

Why Blogging? An Emerging Social interaction Approach in Virtual World

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Abstract

Today more and more people are writing blog online. They keep personal diaries in public places. Why would they like disclosing traditional privacy to other people, even to strangers? Few prior studies have been addressed such motivation of blogging behavior empirically. This study will try to incorporate social interactionism in analyzing online blog usage from a new perspective, by exploring how social interaction process affects blogger's perceived rewards. Empirical research is under way to confirm our hypotheses. Based on prospect conclusion, we hope to find out some new change in mind and behavior that reshape the process of social interaction, the shared value among online users, and even the social structure.

Keywords: Blogging, Social Interaction, Esteem, Social risk, Network Effects

1. Introduction

Blog, short for "Web Log", is not only a personal journal maintained on the web, but also a form of personal communication and expression (Nardi et al. 2004, Kim et al. 2006). Thanks to web 2.0 technology, blog becomes an emerging online social fashion that occurs between many and many, different from former ones that most occur between one and one or one and many (iReserach 2005).

In recent years, a lot of people are engaged in keeping blogs. As of July 2006, the number of bloggers in the world reached about 50 million which was over 100 times bigger than it was just 3 years ago. About 175,000 new blogs were created each day, which means that on average, there are more than 2 blogs created each second (Xinhuanet 2006). From 2003 to 2006, the number of bloggers who use Chinese rose from 200,000 (iReserach 2005) to 19.87 million (iReserach 2006). Tremendous diversity in blog content has also been found (Nardi et al. 2004, CNNIC 2006).

Traditionally, diary is regarded as privacy. People usually keep diaries to document their personal lives and private emotions. Most of them tend to protect personal diaries from being exposed publicly. Now, however, with the emergence of blog, a lot of people change their mind, like keeping diaries online, and disclose privacy voluntarily. CNNIC showed that in China, only 17.8% of bloggers did not care about having many readers; however, 30% cared about readers very much (CNNIC 2006). Here come the most interesting questions: What motivations drive individuals to maintain their blogs and disclose private things to a wider range? Does this new change in mind and behavior reshape the process of social interaction, the shared value among online users, and even the social structure? If does, how?

Researchers have conducted some ethnographic investigation on explaining blogging motivation (e.g. life documentation, commentary, catharsis, and community form, see Nardi et al. 2004), descriptive case study on blog's effect on online community (Blood 2004), and empirical studies on the factors affecting satisfaction of blogs (e.g. blog quality and presentation, see Kim et al. 2006). However, few prior studies have been addressed the motivation of blogging

behavior empirically. The purpose of this paper is to incorporate social interactionism in analyzing online blog usage from a new perspective.

2. Theoretical Background

In this section, we present the theoretical foundations for this study. We incorporate social interaction theory in exploring blog motivation because several blog studies have indicated that blog is a social communication tool among bloggers rather than merely a personal media (Nardi et al. 2004). Self identify and self verification may play important roles in keeping blogs.

According to social interaction theory, interaction between human is “symbolic” that actors respond to others’ behaviours for the significance imputed to them by the actors (Singelmann 1972, Turner 1998). Individual sets his role and looks after role-support from others (McCall and Simmons 1978). In this sense, keeping blogs is a particular kind of role-setting and role-support conduct, and can be accounted for by social interaction theory, e.g., writing blogs can be seen as setting roles, and others’ comments can be seen as role-support. Therefore, this study uses social interaction theory as its theoretical base.

Furthermore, social interaction theory also takes reward-cost paradigm (McCall and Simmons 1978), and finds out vital invisible rewards for human’s “unrewarding” behavior (Turner 1998). In all interaction process, people are always seeking for rewards. If the rewards are less than the costs they pay out, they would be driven to adjust their future behavior to get more rewards or pay fewer costs (McCall and Simmons 1978). In this study, we follow this reward-cost framework to explain why people keep blogs.

During social interaction, people are motivated by three distinctive rewards: external reward, internal reward, and role-support reward (McCall and Simmons 1978, Turner 1998). External reward, which refers to money or other visible stimuli, is not seen markedly in blog behavior and thus ignored in this study. Internal reward, which refers to inside invisible stimuli such as satisfaction or enjoyment, can be represented in the form of perceived enjoyment in keeping blogs. Role-support reward, which refers to outside invisible stimuli, is even considered more important than the other two rewards. Positive role-support will reinforce individual’s conduct (Cast and Burke 2002, Gecas 1982).

During social interaction, costs can be incurred in the form of role-setting efforts (Turner 1998). Individual usually makes efforts to set himself a role by signalling self-meanings to others and verifying the role via others’ feedback. In keeping blogs, people set roles mostly through editing their web pages, such as writing dairies or presenting pictures. Such maintenance efforts will be investigated in this study as main cost. Besides actual efforts, social risk should be taken into account according to some studies in IT adoption (Featherman and Pavlou 2003) because some potential risk would impede people interacting via online blogs. Social risk is defined as the embarrassment, loss of face, and revelation of incompetence (Xu 2006) associated with uncomfortable feedbacks on blogs and potential loss of control over personal information (Featherman and Pavlou 2003). These two cost factors will be investigated in this study.

3. Research Model

Based on the theoretical review in the previous section, we developed a research model, as Figure 1 shows. Most independent variables come from social interaction theory, while dependent variable comes from technology acceptance literature.

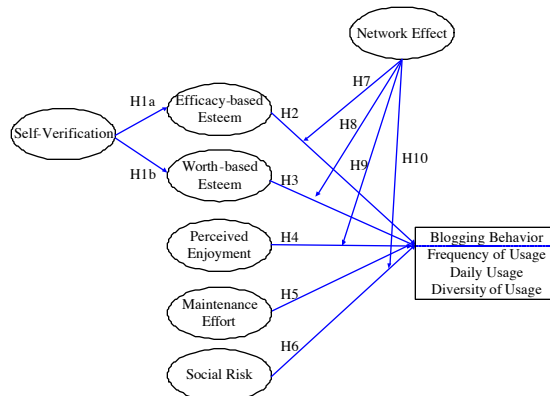


Figure 1. Research Model

3.1 Role support reward

In social interaction, people identify their roles and seek feedback from the environment to help them verify their roles. This process is called self-verification (Burke 1997, Cast and Burke 2002), the degree of which is regarded as the role-support reward. It has been suggested that greater self-verification produces feelings of efficacy and worth, increasing self-esteem (Cast and Burke 2002). Particularly, Cast and Burke stated that the self-esteem consists of efficacy-based esteem and worth-based esteem. The former refers to the degree to which people see themselves as capable and efficacious, and the latter refers to the degree to which people feel they are persons of value (Cast and Burke 2002). Therefore we propose Hypotheses 1(a,b):

H1a: Self-verification is positively related to efficacy-based esteem.

H1b: Self-verification is positively related to worth-based esteem.

Furthermore, as many prior studies stated, self-esteem is a major source of motivation of human conduct (Cast and Burke 2002, Gecas 1982). A person with high self-esteem is more likely to express and communicate. Both kinds of self-esteem are positively related to online blog usage. Since usage dimensions can be defined in terms of frequency of usage, daily usage and diversity of usage (Teo et al. 1999), Hypotheses 2(a,b,c) and 3(a,b,c) are stated as follows:

H2a, b, c: Efficacy-based esteem is positively related to frequency of blog usage, daily blog usage, and diversity of blog usage.

H3a, b, c: Worth-based esteem is positively related to frequency of blog usage, daily blog usage, and diversity of blog usage.

3.2 Internal reward

People will also be driven by internal reward, the perceived enjoyment, to adopt technology. The effect of perceived enjoyment on technology usage has been tested a lot in an individual's adoption of information technology (Davis et al. 1992, Teo et al. 1999, Venkatesh and Brown 2001, Hong and Tam 2006). Therefore, we propose Hypotheses 4(a,b,c):

H4a, b, c: Perceived enjoyment is positively related to frequency of blog usage, daily blog usage, and diversity of blog usage.

3.3 Maintenance effort

Keeping blogs involves codifying words, editing pictures, updating news, and other maintaining acts. Previous researches suggested that maintenance acts can entail costs to individuals as an expense of time and effort, and the maintenance efforts can impede technology adoption (Kankanhalli et al. 2005). Therefore, we propose Hypotheses 5(a,b,c):

H5a, b, c: Maintenance effort is negatively related to frequency of blog usage, daily blog usage, and diversity of blog usage.

3.4 Social risk

For personal blogs, an important factor that might affect blogging behavior is the social risk the bloggers might take (Featherman and Pavlou 2003). For example, visitors might diffuse your articles or pictures via the internet, and you would take the risk of disclosing personal information. When you write something not so good, others may think you incompetent. If you present some ideas that would irritate others, unexpected conflict may occur. Thus, aware of others' presence, people can perceive some potential social risk that would reduce their motivation to write blogs. Therefore, we propose Hypotheses 6(a,b,c):

H6a, b, c: Social risk is negatively related to frequency of blog usage, daily blog usage, and diversity of blog usage.

3.5 Network effect

Many previous studies showed that network effect is an exogenous factor that indicates people's subjective perception of the number of current users with some particular communications service and affects people's adoption behavior (Li et al. 2005,). A network with more users would bring every user more rewards (Karz and Shapiro 1985). This rule also works in blog usage. Particularly, when individual perceives a large network with a lot bloggers or readers, he will be more willing to be motivated by rewards and less willing to incur social risk. For example, he must be aware that what he presents would be read by more people and may think that he is able to do things as well as most other people, thus enhancing the effect of his esteem on keeping blogs. The influence of perceived enjoyment on blog usage also would be intensified (Li et al. 2005). With the presence of more people, the negative impact of social risk on blog behavior can be highlighted. Therefore, Hypotheses 7(a,b,c)-10(a,b,c) are stated as follows:

H7a,b,c: When bloggers perceive stronger network effects, the positive impacts of efficacy-based esteem on (a) frequency of blog usage, (b) daily blog usage, and (c) diversity of blog usage are more significant than when they perceive weaker network effects.

H8a,b,c: When bloggers perceive stronger network effects, the positive impacts of worth-based esteem on (a) frequency of blog usage, (b) daily blog usage, and (c) diversity of blog usage are more significant than when they perceive weaker network effects.

H9a,b,c: When bloggers perceive stronger network effects, the positive impacts of perceived enjoyment on (a) frequency of blog usage, (b) daily blog usage, and (c) diversity of blog usage are more significant than when they perceive weaker network effects.

H10a,b,c: When bloggers perceive stronger network effects, the negative impacts of social risk on (a) frequency of blog usage, (b) daily blog usage, and (c) diversity of blog usage are more significant than when they perceive weaker network effects.

4. Future Works

This study tries to address why people keep blogs online. We explore the motivations from social interaction perspective. We will further conduct empirical study to draw results. The questionnaire has been sent out and preliminary findings will be available in one month. We anticipate positive evidence for supporting the ten hypotheses.

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