

## The Orthodontic Blogosphere!



At a treatment planning session, one of our graduate students made an argument for a particular treatment strategy. The strategy was logical and based on evidence in my opinion. On being questioned by one of the instructors on the evidence for the same, the student very emphatically quoted a very popular orthodontic blog. The discussion now gets really interesting! The next question posed was “in the hierarchy of evidence, where would you rank a blog?” Even if a blog discusses a systematic review or a meta-analysis, it is still an experts’ opinion – which naturally should be at the base of the evidence pyramid! This incident inspired this editorial on Orthodontic Blogs and the *Blogosphere!*

The term “*Blogosphere*” was coined on September 10, 1999, by Brad L. Graham, as a joke.<sup>[1]</sup> It was re-coined in 2002 by William Quick<sup>[2]</sup> and was quickly adopted and propagated by the War Blog community. The term resembles the older word *logo-sphere* (from Greek *logos* meaning *word*, and *sphere* interpreted as *world*), “the world of words,” the universe of discourse.<sup>[3,4]</sup>

Despite the term’s humorous intent, media has used this word several times to describe public opinion. A number of media outlets in recent years have started treating the blogosphere as a gauge of public opinion, and it has been cited in both academic and nonacademic work as evidence of rising or falling resistance to globalization, voter fatigue, and many other phenomena and also in reference to identifying influential bloggers and “familiar strangers” in the blogosphere.

In 1999, Pyra Labs opened blogging to the masses by simplifying the process of creating and maintaining personal web spaces. Before the creation of Pyra’s “Blogger,” the number of blogs in existence was thought to be less than one hundred, which was thought to be the fetal stage of the Blogosphere. Blogger meant the birth of blogosphere. In 2005, a Gallup poll showed that a third of Internet users read blogs at least on occasion, and in May 2006, a study showed that there were over 42 million bloggers contributing to the blogosphere.

With less than 1 million blogs in existence at the start of 2003, the number of blogs had doubled in size every 6 months through 2006. In 2011, it was estimated that there are more than 158 million identified blogs, with more than 1 million new posts being produced by the blogosphere

each day.<sup>[5]</sup> The number of blogs in 2018 is estimated to be more than 450 million! Google is now ranking websites that have original content or blogs as part of their content creation and marketing strategy more than sites that are simply static. Blogs have also transformed the way social media is used to connect. In 2018, there are reportedly 17 new blogs published every second!

What constitutes the orthodontic blog space in 2018? A website lists the top 100 orthodontic blogs – [https://blog.feedspot.com/orthodontic\\_blogs/](https://blog.feedspot.com/orthodontic_blogs/). Most of these are orthodontic practice and product blogs. A few in this list are those of peer-reviewed journals, product magazines, and of course the ones discussing orthodontic FAQs and evidence.<sup>[6]</sup>

From an orthodontic care seeker’s perspective, there is positive content in this blogosphere that can help make decisions or hand hold somebody through the orthodontic journey. The concerns however are – how does a care seeker seeking information on the blogosphere separate the wheat from the chaff? For a professional, who is seeking orthodontic evidence, current research findings, and/or clinical perspectives on the blogosphere; the information is subject to interpretations of the blogger. For clinicians, who do not regularly keep abreast with the published orthodontic world, blogs can be an excellent source of the “gist of the matter” on important clinical matters! However, for residents to substitute reading an original paper to a blog, would probably be preposterous!

If I were to mention one blog that has generated interest like none other, among orthodontic professionals, it would be Prof. Kevin O’Brien’s blog – <http://kevinobrienorthoblog.com>.<sup>[7]</sup> It is an excellent example of what a professional’s blog should be! It has a distinctive viewpoint and a perspective, a strong writing style, and a blend of various forms of content. The best way to truly stand out with a blog is to create unique content. As they say in the blogging industry – “The best blogs are those that provide consistent value to their readers.” Another blog that impresses me immensely is <http://newwaveorthodontics.blogspot.com>. This is a blog scripted by Dr. Peter Miles from Australia, which comprehensively discusses various controversial topics in orthodontics.<sup>[8]</sup> Both these blogs and their growing popularity should inspire more forays into this space in the near future.

The Internet has changed the rules of many games, and the face of scholarly and peer-reviewed communication will, in all probability, see innovations that we have not even conceptualized yet. This should augur “positive possibilities”<sup>19]</sup> for clinicians of tomorrow who will need to be trained in improved research interpreting skills, as they become selective in their reading. John Naisbitt nails it, when he states, “we are drowning in information, but still starved for knowledge.” A dilemma of our times indeed, if we do not acquire appropriate skills for newer terrains!

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