Media for Social Change

Blogs: The Power of Us

Blogs are fast emerging as a social force to enlighten citizenry all over the globe. They build collective power to imagine, invent, and change the world.

Blogs are quickly becoming an effective forum for activism. This media form puts power right into the hands of people, where activism is just a mouse-click-away. Thoughts are expressed; ideas discussed and challenged, criticisms are floated and rebuked in a public manner like never before.

A.J. Liebling, the great twentieth-century journalist had once famously said: "Freedom of the press is limited to those who own one." Since Liebling's time, media has undergone drastic changes. Media was first, and still is, controlled by the government, corporations and giant media houses. Blogs however are swiftly challenging these monopolies of information and public discourse. Anyone can turn their words and ideas into published form; anyone can have at least a small audience. Most importantly anyone who desires a broad hearing can at least be armed to fight for one.

Roger L. Simon, novelist, screenwriter and the author of a famous blog said in an interview: "With the size of our global village here, it's hard to test ideas in any way, but thanks to blogs there is now a way. I am always in a discussion with people in Australia or wherever in the world. Online we are always in the same place."[1]

This freedom of individual expression and an interface with a wider community is the most important aspect of 'public activism'. Public activism is the core of any information society – no activism can survive without public participation and an accessible information-system. An active society always looks for media on which its information needs can be sustained, and blogs

have answered the call. That's why James F. Moore of Harvar's Berkman Center for Internet and Society has dubbed blogging as the 'second superpower." According to David Kline and Dan Burstein, authors of the book 'Blog,' Moore's second superpower is not a nation-state but the social force of enlightened citizenry all over the globe, their co-created consciousness and their collective power to invent, act and change the world.

While the world fights against excessive surveillance and control of expression, blogging is particularly helpful in the larger struggle for human dignity because it is:

- Simplest free way to express oneself if one has computer access.
- Provides a global platform for individual and community expression.
- Creates a virtual common interface for a large, scattered community to access, express, criticize and share new information.
- Builds up the citizen-produced information pool.
- Very importantly, it provides freedom to correct or delete something wrong or unwanted.
- A beautiful blend of individual and collective living without any need of surveillance or control, the naturally emerging 'sociocracy.'[2]
- A multiplicity of information.

In India, we still need to catch up with using blogs for activism. Let's take up blogs to break our long silence.

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[1] *Dove Becomes Hawk in Blog Transformation' in the book 'Blog' by David Kline and Dan Burstein*

[2] *Sociocracy: a system of governance that uses consent-based decision making and a structure based on cybernetic principles.*

Bangalore: India's First Disability Mobile News Service

July 18th, 2011- *Auro Media for Social Change* conducted a three-day workshop for SAMA Foundation* at Bangalore. The objective of the workshop was to enable SAMA's advocacy and communication wing – KARO (Karnataka State Disability Network) to find cost-effective solutions to reach out to the community of people with disability in Karnataka. The organization wanted to develop a communication system to keep the widely scattered community informed about its rights and entitlements.

During the workshop we designed a mobile phone based news bulletin called KARO Newz. This news bulletin is sent every week to a database of people with disability in Karnataka, NGOs and Institutes working with people with disability and other stakeholders. The news bulletin, sent as a text message, is linked to a blog that provides more detailed information. The network will be made up of reporters with disability at the village level in Karnataka. This network would focus on issues of disability and communicate stories and problems to a larger audience for further campaigning and advocacy. The stories will be uploaded on the blog by the SAMA team and the lead will be texted to all mobile phone databases.

*SAMA Foundation is a Karnataka registered NGO that works with children with disability in Karnataka. SAMA runs day care centres for children with disability in 5 slums of Bangalore and campaigns for inclusive education. KARO is a communication and advocacy federation of people with disability in Karnataka. KARO is a part of the larger nation-wide network of NGOs in India and campaigns for policy change both at the state and the national level.

--Venus Upadhayaya

How to Start a Blog: It's Easy!
by Amélie Rousseau

I am a new blogger, but a long-time student activist. I joined the Auro Media for Social Change a month ago, and I am a recent graduate from the University of Oregon in the United States. I write a blog that focuses on politics, spirituality and culture of Indian life. I have found blogging to be a very effective way to share experiences and knowledge with loved ones and others worldwide. If done well, blogs have the potential to organize and mobilize communities. Below are a few tips on creating your own blog.

How to start:
- Wordpress.com or blogspot.com are the two best free blog sites. Along with half of the world's bloggers, I use Wordpress for its clean, comprehensive interface and great support services. A domain name will cost less than Rs. 800 a year, which you can always buy later.
- Know your audience. Blogs should have a very specific purpose, with consistent topics or themes. This will help build loyal readership. A focus will actually help you to write more posts.

- Take time at the beginning to practice with your blog provider, posting images, links, and comments. This will build your confidence and will make your regular posting more efficient.

How to maintain:
- Post regularly. Find a set time each day or week to post.
- Keep a list of blog ideas; you never know when inspiration will strike!
- Read news articles and other blogs for inspiration on form and similar topics.

To promote blog accessibility:
- Write good captions for your images, to contextualize and help a visually impaired reader picture the photo or graphic.
- Explain your links. Screen readers can read the label of text that appears when the mouse rests over a link, but posting 'click here' is not as helpful.

How to build a network:
- This might sound obvious, but write well. Write from your heart, adding some outside links for interest.
- Write catchy, comprehensive titles. I usually write the title after I write my post.
- Word of mouth. Email friends, colleagues, and allies about your blog. It's better to have a small following of people you know than a thousand people who you don't.
- Post links to other blogs that are related to your issues. Leave comments. The world of social media is all about people, so invest in others and they'll invest in you.
- Let people subscribe by email. Subscribers will get an email notice every time you post!
- Set up links to Twitter and Facebook to publish an announcement whenever you make a new post. Labelling your posts with proper tags and categories of the post's topics also helps people search through your posts and find your blog with search engines.

Enjoy yourself! If you have fun, so will your readers. Remember, a technical issue or solution for writer's block is just a Google search away. Happy blogging. 🦋

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