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Troy J. Strader

Drake University, Troy.Strader@drake.edu

Garry L. Frank

Drake University, Garry.Frank@drake.edu

Philip A. Houle

Drake University, Phil.Houle@drake.edu

Chip E. Miller

Drake University, Chip.Miller@drake.edu

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THE IMPACT OF PERSONALITY TYPE ON BLOG PARTICIPATION

Troy J. Strader

Drake University

Troy.Strader@drake.edu

Garry L. Frank

Drake University

Garry.Frank@drake.edu

Philip A. Houle

Drake University

Phil.Houle@drake.edu

Chip E. Miller

Drake University

Chip.Miller@drake.edu

ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to explore the impact of individual personality type on blog participation. Results indicate that blog participants are more likely to be introverts and perceptives.

KEYWORDS

Blog; blogging; personality; personality type; online communication; social networking

INTRODUCTION

In today's interconnected online world, if someone wants to document their life, express an opinion, or interact with people who share similar interests, they are able to do so by using a Web log – more commonly referred to as a blog. A blog is a personal (or organizational) online journal that is frequently updated and intended for general public consumption. They consist of a series of entries posted to a single Web page in reverse-chronological order (SearchVB.com, 2007). Blogs have been around for more than a decade and have become as common as reading the morning newspaper (Varadarajan, 2007). Because blogging is a relatively inexpensive activity, and it requires minimal technical skills, most Internet users can participate and there has been an explosion of activity over the past few years. According to a survey by Technorati, at the end of 2006 there were about 70 million blogs, about 120,000 new blogs were being created each day, and there were about 1.5 million new posts each day (Good, 2007).

It is obvious that there has been a tremendous growth in blogging activity in recent years, but what is not clear are the reasons why people participate in blogs. Its ease and low cost provide the opportunity to participate, but what is the motivation? Interestingly, it does not seem to be money. Only 8% of bloggers report actual income and these people are mostly age 50 or older (Lenhart and Fox, 2006). So other factors must be providing motivation. Previous studies have addressed this issue from various perspectives. One possibility is that it provides a means for accomplishing a particular purpose. Nardi et al. (2004) identified five motivations for bloggers – documenting life, expressing an opinion, providing an outlet for thoughts and feelings, testing ideas by writing them down for an audience, and expressing views to one another in a community setting. If someone wishes to accomplish one of these purposes, and they are aware that blogs provide a means to do this, then that may motivate them. In other studies the focus is on the blog's ability to provide a space for interpersonal relationships that has different characteristics than traditional face-to-face interactions. Blogs enable initiation of new relationships, experimentation with new media, and provide a complement to face-to-face relationships (Peris et al.,

2002). They also enable expansion of social networks and the possibility for enhancing the chances of creating meaningful relationships (Campbell et al., 2006).

Early studies typically viewed individuals who were involved in blog-type activities as being part of an overall homogeneous category of Internet users without considering their individual characteristics. But people are different and one of these differences is in individual's personality types. One study has addressed the degree to which user personality affects choice of online versus offline methods for social interaction based on a survey of young Singaporeans (Goby, 2006). In the study, online communications were broadly defined to include e-mail, chat rooms, and various other forms of online communications. Correlations were found between personality and preference for online versus offline communications options. Given the limited number of studies in this area, further study is needed to focus on different user populations and more specific online communication systems.

In this study we investigate whether differences in personality motivate some people to read blogs, or post messages on blogs, while others do not participate at all. A relationship between personality and information behavior has been shown to exist in the very broad context of information seeking (Heinstrom, 2003), but in this study we address issues related to the match between the unique characteristics of the blogging environment and the personality types resulting from extensions to the theoretical work of Carl Jung (Boeree, 2006). Personality types are used in this study because of their relation to the ways people get information and evaluate it (Boeree, 2006). The following sections discuss the unique characteristics of blogs followed by a description and discussion of the study, findings, and overall conclusions.

BLOG CHARACTERISTICS

Blogs have a number of unique characteristics that differentiate them from other forms of information exchange and interpersonal relationships. Blogs are typically unedited and unfiltered (Dearstyne, 2005). They may be viewed and posted to any time and from anywhere Internet access is available. This removes many of the time and geography constraints associated with face-to-face interaction. All interactions with other users are virtual – there is no physical or visual contact. The number of potential interactions is very large given that the blogosphere supports a many-to-many form of information exchange (Peris et al., 2002). The content is primarily made up of text and photos, but other forms of multimedia such as audio and video files may also be included. It is also common for blogs to include hyperlinks to other content or blogs. Also, people can choose to participate in a private setting – in fact, about 83% blog from home (Lenhart and Fox, 2006).

Individuals may participate in blogs at one of two levels. They may be a blog reader who reads posted messages, but does not post messages themselves. They may also be a fully participating blogger who both posts their own messages as well as reads other posts. A non-blogger would be an individual who does not read or post messages on blogs. The question is whether there is a match between these unique blog characteristics and individual's information seeking and evaluating behavior associated with different personality types. Are some people drawn to participating in blogs more than others because of their personality?

STUDY DESCRIPTION

The users of interest for this study are people who have access to the Internet and the minimal technical skills needed to allow them the opportunity to blog. Throughout the remaining sections of this paper the term blogger will be used to describe individuals who participate by either reading blogs and/or posting messages on blogs. To gather the data needed to address blogger personality and behavior, approximately 400 paper and pencil surveys were distributed to students in three university class levels (first year students, juniors, and graduate students) at a Midwestern private university. The survey included

questions regarding whether they participate in blogs or not, a four-dimension personality type questionnaire (extravert/introvert, sensor/intuitive, thinker/feeler, and perceptive/judge) (RoBards, 2007), and general demographic classifications. For a discussion of the personality type assessment validity, see (RoBards, 2008). A total of 359 surveys were returned and ten were eliminated because they were incomplete leaving 349 usable surveys, a response rate of about 87%. The respondents were almost evenly split by gender – 177 men and 172 women. Their ages represented the segment of individuals most likely to have access to, and ability to participate in, blogs – 18% were less than 20, 62% were 20-24, 10% were 25-29, and the remaining 10% were 30 years of age or older. The demographic characteristics of the sample closely match the blogging population that is composed of a majority of people less than 30 years old and is evenly split between women and men (Lenhart and Fox, 2006).

Of particular importance to this study is that the people surveyed encompass a wide range of personality traits. The number of people in each personality classification is summarized in Table 1.

Classification	Number	Mixed	Number	Classification
Extravert	197	41	111	Introvert
Sensor	231	35	83	Intuitive
Thinker	75		274	Feeler
Perceptive	156		193	Judge

Table 1. Survey Sample Personality Types (n=349)

Sufficient numbers of people fell into each personality classification which enables analysis of relationships using statistical data analysis. For blogging behavior we asked each person to answer yes or no to the following question – Do you read, view, or post to blogs? The sample included 192 blog participants and 157 non-bloggers.

FINDINGS

Data were analyzed using a regression model to identify whether statistically significant relationships exist between personality types and blogging participation. The dependent variable is a binary variable where 1 indicates that a user either reads and/or posts messages on blogs and a 0 indicates that the user does not participate in blogs. Results are summarized in Table 2.

Independent Variable	Coefficient and t statistic
Intercept	0.58
Extravert/Introvert	-0.03 -3.05***
Sensor/Intuitive	-0.00 -0.02
Thinker/Feeler	-0.01 -0.92
Perceptive/Judge	0.03 3.00***
Adjusted r^2	.041
F statistic	3.67
n	349

NOTE: *** = 99%

Table 2. Regression Results

Extraverts and Introverts

Extraverts are outgoing and have a higher need for interactions with people, while introverts are more withdrawn, reserved, and need more peace and privacy (Boeree, 2006; RoBards, 2007). For this study, the extent to which a person is an extravert or introvert was measured on a scale from 0-12 (RoBards, 2007) where a higher score would indicate that someone is more extraverted. Individuals were asked to select the phrase that best describes them given 12 pairs of choices. A score of six would indicate an individual is a mix of extravert and introvert. Given the characteristics of the blog environment, it could conceivably attract either group. Extraverts may find that the blogosphere provides a medium for extending the time they spend interacting with others, even though it is not face-to-face. Introverts may find that the online environment provides a less risky means of initiating social relationships in a more private setting. The latter case was found to be true. The data indicated that individuals participating in blogs were more introverted than the non-bloggers. This agrees with an earlier study that found that users who are socially fearful may use the Internet as a form of low-risk social approach and an opportunity to rehearse social behavior (Campbell et al., 2006). It also agrees with another study that found that introversion encourages individuals towards online communication (Goby, 2006). Introverts can use blogs to voice an opinion and interact with others, when they choose, while being in a peaceful, private place.

Sensors and Intuitives

A sensing person is good at looking, listening, and getting to know the world. Intuitives gain knowledge through the complex integration of large amounts of information. Sensors are most comfortable dealing with the current world, while intuitives tend to be more creative and look to the future (Boeree, 2006; RoBards, 2007). A 0-12 point scale was used to measure the extent to which a person is a sensor or intuitive. A higher score indicates that someone is more sensing. A score of six indicates a mixed personality type (RoBards, 2007). For this trait we found no significant difference between bloggers and non-bloggers. Blogging may involve discussions of either the current or future world so individuals who are in either category could be equally drawn to the discussions. Blogs may provide practical discussions of the current world that would attract sensors, but they may also support discussions of the future involving large numbers of information sources that may fit an intuitive.

Thinkers and Feelers

Thinkers evaluate information or ideas rationally and logically. Feelers evaluate information by weighing one's overall emotional response. Thinkers are interested in structures and patterns, while feelers are interested in people and their feelings (Boeree, 2006; RoBards, 2007). In the survey, the extent to which an individual falls into either category was measured using a 0-13 point scale (RoBards, 2007). A higher score indicates that someone is more inclined toward thinking. Thinkers may be drawn to blogging because it offers a great deal of data they could use in rationally and deliberately assessing a situation and making a decision. Feelers may find that blogs offer a wide range of personal perspectives and thoughts which they may appreciate. We found no significant relationship between this type and whether someone blogs or not. Both groups may find value equally in this online world.

Perceptives and Judges

Our fourth and final personality type involves whether people are flexible, and can see other people's viewpoints (perceptives), or whether they are organized and appreciate order and structure (judges) (Boeree, 2006; RoBards, 2007). This was measured using a 0-13 point scale (RoBards, 2007). A higher score indicates that someone is more perceptive. A strong characteristic of blogs is the lack of control over other bloggers and their thoughts, and the likelihood that many different opinions will be expressed.

Thus, it seems that perceptives would be drawn to blogging and the results indicated this to be true. It was found that blog participants more often fell into the perceptive personality type. The blogosphere has the unique characteristic of allowing huge numbers of people all over the world to offer viewpoints at any time and from any place. Judges may be turned off by the lack of order and structure that exists in blogs.

Demographics

In addition to the four personality types discussed above, relationships between demographic variables (gender, age, education, and income) and blog participation were also analyzed. No significant relationships were found between demographics and blog participation.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has several limitations. It is based on a single study and a single sample. It also uses only one personality assessment questionnaire while there are many others that exist that test various personality traits and types using different items and scales.

Given these findings we can draw a number of conclusions. First, individual personality types do differ between blog participants and non-bloggers. And the characteristics of the blogging environment provide greater motivation to participate for people who are introverts and perceptives. One practical implication these findings have is that if blogs are used as an information source, people and organizations should realize that it does not necessarily represent all types of people's views. The Web is a rich source of data on people's lives, interactions, and opinions created through 'natural' conversation that has up to this point not been fully utilized as a source of market research (Puri, 2007). Because some personality types are drawn to blogging more than others, the usefulness of some forms of market research may be affected.

From a theoretical perspective several directions for future research exist. This study could be replicated but with a different personality assessment. Studies could also focus on a specific category of blog (social networking, political discussions, organizational product/service discussions, etc.) to see if these findings are valid across a wide range of contexts. Finally, a model of blogging behavior may be developed that includes a broader range of factors such as individual time availability, Internet self-efficacy, perceptions regarding the number of other people who blog (network externality scenarios where the value of blogging to individuals grows as the number of other bloggers grows), and perceptions regarding the risks associated with online communications. These studies could also utilize other dependent variables that measure the extent to which people blog, for example, the number of hours spent viewing blogs, the average number of messages posted in a time period, or the number of different blogs in which someone participates. Given the tremendous growth in blogging activity, understanding blogger motivation is an important practical and theoretical issue that deserves further study.

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