

Chapter 1.23

Personal Blogging: Individual Differences and Motivations

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ABSTRACT

The present chapter examines current research of blogging practices; it focuses on the personal blog, a blog created and maintained by an individual and not used for financial or occupational gain. The authors maintain that individual difference factors, such as personality and gender, may contribute to differences in likelihood to blog, motivation to blog, and blog content. The authors argue that the same factors that allow for differentiation of individuals in more classic self-expressive communication modalities (e.g., journaling) may also delineate individuals in new modes of online communication and self-expression. However, these factors may manifest themselves differently over more contemporary

methods of self-expression and communication. The authors conclude that bloggers and blog readership appear to be steadily growing, making this area of online self-expression increasingly deserving of scientific inquiry.

INTRODUCTION

Current trends in online social interaction have led to an increase in personalization and a decrease in anonymity owing to both technological advances and changing social norms (for a review, see Bargh & McKenna, 2004; McKenna & Bargh, 2000). At the forefront of these changing trends are *blogs* (short for *weblogs*), which are personal websites updated regularly by their creator where journal-like entries or “posts” appear in reverse chronological order

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(Herring, Scheidt, Wright, & Bonus, 2005b). Blog topics vary from personal information (e.g., a log of daily activities, information about friendships and relationships) to political opinion to celebrity gossip to high tech news and information. Blogs can be created with little technological savvy as many blogging websites are user-friendly and allow the blog creator to simply choose a template and begin creating posts. Blogs, such as the ones described previously, are said to reside in the *blogosphere* -- an online world of conversation among bloggers via heavily interconnected blogs (Herring et al., 2005a). While this is how the blogosphere was originally conceptualized, at the current time blogs are mostly independent of each other. Although it is possible to post links of other blogs (also known as a blogroll) on one's blog, most conversation occurs through a dialogue between the blog creator and readers of a particular blog. That is, each time a creator posts an entry on his or her blog, readers view the entry and have the option to respond with a comment. Blog creators can respond with a reciprocal comment and these comments may impact the content of future entries within the individual blog. However, these conversations have little impact on the content or dialogue of other blogs.

Although reports indicate that the first blog appeared online in 1997 (Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Swartz, 2004b), the number of blogs available online has only started to increase dramatically in the past few years (Sifry, 2007). The same can be said for research on bloggers' demographics, motivations, personality, and practices. The present chapter examines current research in blogging practices, focusing on a type of blog known as a personal blog, which is created and maintained by an individual and is not used for financial or occupational gain. Specifically, we will review demographics on blogging and then examine two aspects of blogging: how individual differences -- such as personality and gender -- affect blogging practices and what motivates individuals to create and maintain a blog.

BACKGROUND

Research indicates that while blogging is becoming increasingly popular around the globe, many of the world's bloggers reside in the United States (Herring et al., 2005b). Similarly, much of the research on blogging has also been conducted in the United States. This research indicates that, in the United States, bloggers are younger, better educated, more urban, less likely to be a member of an ethnic minority group, and more likely to shop online compared to the general population of Internet users in the United States (Lenhart & Fox, 2006).

Although some research indicates that the adoption rate of blogging in other countries is lower than that of the United States (Herring et al., 2005b; Trammell, Tarkowski, Hofmohl, & Sapp, 2006), other research indicates that Japanese is the most commonly used language for writing blogs and is used more by one percent more bloggers than English (Sifry, 2007). Despite this change, relatively little research has been conducted to examine blogging patterns across different countries; however, the research that is available suggests that blogging patterns are similar across countries. For example, research conducted in Britain shows a similar pattern to what has been found in the United States (Pedersen & Macafee, 2007). These results also suggest that research conducted on blogging in the United States should generalize to blogging in other western countries; however, these results should be interpreted with caution until more research is available.

In terms of number of blogs online, statistics on blogging in the United States indicate that 8 million US citizens keep a blog and 57 million US citizens report reading blogs (Lenhart & Fox, 2006). More recent data that examined worldwide blogging trends indicate that across the globe, there are 70 million blogs (as of April, 2007), and that this number is increasing daily by 120,000 (Sifry, 2007). This suggests that there are currently well over 100 million blogs available worldwide. Of all

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