

# **BLOGGING AS EMPOWERMENT: Self-presentation of bloggers in Surabaya, Indonesia**

Luik, Jandy E.

*Dept. of Communication, Petra Christian University, Siwalankerto 121-131, Surabaya, Indonesia  
jandyluik@petra.ac.id, jandyluik@yahoo.com*

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**Abstract:** Apparently, the emerging of blog has created a lot of new communication opportunities. Bloggers choose and control the content of their blog in order to create their identity. This research focuses on how the freedom to choose and control the content of the media is being used by bloggers in Surabaya to present something outside of their stereotype. Using the self presentation theory, this study investigates how the Surabaya bloggers are involved in the cyberspace community. Specifically, there are five strategies namely ingratiation, competence, intimidation, exemplification, and supplication. By using the content analysis, it shows that ingratiation (48%) and competence (26%) are the top two strategies which are applied by the bloggers. Additionally, the researcher has found that the bloggers tend to soften the message when they give critic. This result indicates there is an empowered way of communication by blogging to break the typical stereotype.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The emergence of Internet has brought new opportunities for ordinary people to create their personal space in media. They do not have to depend on the mainstream in the media, nor spend a lot of money if they want to enter the publishing arena. As Burns recommends: "Put a home page. Tell the world who you are and what you're all about" (Dominick, 1999). Today, having a homepage or blog does not require the sophisticated skills in web programming. Blog providers like Wordpress, Multiply, and Blogspot offer easy and ready-to-use templates. Only by signing up with a valid e-mail address, a potential publisher can create his own blog.

The simplicity of accessing media online gives opportunities for media's practitioners to present their thoughts. Besides, the opportunity of people to speak for themselves is challenged by the "old" players in the traditional media. They go online and continue their dominance in creating, and more likely, determining the identity of the society. Since these sites are generally affordable and easily accessible, more consumers are likely to take advantage on it.

While determinists talk about the influences of media to people, Blumler and Katz (1974) argue that it is actually the people who influence media. However, instead of being used as a tool for oppression, media can be used for empowerment.

In the vein of self presentation, Rubio said: "When you visit my home page, you don't get to meet me, but only my presentation of my self" (Dominick, 1999). The appearance of Internet-based media, like blogs, brings users the opportunity to create their own "space." With this space, the user (individual or collective) has a voice, which is different in editorial-content in traditional mass media. For example, Vogt and Chen's study states that the feminist group relies on the Internet for a host of activities, including locating and nurturing resources, forming collective identities, producing knowledge, circulating information, and mobilizing (Harp and Tremayne, 2006). This group constructs their personal using the advantage of blog. Therefore, a personal web page can be viewed as a carefully constructed self-presentation (Dominick, 1999).

Bloggers choose and control the content of their blog in order to create their identity. Bloggers in Surabaya (East Java, Indonesia) are provided with opportunities to create their identity that will allow

them to break away from stereotypes. Commonly Surabaya people are notorious in terms of their language and behaviour which full with violent and rough. An example would be Madura, a member of a typical ethnic group, who is being portrayed as temperamental and malicious, and like to pay off as stated in Wiyata (2001). Therefore this study will show how the Surabaya bloggers use blog to present something outside the stereotype.

In Surabaya, there is a blog's community called *Tugu Pahlawan*, a site for Surabaya bloggers to have online-meeting. The increasing number of bloggers in Surabaya, especially those who join this blog is a recent phenomenon which can be an interesting issue to be discussed in this analysis. At glance, the bloggers are interested in expressing their ideas and opinions. They create a style of publishing which is in blog form.

The growing number of Surabaya bloggers becomes an important area of study because this new medium presents an opportunity for empowerment. The specific study about blogging in Surabaya still can be done in order to investigate about the ways in which bloggers present themselves online. The method which is used is content analysis of particular blogs. The findings of this study will present one of the blog's benefits among the Surabaya bloggers.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The emergence of blog gave people the opportunity to gain freedom in cyberspace communication. The technology itself brings chance for empowerment but the factor of how users use the blog should not be put aside.

In order to become more empowered, users need freedom to choose and control the content of media. As mentioned by Blumler and Katz (1974), users choose the media to fulfil their needs. Users become active in the communication process which is unlike the Hypodermic Syringe model wherein audiences are described as passive recipients of information. On the other hand, the uses and gratification theory assumes that the user has alternate choices to satisfy their need. Blogging takes after the uses and gratification theory because it is one of the forms of media that is used by the user to fulfil their needs. One of their needs is to interact with other people through blog. At the same time the user is building his identity by the blog's content.

Blogging is effort-consuming and cannot be conducted as a ritualized activity as opposed to

traditional media like television watching or radio listening (Li, 2005). In the passive communication contexts, audience can opt to leave the television or radio on without paying too much attention on them (Rubin, 1984, 1994). Blogging, however, is a type of active media. They are not just merely posted. They need active input and participation from the bloggers.

### 2.1 Media Empowerment

“There is no such thing as unmanipulated writing, filming, or broadcasting. The question is not whether the media are manipulated, but who manipulates them. A revolutionary plan should not require manipulators to disappear; on the contrary, it must make everyone a manipulator” (Enzensberger, 1970).

The presence of blog gives almost everyone the opportunity to express their idea to the masses. Gallo (2004) states that the revolutionary plan that Enzensberger traces, as indicated above, does not advocate a direct overthrow of existing media practices; rather, it promotes infiltration of the media hierarchy by the broadest public possible to remedy the manipulation of the media. Blogs allow each user to act as a manipulator of information, enabling the user to construct an individual interpretation of information, and channel that interpretation back into the discursive space of cyberspace, where it can circulate indefinitely without further maintenance from its creator. Weblog publishing allows authors to engage the wider public of cyberspace through the circulation of texts by providing a platform for sustainable discourse outside of the control functions of traditional media.

Enzensberger (1970) outlines seven characteristics for what would constitute emancipatory use of media: decentralized program, each receiver a potential transmitter, mobilization of the masses, collective production, interaction of those involved (feedback), social control by self-organization, and political learning process.

These characteristics appear in blogs. In contrast to centrally controlled program, blogs allow users to participate in the making of the content. In the same time, the readers of the blog have opportunity to become the transmitter; they can interact with authors or other readers by giving feedback. In the recent practice, the Internet or blog has been used to organize and provide information about protests against World Trade Organization. This is one example of using blog to support alternative

organization of a social movement and to provide different model of media consumption.

One of the manifestations of this usability is the ability of users to construct their individual impression by controlling and choosing the content of their blog. Erickson (1996) stated a relationship between the shifting of content control and impression construction. For him, “[Personal pages, like blog, are] one of the first venues where individuals can construct portrayals of themselves using information rather than consumer goods as their palette.”

## **2.2 Self-Presentation**

Goffman (1959) is well-known for his work on self presentation. In “The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life”, he claims that individuals (so-called performers) present themselves verbally and nonverbally. Moreover, Baumesiter stated that self presentation strategies may be engaged as a way of constructing the self in a manner that pleases the audience (Bortree, 2005). In cyberspace, the absence of nonverbal elements may render communication less rich, but simultaneously allows individuals to be more inventive with self presentation (Papacharissi, 2002).

There are studies about self presentation in the blog or personal home page. In the absence of nonverbal communication, researchers focused on the verbal and written interactions (Bortree, 2005). Dominick (1999) started to investigate the World Wide Web by measuring five strategies for self representation in the personal home page. Papacharissi (2002) explored how individuals used personal home pages to present themselves online. Bortree (2005) chose specific subject in the research. She conducted ethnographic study of teenage girls’ weblogs. Trammell and Keshelashvili (2005) studied self presentation in the small group called A-list blogger. A-list blogger has arguably the largest influence on the public’s perception of blogging. Ellison et al. (2006) explored how online dating participants manage their online presentation of self in order to accomplish the goal of finding a romantic partner.

## **2.3 Self Presentation Strategy**

In order to present themselves, bloggers should manage their persona. What is being published, or the content, must pass their self-editorial standards. Therefore, they must have strategies in constructing their identity. Jones (1990) presented a summary of five strategies of self representation construction

drawn from experiments in an interpersonal situation:

### **2.3.1 Ingratiation**

A person using this strategy has a goal of being liked by others. Some common characteristics of ingratiation are saying positive things about others or saying mildly negative things about your self, statement of modesty, familiarity, and humor.

### **2.3.2 Competence**

The goal of this strategy is to be perceived as skilled and qualified. Common characteristics include claims about abilities, accomplishments, performance, and qualifications.

### **2.3.3 Intimidation**

Persons using this strategy have power as their goal. Typical characteristics are threats, statements of anger, and potential unpleasantness.

### **2.3.4 Exemplification**

The goal of this strategy is to be perceived as morally superior or possessing high moral standards. Characteristics include ideological commitment or militancy for a cause, self sacrifice, and self discipline.

### **2.3.5 Supplication**

The goal is nurturance or appearing helpless so that others will come to your aid. Characteristics of this self-presentational approach include entreaties for help and self-depreciation.

## **2.3 Blogs or weblog**

Weblogging’s focus on links and commentary is a step towards the realization of inventor Tim Berners-Lee’s vision for the Web itself: “Our minds hold thousands of ephemeral tentative associations at the same time. To allow group intuition, the Web would have to capture these threads – half-thoughts that arise, without evident rational thought or inference, as we work. ... This all works only if each person makes links as he or she browses, so writing, link creation and browsing must be totally integrated” (Berners-Lee, 2000). Ewins (2005) specify that in the main sense, the weblog is a format: a website, or part of one, containing a series of entries arranged in reverse chronological order

(or, rarely, chronological order), where each entry is a piece of text, a link, an image, a sound or video file, or a combination of these.

Weblog entries are usually time or date-stamped and arranged so that the most recent appears at the top of the blog's front page. Older entries are archived on separate pages. Blogs often carry comment links allowing reader responses to appear as footnotes to their entries. Blogs offer a form of participatory discourse providing an intimate connection with consumers that is distinct from traditional media (Bichard, 2006).

In their study, Herring et al. (Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005) found that media exaggerates the extent to which blogs are interlinked, interactive, and oriented toward external events, while underestimating the importance of blog as an individualistic, intimate form of self-expression. Additionally, bloggers provide considerable information about their real-life identities although some are more self-revealing than others. The blogs shared a common purpose: to express the author's subjective, often intimate, perspective on matters of interest to him or her (in the case of most blogs, the matters of interest concern the authors and their daily lives).

### 3 METHOD

Tugu Pahlawan (<http://tugupahlawan.com/>) as the blog community provides the list of blogger in the bloggroll. So far, the total number of members in this blog (actual and verified) is [101 bloggers](#). It can cover about 20 blogs and the blog is chosen purposively (latest posts, sex, education, and age). The unit analysis is the post seen in the front page of the blog at selected period of time.

Two main coding categories are demographic information and self presentation strategy. Demographic information is chosen to enrich this study with information like sex, age, occupation, marital status, structure of blog, and blog provider. Self presentation strategy consists of five variables such as ingratiation, competence, intimidation, exemplification and supplication.

The researcher selects the blogs to be analyzed using the first visiting in a particular period of time. The three highest-commented articles are set in the front page. From the selected articles, each paragraph is examined.

### 4 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The profile of the bloggers shows predictable results. In Table 1, it provides some data about the bloggers. Most of them are (45%) young people and student (45%). However, one interesting point from this profile is the tendency not to mention certain aspects of their identity. Researcher uses NL (not listed) category to indicate this matter.

Table 1: Profile of the bloggers.

Profile	Percentage
Sex	
Female	25%
Male	75%
Age	
At least 22 year-old	45%
Older than 22 year-old	20%
NL	35%
Occupation	
Student	5%
College Student	40%
Entrepreneur	20%
Worker	10%
NL	25%

Regarding the medium itself, the bloggers have different choice. Standard blog components such as comments, bloggroll, current posts, and identity are presenting. Refer to Table 2, providers of blog vary from Wordpress (45%) up to blogger (5%). Usage of topic statement (95%-used) of each bloggers is very unique. Short sentence describes bloggers thought or standpoint in writing such as *fresh, powerful, and a little bit naughty, life is delicious, polos n' apa adanya (straightforward), oret-oretanku, and smile can heal a broken heart*. These blog statements appear in the front page to indicate bloggers' view. However, not all the bloggers use similar way. Some bloggers decide to use topic statement to emphasize their identity such as: Benny Chandra, Aziz personal blog, and Eros personal site.

Table 2: Blog usage.

Usage	Percentage
Topic statement	
Yes	95%
No	5%
Providers	
Wordpress	45%
Personal site	35%
Blogspot	10%
Multiply	5%
Blogger	5%

The way' Berners-Lee (2000), Ewins (2005) and Bichard (2006) describe about blog is clearly presented here. An idea of blog as a participatory medium is presented by open discussion in each blog. Readers have opportunity to involve actively in the medium. If the readers have different idea, he or she can give comment and the writer will reply. Moreover, if the reader need to emphasize more on the topic then he or she can create a post or making own blog.

These findings indicate the profile of the bloggers as young and dynamic. Young is found in sense of their age and occupation. Dynamic as seen in variability of provider, unique topic statements, and tendency to use NL (not listed). These characteristics can be a point of view in further analysis of the strategies.

Table 3: Self-presentation strategy.

Strategy	Percentage
Ingratiation	48%
Competence	26%
Intimidation	10%
Exemplification	7%
Supplication	5%

Result of the strategy seems to promote an active usage of blog. The bloggers has presented themselves according to their decision. In their post, 74% shows different presentation. It is different from the stereotype.

As the nature of interactivity, blog provides opportunity for two-way communication. This medium empowers people to involve more in communication. Previous practices of published message are quite closed to reader's participation. Blog, with at least two unique features: comment and link, makes receiver as sender and vice versa. Therefore, decision is in the individuals' hand, they can choose to involve actively or merely just a passive reader.

One of the empowerment practices is in a view about self presentation. Surabaya bloggers, as listed in Tugu Pahlawan, use the medium to present their idea about daily life topics or their interests. Along with that, the bloggers should manage their personal because this blog is not only medium; it is part of bloggers body. As the notion of McLuhan (1965) that medium is an extension of their mind and senses. Furthermore, Erickson (1996) stated about the relationship between the shifting of content control and impression construction. According to him, "[Personal pages, like blog, are] one of the first venues where individuals can construct portrayals of

themselves using information rather than consumer goods as their palette." Previous studies like Dominick (1999), Bortree (2005), Trammell and Keshelashvili (2005) and Ellison et al. (2006) used self presentation as a method to explain this challenge.

Content of post in blog cannot be separated from the writing's context. As mentioned above, Evelyn has chosen to use mildly negative and positive way in expressing her feeling and thought. She has a problem in thesis's writing. Despite of describing details about her feeling, she chooses to use solution-oriented way to write an entry. Similar topic about theses, Putri has chosen another way to describe her dilemma about theses or non-theses track. She describes the details about her problems and finally asking for advices from readers. A different way appears in Benny's blog. He presents himself as someone who likes to report his daily activities. In one of his entry, Benny has chosen to present his daily experiences by elaborating his photography skill.

Although there are situations that have probability to express one's feeling and thought in many ways, the bloggers tend to express in a positive way. Positive way means in the way of ingratiation and competence. This condition indicates that blogging, as intentional media use, is "purposive and planned" (Rubin & Perse, 1987). The question then, what the purpose is. Goffman's (1959) statement, "... *knowing that the individual is likely to present himself in a light that is favorable to him ...*" (p. 7), can be used to explain this phenomena. Further study on forty years later, Dominick's finding supports this result.

However, the result of positive way in self presentation should be analyzed in the context of communication. As mentioned by Mulyana (2008), there are four contexts of communication. Regarding this interaction, the third context, social, is interesting. The social context where the interactions (blog entries or comments) occur is in a sense of building friendship. The bloggers have the similar purpose to gain as much as friends in online world. Therefore, it influences their way to present themselves.

In the context of cyber community, Tugu Pahlawan extends interaction among Surabaya people. People, who are live in Surabaya or associated with Surabaya, able to meet and to interact each other in the virtual world through any sites. Moreover, they probably do not know each other in the real world. However, the kind of interaction should be considered in a view of time:

temporary or quite permanent. Temporary activities are known as browsing, chatting, and search. Permanent activities are the activities with long period of time such as online dating, online business, online learning, or even online crime. Therefore, interaction in virtual world, in this context of Tugu Pahlawan, should be examined by the two kinds of interaction. At glance, there are bloggers, like Evelyn, with periodical post and comments to other bloggers. This condition shows Tugu Pahlawan as an extension from real world community.

Regarding the profile of the bloggers, it seems that the characteristics of bloggers make the entries dynamic. Dynamic is founded in a sense of daily life topic, of combination of picture and text, of writing style either formal or informal language. At least there is one common consideration when bloggers choose to write: interesting. Or in another word, there is value in the entry. In the fulfilment of this need, the bloggers should make variation or use strategy. Therefore, the way the bloggers make entries implies to the kind of presentation strategy. In this finding, they tend not to use the strategy of intimidation, exemplification or supplication.

As elaborated early, the concern in this research is identity. The stereotype of Surabaya people is in the process of negotiation. In the flow of global culture, we should have our own culture, or can be said: national identity. However, the purpose of this research is not to investigate that we already have the identity. Rather, the findings show that there is an effort to create our identity. As shown from the result that ingratiation is the most-used strategy. The biggest challenge is what kind of identity or culture. This process will not be easy because of different people, personalities, values, and cultures among the Surabaya people, and Indonesia in commonly.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

Empowerment practice by presenting oneself in cyberspace is an interesting phenomenon in Surabaya. Based on analysis, periodic entries by the bloggers show the fact that those entries are not in the side of typical stereotype of Surabaya people. Although there is no evidence that this is an intentional-collective action, this phenomenon can be explained by the need of human for self esteem. This need meets with the nature of blog as an interactive medium. Therefore, the empowered way of communication to break the typical stereotype is presented.

In a view of strategy, the bloggers have chosen ingratiation (48%) and competence (26%) as dominant strategy. In context of criticizing a reality or an object, the bloggers tend to soften the message.

Further research on media empowerment, in particular self presentation, should consider limitations from this early research about Surabaya bloggers. The sample of this research can be expanded to member of another community blogger or bloggers with no affiliation. This finding needs to be combined with finding from other methods such as focus group discussion and in-depth interview. Regarding to the theme, relationship between the way of a blogger identify themselves and how they manage their content of entries can be used as a base for further development.

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