

The Tenacity of Orphaned Blogs

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Abstract: A key digital preservation principle is that content creators are a first line of defense. A pre-requisite for such a defense is creators' preferences for what should be stewarded and maintained for future use. What, then, of orphaned works as reflections of "unstated" preference, so to speak? Just as we encounter orphaned works in the print realm, the growth of social media and lower barriers for publishing to the Web contribute to a new breed of "orphaned" works. Abandoned, in the context of blogs, is possibly more accurate, as primary authorship may be known. This paper examines such abandoned or orphaned blogs, characterized as blogs that remain publicly discoverable and available after they are no longer actively published to or updated. Applying a content analysis approach, reported are findings from a review of final posts published to nearly 400 inactive scholar blogs. It examines what, if any, message is left behind at the assumed end of the blog's life cycle. Such messages may be seen as one indicator of creators' intentions or assumptions for their blogs' continued persistence. For a clear majority of these blogs, there is no farewell post or "note tacked to the door," with the blogs simply ending abruptly. A minority do leave a message as to where the blog has gone, though these "final" messages are not exclusive to just the last post published to the blog, and may appear in earlier posts as well. Themes that arose from this analysis of "farewell" posts include intentions for archiving or to come back to the blog at a later date. The paper concludes with plans for a future study to survey the bloggers' attitudes and reactions as to the continued persistence of their respective "abandoned" blogs in respect to their own personal blog preservation, or "unpreservation," preferences.

About the author:

Carolyn Hank is an Assistant Professor at the School of Information Sciences at the University of Tennessee (UTK). She received her Ph.D. from the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her dissertation research looked at scholars who blog, and how blog characteristics and blogger behaviors, preferences, and perceptions impact digital preservation. Her overall research agenda concerns scholars' informal digital content creation, communication and management practices in our contemporary, co-produced, social networked information environment. Currently, she is PI on an OCLC/ALISE grant funded study, "The Biblioblogosphere: A Comparison of Communication and Preservation Perceptions and Practices between Blogging LIS Scholar-Practitioners and LIS Scholar-Researchers" and on another ALISE-funded study looking at information and library science faculty and

student interactions via Facebook. She is also a Co-PI on InterPARES Trust, a five year, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funded project led by Dr. Luciana Duranti at the University of British Columbia. She also served as the North American academic expert on BlogForever, a co-funded European Commission project on blog preservation. She teaches in the areas of digital curation, human information interactions, and research methods. At UTK, Dr. Hank is currently developing an online archival studies program, with a focus on digital archiving practices and principles.