

What is blog analysis?

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Blog analysis

- Any analysis that uses blogs as a source of data
- Wide range of approaches:
 - Qualitative / quantitative / mixed methods
 - Solicited / unsolicited blogs
- Wide range of research questions
 - Interest in phenomenon of blogs and blogging
 - Asking questions about ‘offline life’

Introduction to blogs

- Web-log = blog
- 1997: used to describe website to 'log' webpages (Blood 2004: n.p.)
- “Rise of linkless blogging culture” (Wakeford and Cohen 2008: 311) and online journals
- Development of new blog 'genres' – no longer a specific form of web content (Bruns and Jacobs 2006)
 - corporate blogs, news blogs, travel blogs, research blogs....

Contemporary blogging conventions

- “... regular and frequent updating, whether writing, photos or other content; the expectation of linking to other bloggers and online sources; a month-by-month archive; the capacity of feedback through comments to the blog; a particular style of writing which is often characterised as spontaneous and revelatory” (Wakeford and Cohen 2008: 308).



(Huffaker, 2006: 3)

Web 2.0

- Social software and user content
- Producers = users
- Interactive web
- The personal is now public
- ‘Archives of everyday life’
 - *“preferences, choices, views, gender, physical attributes, geographical locations, background, employment and educational history, photographs...”*
(Beer and Burrows 2007: 4.4)

Examples of blog analysis

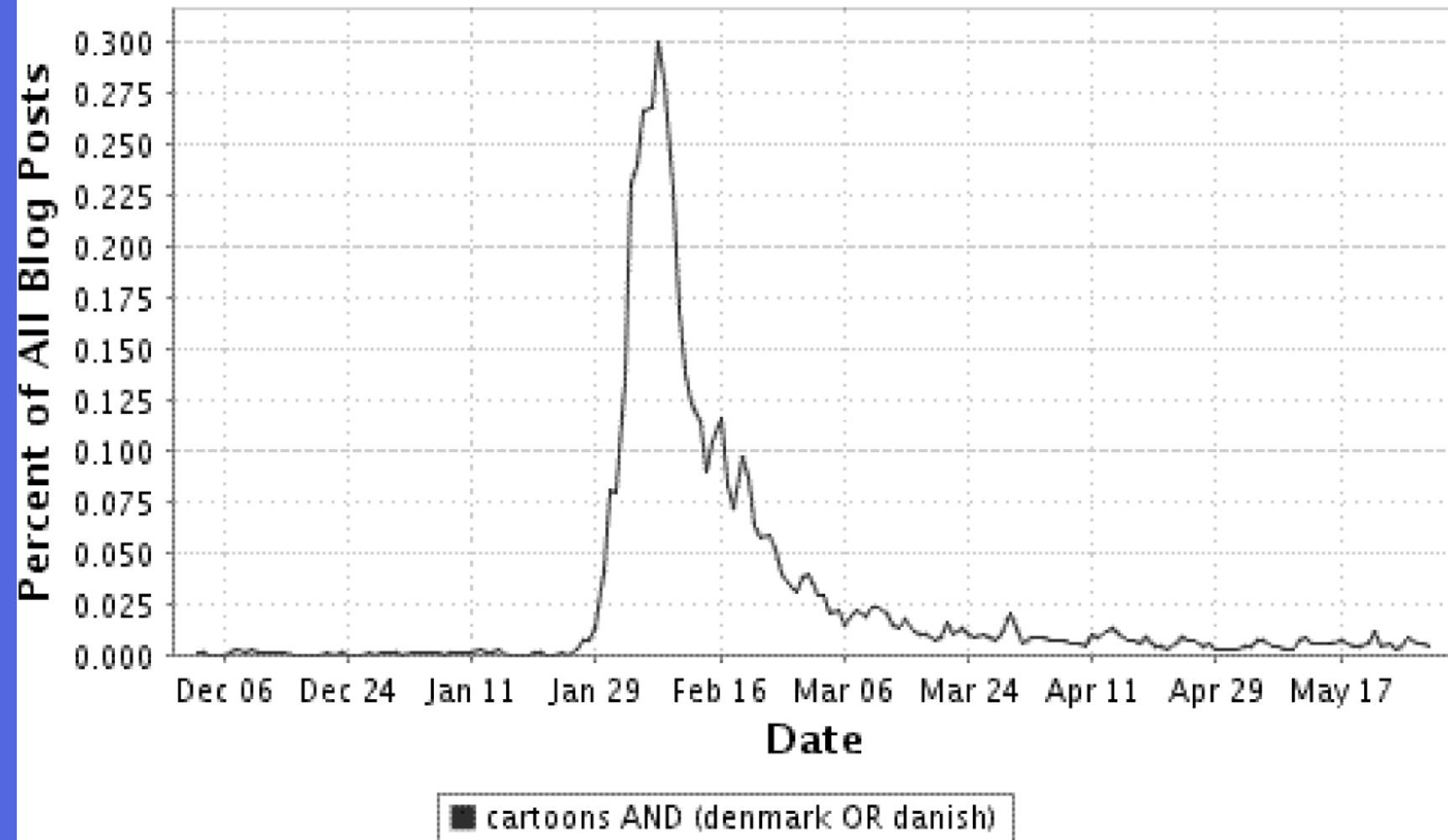
1. Herring et al (2005)
 - How interlinked is the blogosphere? Do other types of conversation take place?
 - Random sample from blog tracking service (blo.gs)
 - Manually followed hyperlinks
 - Social network analysis and qualitative analysis of “conversations” (e.g. comments)

Examples of blog analysis

2. Thelwall (2007) / Thelwall and Prabowo (2007)

- Exploring public opinion
- Retrospective - Danish cartoon controversy (Thelwall 2007)
- Emergent - public fears about sciences (Thelwall and Prabowo 2007)
 - Automated data collection using 'RSS' feeds
 - Trend detection for posts using 'fear' words and 'science' words

Generated by BlogPulse Copyright 2006 Nielsen BuzzMetrics.



Examples of blog analysis

3. Huffaker and Calvert (2005)

- Examination of gender similarities and differences among teenage blogs
- Content analysis of randomly-selected blogs sampled using blog search engines
- Presentation of identities and use of language to express experiences and feelings

Examples of blog analysis

4. Hodgkinson (2007)

- Goth community and transition from discussion forums to blogs
- Context - debates surrounding individualisation and identity
- Ethnography of LiveJournal users
- Set up own LiveJournal account
- Participant observation and interviews with users recruited through journal

Examples of blog analysis

5. Hookway (2008)

- Experience of morality in everyday life
- Presentations of self unprompted by research interaction
- Set up online presence – blog and research website
- Data collection through both passive ‘trawling’ and active solicitation
 - Recruitment through blog community networks

Blog Analysis Case Study

- “Framing the gap year”
 - Representations of gap year experiences
- How do young people present their gap year stories?
- Blogs as narratives

Image:
www.smileinternational.org

Combining the strengths of UMIST and
The Victoria University of Manchester



Gap Year Study: Why Blogs?

- Practical advantages, e.g. access
- Wealth of data
- Unobtrusive
 - Unsolicited and naturalistic narratives
 - Own language and reflections
- How did the gappers 'frame' their accounts for an audience?
 - Extent of 'unprompted reflexivity' or accounts guided by 'pre-existing dispositions'?

Gap Year Study: Practical Issues

- Searching for blogs
 - Blog search engines and blogging websites
 - Manual checking to construct sample
- Keeping track
- Managing blog data
 - Converted to text and imported into Atlas.ti
 - Problem: blogs are multimedia ‘texts’
 - Over 1 million words!

Gap Year Study: Methodological Issues

- Who are we capturing?
 - ‘Digital divide’
 - Alternative perspectives
- New form of text
 - Text; pictures; video; comments; hyperlinks; audio; adverts
- Verifying identity
 - E.g. could not make conclusions regarding class background

Gap Year Study: Ethical Issues

- Public or private data?
- Blogs as representation of a person or text with author?
- Tension between acknowledging authorship and protecting identity
- Data in public domain
 - Informed consent not required
 - ‘Personal but not private’ (Hookway 2008: 105)
- Data anonymised
- Bruckman (2002): ‘moderate disguise’

Some conclusions

- Wide variety of approaches
- Wide variety of research questions
- Opportunities and challenges
 - Sampling, managing data, analysis tools
 - Ethical considerations
- Collaboration with information scientists

Further information

- Statistical Cybermetrics Research Group
 - Specialises in the downloading and analysis of data on a large scale from the web <http://cybermetrics.wlv.ac.uk/>
- The Blog Analysis Toolkit (BAT)
 - System for capturing, archiving and sharing blog posts https://surveyweb2.ucsur.pitt.edu/qblog/page_login.php
- Blog trends / searches / directories
 - <http://blo.gs/about.php>
 - <http://www.blogpulse.com/>
 - <http://blogsearch.google.com/>
 - <http://technorati.com/>

Case Studies

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