Bloggers as beautiful dots (Media Re:publica conference: pt 2)

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John Kelly, an associate at the Berkman institute presented to the second session. He believes in the power of colourful dots. His pretty globe maps of the blogosphere show how certain blogs – such as the New York Times are bigger or smaller than other blobs – such as the BBC – but more importantly how they link to each other in heirarchical ways and what they are talking about ("Attentive clusters").
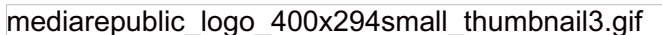
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His maps are beautiful. A bit like those maps of distant galaxies. But better still they do give you a sense of how diverse or heirarchical particular blogospheres are and what they look like. He compares the English language blogosphere with its axis of liberal and conservative with the Iranian blogosphere with its religiously orientated structure (although still surprisingly 'open').

He can also chart how different political blog groups use particular words such as "moonbat" or "wingnut" – or more significant words such as 'security' or 'islamofascist'.

This stuff is nice to look at but it also helps understand issues such as whether the Internet encourages dialogue between people with different points of view. Of course, the answer is a bit of both. Liberals and Conservatives do link to the same subjects (although only liberals link to Save Darfur) but they also have their own spaces.

And what about viral versus salient? His mapping shows how topical stories (such as an Obama speech) on New York Times online will have a different life-cycle to how a topical story lives on Wikipedia.

Full official conference blog with lots of links here.

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