Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Librarians Are Attracted to Blogs That Support Professional Continuing Education

A Review of:
Jackson-Brown, G.M. (2013). Content analysis study of librarian blogs: Professional development and other uses. *First Monday*, *18*(2). Retrieved 4 Sept. 2013 from
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Objective – The purpose of the study was to examine how librarian blogs are being used for communication within the profession.

Design – The method used was content analysis and unstructured interviews.

Setting - The researcher is based out of a state university in the United States of America.

Subjects - Content of and communication within 12 librarian blogs were analyzed. Seven of the 12 bloggers were interviewed.

Methodology – There were 15 blogs identified in a list by Quinn (2009) and reduced to the 12 best suited for the study. Over a 24-month period (January 2009-December 2010), random samples of posts with 2 or more comments were selected for each month from the 12 blogs and analyzed. All comments related to these selected posts were also analyzed. The researcher categorized the blogs overall, plus individual posts, into one of four predominant genres (social, professional development, political, and research). Content was coded based on previous coding methodology for blog content found in the research literature. Requests for interviews were sent to all 12 bloggers with 7 agreeing to be interviewed. Preliminary results of the content analysis for his/her own blog were shared with each blogger before the interview took place. Inter-coder reliability was pretested and found to be 83.33%.

Main Results - Two hundred eighty-eight posts randomly chosen received 1936 reader

comments. Bloggers responded to these comments 254 times. Blogs were categorized under the "social" genre most frequently (53%), followed by "professional development" (31%), "political" (14%), and "research" (2%; percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number by the reviewer). Professional development was the lead genre in two of the individual blogs. All seven bloggers interviewed stated that professional development is a large focus of their blogs. Reasons for blogging ranged from the importance of sharing information, contextualizing information, and (for some) satisfying personal ambition. There was a common personal enjoyment of writing and all planned to continue blogging despite increasing time constraints.

Conclusion - Professional development is a major focus of content in librarian blogs. Blog posts and comments stay on topic throughout exchanges between bloggers and readers.

Commentary

Social media is a vast and ever-evolving entity. Many librarians use tools like blogs and Twitter to keep up to date on issues that affect the profession. This paper is the latest regarding the use of blogs in academia. Although others have written about library/librarian-specific blogs (see citations below), this paper categorizes blog content and reader comments into specific genres.

Using the EBL Critical Appraisal Checklist (Glynn, 2006), the reviewer found the content analysis and interviews appropriate choices for data collection. One can appreciate the difficulty of narrowing down a list of blogs from the many available on the web. However, in narrowing the list available for content analysis to a list from another paper about librarian blogs (Quinn, 2009), the strengths of the paper are put into question.

The author used a selected list of 12 blogs from an article entitled "Learning with Blogs" (Quinn, 2009). First, this is a very small number in light of so many individual

librarian blogs available. However, what's more troubling is that the basis of the list from "Learning with Blogs" is that they are included because of their value as continuing education tools. The researcher concludes that professional development is the major focus for librarian blogs, but her source is a list of blogs valued for their professional development focus. The paper would have been much stronger had she used a variety of sources to form a list of blogs for content analysis (e.g., Aharony, 2009). Albeit an older paper with focus on organizational and individual blogs, Bar-Ilan (2007) goes into great detail regarding how blogs were chosen for content analysis.

Bar-Ilan (2007) was not mentioned in the researcher's citations. Nor were others of relevance, and this also limits the paper's effectiveness. The researcher states that "genres used in the content analysis [were] . . . based on professional and scholarly literature" (Research Design section, para. 6) and that coding was "derived from previous conceptual constructs of blog content from professionals and academics that [were] found in previous research and published literature" (Research Design section, para. 9). A list of that literature would have made for a stronger paper.

It is interesting that the research genre had the smallest content area in librarian blogs. Is this a reflection of the state of librarian research publishing in general? Or is it more reflective of the fact that librarians are reserving their writing for more peer-reviewed/scholarly outlets? Although there are benefits to blogging (e.g., collaboration, networking), there is also a hesitancy to use one's time writing in a self-publishing venue that may not "count" in terms of tenure or promotion.

The time period studied, January 2009-December 2010, is a long time ago in terms of social media, and time is always a constraint in social media research. As mentioned by one interviewee, people's attention is moving more toward Twitter. This reviewer can tell by her RSS feed reader results that many blogs that were once active a few years ago have either discontinued completely or now post

significantly less content. The researcher is to be commended for trying to pinpoint categories in the moving target of social media. Although there are issues with this research paper, it does contribute to the knowledge base regarding genre theory, social media, and its use for librarians as a professional development tool. A selection of recommended further readings on this topic is listed below.

References

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