

The decline of the Expert?

The Internet has revolutionised access to information, leaving in its wake an ever-expanding knowledge economy. But what of the other side to this story: the *provision* of information? The Internet is fast becoming an influential global forum for anyone – from professor to layman – with online access.

With anyone being able to contribute to knowledge hotspots like [Wikipedia](#) and alternative information sources like the blogosphere, is the Expert being replaced by many diffuse experts?

Blogging is increasingly used to comment on anything from politics to culture, and its influence is growing. One only has to look at the numbers: 12 million bloggers in the US alone, 34% of whom regard their art as a form of journalism, according to a study published by [Pew Internet & American Life Project](#). Blogging is also changing the locus of ideas. [Econobloggers](#) like [Brad DeLong](#) at the University of California, Berkeley, regularly develop ideas on their blogs, creating a flow of information to all economists and undermining the dominance of the Ivory Towers who have benefited from having clusters of top-rate academics all in one location.

Wikipedia draws on information from its online community of amateur contributors – Wikipedians – who work in a collaborative fashion and moderate each other's entries. Last year *Nature* compared entries on Wikipedia and the Encyclopaedia Britannica, finding Wikipedia had four errors for every three of Britannica's. But Wikipedia's entries outnumbered Britannica's, and were more diverse and up-to-date, e.g. the entry "2006 Israel-Lebanon" conflict appeared only six hours after Hezbollah militants kidnapped two Israeli soldiers. (See [New Yorker article](#))

Are bloggers and Wikipedians the new fonts of knowledge?

At least one journalist disagrees. New Yorker journalist and author of *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell noted, "without the New York Times, there is no blog community. They'd have nothing to blog about." Chris Anderson, editor of *Wired* magazine responded – on his [blog](#), naturally – by demonstrating that only a small percentage of blogs actually link to major media outlets like [Guardian Unlimited](#) or [BBC Online](#).

But it may indeed be too early and misleading to talk of the decline of the Expert. It seems more likely that, as the amount of information we have access to explodes, we will need our Experts even more to cut through the noise. As these trends develop, it will be interesting to note who is cutting through the noise and where the ideas are coming from: the Experts today may not be those of tomorrow.