Jumping the Border in the Blogosphere?
A Cross-Cultural Comparative Study on the Motives of American, Russian, and German Bloggers for Writing and Commenting

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ABSTRACT
Since the late 1990s, blogs have become a popular platform to communicate various facets of Internet users’ personal lives such as thoughts, opinions, interests, and ideas. However, what remains open is the question of how much intercultural differences determine the specific motives of bloggers to write a virtual diary, as well as their attitudes and reactions towards comments. A cross-cultural online survey with 79 German, 68 American, and 68 Russian bloggers investigates whether the bloggers’ cultural backgrounds impacted these individual usage patterns. Analysis indicates that Russian bloggers tend to be more reserved towards documentation and are more insecure towards received comments than American and German bloggers who, on the contrary, blog more frequently. Results are discussed in the light of Hofstede’s cultural dimensions.

Keywords: Blogging Behavior, Blogs, Cross-Cultural Differences, Motives, Online Survey, Social Web

INTRODUCTION
From its early days, the Internet has been a place where people from all over the world can be active participants, from communicating by email to browsing websites for information. Within the last few years, the degree of user activity has advanced even further: Any individual can use the Social Web not only for communication, but also to actively create virtual data and present him/herself through the Internet. In particular, blogs allow a high degree of activity and productiveness (Blood, 2002; Miller & Shepard, 2004). Many are self-representational online diaries (Serfaty, 2004), i.e., frequently updated websites where content (text, pictures, music, etc.) is posted on a regular basis and displayed in chronological order. Users are able to interact with the producers by commenting on any individual post; they can

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criticize or agree with the creator or present their own experiences. The blog author, in turn, can react to the comment if he or she desires. By means of such comments and references to other online sources in the posts, blogs form a clustered network of interconnected texts: the blogosphere (Schmidt, 2007).

With regard to the theoretical analysis of blogging behavior, there is already a considerable body of research considering the uses and gratifications paradigm for the bloggers’ usage motives (e.g., Nardi et al., 2004; Olcoń, 2003; Papacharissi, 2004; Schmidt, 2007). Most of these studies identified that interpersonal communication as well as the blog authors’ individual self-display appear to be the important motives for engaging in blogging. However, since weblogs are hosted by people from a different cultural background, the question must be asked whether blog usage fuels the processes of globalization and diminishes national borders, or if intercultural differences are transferred into the blogosphere and in particular into specific usage patterns.

Given that an individual’s culture background still has a great impact on the way people behave and communicate in offline contexts (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 2001), this paper explores its meaning for participants of the blogosphere. We asked German, Russian, and American bloggers about their motives to write a blog, which topics they blog about, and how they react towards feedback from other users. The selection of these countries is based on their impressive dissimilarities on diverse cultural dimensions as postulated by Hofstede (2001). Following his work, national culture, i.e., cultural traits that are related to a specific nation can be identified through four dimensions: power distance, collectivism versus individualism, femininity versus masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance. In consideration of the chosen nationalities, the individualism/collectivism dimension appears to offer a fruitful basis to distinguish communicative behavior on weblogs since it allows for differentiating communication goals and purposes. In accordance with this, we start our theoretical review by presenting previous results on usage motives and, secondly, describe what is already known about bloggers’ reactions towards comments from the audience. Finally, our third section attempts to discuss to what extent intercultural differences play an important role in terms of analyzing blogging behavior.

**MOTIVES FOR WRITING BLOGS**

Parallel to the rapid spread of blogs, a considerable body of research has been conducted on the authoring of blogs (Schmidt, 2007). Most of these studies focused on content analyses that examine user-initiated features and topics discussed in order to reveal bloggers’ motives and gratifications. For instance, Papacharissi (2004) conducted a content analysis of 260 registered public blogs hosted at blogger.com. From the results, she inferred possible gratifications that bloggers gained by publishing their blogs. She found that self-expression as well as social interaction seemed to be most important to English-language bloggers. The results further suggested that the posts were intended to be read by friends or family, thus fulfilling a need for social interaction. In a content analysis, Olcoń (2003) summarized five social functions of writing a blog: fulfillment of emotional needs, fulfillment of the need for social ties, sociability, pleasure, and self-expression.

Nardi et al. (2004) also investigated the various motivations that drive individuals to create and maintain blogs. They considered several alpha bloggers (authors who are very popular and widely read), but also paid special attention to ordinary authors with much smaller audiences. Based on qualitative in-depth interviews with 23 blog authors in the U.S.A., they identified and categorized five major motivations for blogging: (1) documenting one’s own life, (2) providing commentary and opinions, (3) expression of deeply felt emotions, (4) articulating ideas through writing, and (5) forming and maintaining community forums. Additionally, their results indicated that blog authors were primarily motivated by social
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