Chapter 12

Blogging Motivations for Latin American Bloggers: A Uses and Gratifications Approach

Jenny Bronstein
Bar-Ilan University, Israel

ABSTRACT

The author of this chapter investigated the motivations that drive bloggers in Spanish-speaking Latin American countries to write personal blogs. The conceptual framework drew on the uses and gratifications theoretical perspective as a means for exploring such motivation. Different types of motivation for blogging were analyzed. The motivations included self-documentation, improving writing skills, self-expression, information sharing, passing time, and socialization. An online survey was designed, and 90 bloggers from six Latin American countries participated in the study. Results of both quantitative and qualitative analyses indicate that the three most-cited reasons for blogging were the opportunity that blogs provided for participants to freely express their thoughts and feelings, the facility for publishing information in their areas of interest, and the chance to practice their writing skills.

INTRODUCTION

Weblogs or blogs, frequently updated Web pages in which dated entries are listed in reversed chronological order, are one of the most popular forms of communication on the World Wide Web. Blogging in its current form began around 1997 with Dave Winer’s scripting news, an online record of Winer’s reflections on a wide range of topics (Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004). At the beginning, personal blogs resembled the online journals that had emerged in the mid-1990s (Flynn, 2003). These online journals focused on personal content and were regularly updated. The first blogs presented a mixture of links to a wide
Blogging Motivations for Latin American Bloggers

variety of sites, commentary, and posts. They can be viewed as being directly descended from the hotlists of “what’s new?” or “cool links” (Blood, 2002). In this initial stage there were only a handful of blogs because their publication required users to have an extensive knowledge of HTML code. The emergence of free publishing platforms, such as Blogger.com in 1999, allowed users with no knowledge of HTML to publish a blog. With the creation of easy and free publishing tools the number of blogs grew exponentially and new and original types of blogs emerged, so that today’s variety of blogs is as diverse as the human interests they represent (Thelwall, 2006).

Blogs and bloggers have been at the forefront of new media research in the United States, Canada, and Europe. Because early research on the emergent blogosphere focused on blog classification, several categorizations of blogs were proposed. Blogs were classified in the following ways: according to their purpose (journalistic, educational or business oriented) (e.g., Mermit, 2003); by authorship (single, group or communal) (e.g., Bar-Ilan, 2005; Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2004) or by type of content (personal or topic-oriented) (e.g., Bar-Ilan, 2005; Dearthyn, 2005). The Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project blogger survey (Lenhart & Fox, 2006) found that the American (USA) blogosphere is dominated by those who use blogs as personal journals, citing 37% of participants as reporting that one of their main writing topics was “my life and experiences” (p. ii). Yet, few studies have focused on the state of the blogosphere in Latin America (Jeffrey Group, 2008), despite the growing size of the bloggers’ population among Internet users in this region. According to Internet World Statistics, there were an estimated 175 million Internet users in Latin America in 2009, approximately 8.4% of the world’s Internet users’ population. Furthermore, there are an estimated 9.1 million bloggers in Latin America that represent 7.2% of that region’s Internet users (Jeffrey Group, 2008). Given the predominance of personal blogs in the Latin American blogosphere (State of the Hispanic Blogosphere, 2009; Yu, 2007), the present study investigated the motivations that drive bloggers in Spanish-speaking Latin American countries to write individually authored, personal journals.

MOTIVATIONS FOR BLOGGING

The concept of motivation has been described as “a directing force over behavior and that motivation can act to begin the behavior as well as influence its continuation” (Brady, 2006, p. 4). The reasons and motivations for authoring a blog have been at the center of blog research in recent years and different motivations for blogging have been found. Individually authored blogs give their authors a personal space on the Web by allowing them to publish their subjective views, feelings and statements easily and for free. Self-expression in a free and unrestricted environment has been revealed as an important motivation for blogging (Lenhart & Fox, 2006; Nardi et al., 2004; Trammell et al., 2006; Yu, 2007). Blogs have also been described as “protected spaces” that allow bloggers to share the feelings that they would not share otherwise and tell their story or relate their thoughts without interruption (Gumbrecht, 2004).

Several studies have indicated that the need to socialize along with the need to create and maintain social ties produces a strong motivation to blog because “by identifying, formulating, and discussing problems and interests, a socially shared view can evolve through the interaction of others” (Mosel, 2005, p. 4). When using a blog as a socialization tool, bloggers’ motivations can either be intrinsic (that is, a blog is started to contact the people on the Internet) or extrinsic (that is, a blog is started to maintain relationships formed elsewhere) (Walker, 2000). Self-expression and the creation and improvement of social relationships