Chapter 13
Human Behaviors with Blogs

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ABSTRACT

A weblog, also known as a "blog," is the standard form for any website that is frequently updated on a regular basis and is one of the most popular such online communication media for a person to talk about himself or herself in a space open to other people. The dramatic increase in information transmission through blogs has greatly influenced individuals, interpersonal relationships, and society. A person who writes a blog is called a "blogger," and an aggregate of communities in which blogs are interactively connected is called a "blogosphere." In this chapter, a series of research articles on human behaviors with blogs were reviewed from three perspectives (blog content, bloggers, and blogosphere), and their impact on personal and social life is discussed.

INTRODUCTION

From its early stages, the Internet, and especially the World Wide web, was a place where people could communicate with one another. A weblog, also known as a "blog," is one of the most popular such online communication media for a person to talk about himself or herself in a space open to other people. Blogs began as attempts to classify and organize the overwhelming quantity of online information available on the web. Currently, "blog" is the standard form for any website that is frequently updated on a regular basis. The dramatic increase in information transmission through blogs has greatly influenced individuals, interpersonal relationships, and society. A person who writes a blog is called a "blogger," and an aggregate of communities in which blogs are interactively connected is called a "blogosphere." In this chapter, a series of research articles on human behavior with blogs are reviewed from three perspectives, and their impact on our personal and social life is considered.

OVERVIEW

Even though the history of weblogs is not nearly so long, they have had a very influential impact on the culture of computer-mediated communication and our modern society. Originally, the term "weblog" was coined by Jorn Barger in December 1997. The word is a combination of "web" and "log" (to record), and a "weblog" was meant to be used to record or log information discovered on the web. The shorter version, "blog," was coined by Peter Merholz in 1999 (Blood, 2002). Blogs are frequently updated (at least once a day or more in some cases) and are characterized by their communication-oriented content. In the literal sense, "to blog" means to log information found on the web. Blogs emerged as an individual attempt to organize and catalogue massive amounts of information provided by the mass media. In trying to do so, bloggers not only chronicled what they considered to be interesting events on the web, often with hyperlinks, but also often added their personal comments on the logged information.

It has been since 1997, the birth year of the word "weblog," that researchers began to pay attention to and launch extensive studies on human behaviors with blogs. However, prior to the emergence of blogs, we already had access to various similar types of web-based personal communicative activity. The most typical approach is the personal homepage, which appeared upon the inception of the web. Since the inception of personal homepages, many of them have included "diary" or "journal" sections that are often entitled "online diary" or "web diary." Therefore, before the emergence of blogs, online diaries were popular with Internet users and played much the same role as blogs. Generally, systems and tools usually progress along with the needs of their users. If looked at from this angle, it could be said that a blog has been developed as a kind of web-based system that provides a variety of tools to facilitate keeping an online diary in an easy way.

Furthermore, blogs play an important role as not only a space for logging and accumulating information for personal use but also as an interpersonal communication medium. This is the most distinctive feature of blogs and the largest difference with the conventional view of a diary. Blogs are usually open to all other people on the Internet whereas traditional "offline" diaries are usually restricted to the authors themselves. Blog articles are written by bloggers on the assumption that they will be read by others, and, in a deeper sense, they are offered as cues for interpersonal communication between bloggers and readers of their blogs.

In Medieval Europe, as the literacy rate increased, written language established itself as a method for interpersonal private communication, that is, exchanging letters became popular among the general public. It brought a revolutionary change in human communication at that time. The same goes for our modern online activities. As we have been able to communicate much richer information such as images and sounds in addition to written language in not face-to-face communication, our world of communication has been changed significantly and dramatically. It can be said that the empirical research on human behavior with blogs we review below requires a multilevel approach to interpret such various changes.

Blog Content

Focusing on the content of blog articles is the most direct approach to learning about the transmission of information that takes place through blogs. Analyzing the content of blog articles has captured the attention of many researchers who have much interest in blogs. The pioneering scholar in the area is Prof. Yasuyuki Kawaura, who had taken notice of writing in online diaries prior to the appearance of blogs (Kawaura, Kawakami, & Yamashita, 1998). The earliest and current lead-

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