

Taiwanese student bloggers: Motivations behind and topics of their blogs

Sandra Haggard.,USA, Taiwan

Dept. of Applied Foreign Languages, Meiho University, Taiwan

Email of Contact Author: Sandy@meiho.edu.tw

ABSTRACT

The Internet offers many outlets for people to express their thoughts and ideas. One way is through blogging. Blogs, a word developed by blending the words web and log, can come in many forms. Social networking sites such as Facebook, Wretch, Xanga and MySpace offer a way to filter who is allowed visit the site and are a way to reconnect with old friends and colleagues. This personal or professional website is written about oneself or one's business as a way to meet others with similar viewpoints and to present one's own opinions on the world information platform. The purpose of this research is to determine the reasons why students in a southern Taiwan university have their own blogs, what information they normally post, and why they keep posting, and to analyze this information to make recommendations for better communication between teachers and students. Students from Meiho University in southern Taiwan were surveyed. The survey asked 44 questions using a 5-point Likert scale and an additional four open-ended questions. The student survey was in Mandarin Chinese. There were 173 samples collected, 159 were analyzed, with the remaining 14 surveys found to be incomplete. The findings included the motivations behind students having blogs and the usual topics they post on the blogs. Students reported reasons for having a blog as mostly personal reasons such as "for fun", "because I'm bored, it's something to do", "to express my feelings", and "to exchange ideas with friends." Students reported that they usually post about their "mood that day", "personal thinking and life events", "what is going on that day", "school things", "diary", "greetings to friends", "pets", "poetry, prose", "pictures", and "private information". The Cronbach Alpha based on standardized items for the Motivation reliability was .698, Self-efficacy .749, and Satisfaction .804, each being found to be of sound reliability. The older the student, the less motivated they are to keep their blog active. The longer the student has had a blog, the more satisfied he/she is and the more motivated to continue. The more blog experience the student had, the more motivation he/she reported (.240). In this digital age and with the predominance of students using computers, a natural next step would be to include blogging in the classroom in an e-learning platform.

E-learning is increasingly more common in schools in Taiwan and around the world. E-learning can be best described as "educational delivery or interaction via technology" (Catherall, 2005). Web pages of the past were static, were not updated often due to the complicated process involved, had limited communication between the web author and web visitors, and had limited privacy security (Catherall, 2005). On the other hand, e-learning systems provide dynamic web content, easy updating, a range of communication tools, and advanced security features (Catherall, 2005). E-learning can include "interactive multimedia programs, online discussion forums, web browsing and web link sharing tools, course announcement pages, chat rooms, course management systems, digital portfolios and the use of virtual learning environments

for both pedagogical purposes and the institutional management of learning,” (Goodfellow, 2007). E-learning systems offer collaboration to develop a finished product, document management and publishing, synchronous and asynchronous communication, course-work submission, distance learning, blended learning (E-learning mixed with traditional book learning), and ubiquitous learning (relationship of students, teachers, and electronic systems in a variety of settings and contexts (Catherall, 2005). Educators can consider how to use the students’ proclivity for using blogs to get them motivated to learn in the classroom as well.

Some teachers may be reluctant to participate in e-learning, feeling that they must change their “teaching styles and methods to accommodate technology rather than to use technology to accomplish [their] goals” (Clyde, 2005). Another challenge may be that not every student has access to the Internet, so requiring Internet communication may not be feasible for every student. Students without Internet access at home may need to use computer labs on campus, may need to borrow a laptop with a way to connect online, or may need to request paper copies of material referenced online (Catherall, 2005). Blogging is a way for students to communicate their ideas and report their activities online with those who share a common interest. Their willingness to continue blogging and to keep their site active is borne from an enthusiasm that teachers should nourish.

Keywords: blogging, student motivation, e-learning

1. Introduction

Background: Many people choose to express their thoughts, interests, and ideas on the Internet. One effective way for them to do so is by blogging. This personal or professional website is written about oneself or one’s business as a way to meet others with similar viewpoints and to present one’s own opinions on the world information platform. Blogging and social networking pages are becoming increasingly more popular for people of all ages.

Motivation: The purpose of this project was to see what information Taiwanese university students normally post on their blogs, why they keep posting, and to analyze this information to develop recommendations for teachers. The ultimate goal is to provide recommendations for better communication between university teachers and students.

2. Literature Review

E-learning is increasingly more common in schools in Taiwan and around the world. E-learning can be best described as “educational delivery or interaction via technology” (Catherall, 2005). Another definition is “the explicit association of learning in tertiary education with electronic and digital applications and environments (Goodfellow, 2007). Web pages of the past were static, were not updated often due to the complicated process involved, had limited communication between the web author and web visitors, and had limited privacy security (Catherall, 2005). On the other hand, e-learning systems provide dynamic web content, easy updating, a range of communication tools, and advanced security features (Catherall, 2005). E-learning can include “interactive multimedia programs, online discussion forums, web browsing and web link sharing tools, course announcement pages, chat rooms, course management systems, digital portfolios and the use of virtual learning

environments (VLEs) for both pedagogical purposes and the institutional management of learning (Goodfellow, 2007). E-learning systems offer collaboration to develop a finished product, document management and publishing, synchronous and asynchronous communication, course-work submission, distance learning, blended learning (E-learning mixed with traditional book learning), and ubiquitous learning (relationship of students, teachers, and electronic systems in a variety of settings and contexts (Catherall, 2005). Some teachers may be reluctant to participate in e-learning, feeling that they must change their “teaching styles and methods to accommodate technology rather than to use technology to accomplish [their] goals” (Clyde, 2005).

Blogs, a word developed by blending the words web and log, can come in many forms. Social networking sites such as Facebook, Wretch, Xanga and MySpace offer a way to limit who is allowed visit the site and are a way to reconnect with old friends and colleagues. Some MySpace pages include tutorials, business sites, teen help lines, research and literature discussion groups, and homework help (Kolb, 2009).

Blog hosts include Blogger, WordPress, and Edublogs, a WordPress system designed especially for educators. Setting up a new blog is very easy as users fill in a template of their site’s title and information. The design and colors can be chosen, as well as the font and arrangement of information on the page. Links for related sites of interest can be added on a side column of the blog.

Time Factor: Bloggers questioned by Brookover reported that they spent 10-30 minutes each day blogging. “Done responsibly, blogging is not a time sink. Instead, it can be a creative, easy way to reach tech-savvy community members.... The best way to ensure productive blogging on staff time is through training”(Brookover, 2007).

Motivations to begin blogging: A study in Austria in 2009 reported that students began blogging due to the desires to write and publish, to experiment with the technology, to keep in touch with loved ones, and to develop social contacts (Andergassen et al, 2009).

Reasons for not wanting to blog: The university students surveyed in Austria who did not blog found it to be not useful, found instant messaging to be more attractive due to immediate communication, and had privacy concerns (Andergassen et al, 2009).

E-learning has an important role in education and higher order thinking, and that teachers and students are becoming more tech-savvy in order to keep up with technology demands. In this study, we will explore the reasons why university students in southern Taiwan take the time to blog and what their expectations are for their blogs. We would also like to discover what kind of posts they usually add to their blogs. We will then take this data to provide recommendations for educators.

E-commerce is also a growing trend. According to Banks, e-commerce did not utilize the Internet until 1994 having been used prior to this as a term to mean computer networking (Banks, 2006).

Advertisers may want to take more of an interest in bloggers as found in a study by Huang et al, 2007, “If the purpose of a campaign in the blogosphere (sic) is to get a simple message diffused as quick and as far as possible, then the logical target should be bloggers who are blogging mainly to interact with other bloggers. Instead, if the campaign has more information to communicate and has a longer-term agenda, then a more balanced targeting plan or even more emphasis on content-gathering-oriented bloggers will help maximize a campaign's effectiveness.” Their study also found

that “ self-expression motivation leads to interaction, the higher the life-documenting motivation that a blogger has, the more likely he or she is to interact with people by blogging, the commenting motivation leads to the engagement of online interaction by blogging, and the commenting motivation also leads to interaction behaviors by blogging”

3. Methodology

The survey used a 44-question 5-point Likert scale and four open-ended questions. The student survey was translated into Mandarin Chinese. (See Appendix A.) Only students from Meiho University were surveyed. There were 173 samples collected, and 159 were analyzed. The other 14 were thrown out as incomplete.

- a. Qualitative research: We will explore the motivations and actions of teachers in southern Taiwan universities as to why they blog, what they post, what are their expectations of blogging. The surveys included open-ended questions for respondents to be able to fully express their opinions without the limitations of a few possible responses.
- b. Quantitative research: An analysis of a sample survey given to university students in Kaohsiung was found to be of sound reliability. Three Meiho University teachers distributed the surveys in their English courses. The results of the survey were then tabulated and analyzed.

4. Results

The purposes and results of the research are:

- a. to determine the reasons why students in southern Taiwan university have their own blogs.

Students reported mostly personal reasons such as “for fun”, “because I’m bored, it’s something to do”, “to express my feelings”, “to exchange ideas with friends.

- b. to determine what information they normally post

Students reported that they usually post about their “mood that day”, “personal thinking and life events”, “what is going on that day”, “school things”, “diary”, “say ‘hello’ to friends”, “pets”, “poetry, prose”, “pictures”, and “private information”.

- c. to learn why they keep posting

For the student surveys, there was not a significant correlation between length of time they had blogged in relation to self-efficacy, but there was an impact of 0.233 for satisfaction.

- d. to analyze this information to develop recommendations for teachers and students.

The Cronbach Alpha based on standardized items for the Motivation reliability was .698, Self-efficacy .749, and Satisfaction .804, each being found to be sound reliability.

The older the student, the less motivated they are to keep their blog active. The longer the student has had a blog, the more satisfied he/she is and the more motivated to continue. The more blog experience the student had, the more motivation he/she reported. (.240)

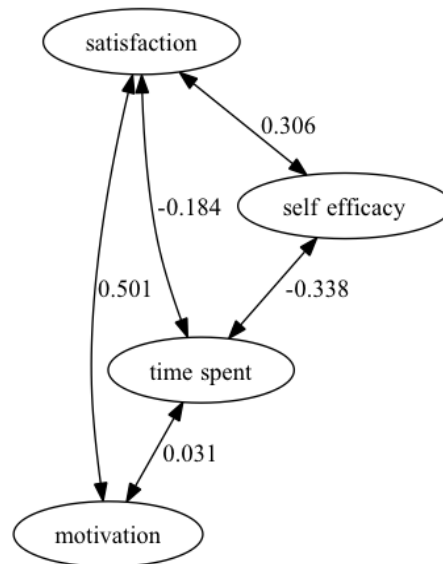


Figure 1. Pierson co-efficient relationships

5. Conclusions

Because the time spent had little effect on motivation, satisfaction and self-efficacy, a blogger may soon find that too much time has been spent to reach their goal of blogging. This may be cause for employers to take note that employees blogging at work may find that time spent blogging is irrelevant and they may be distracted from their actual work.

Other conclusions from the results include that younger students are more likely to keep their blog active, and the longer someone has a blog, the more likely they are to keep it going.

Blogs are used as a way to express ideas and to share information. If blogs “were approached from the standpoint of providing potential audit trails of knowledge built up over a period of time, they could contribute powerfully to promoting knowledge production, as well as enabling reflection upon and evaluation of how this knowledge was arrived at.” (Lankshear, Knobel 2003).

Recommendations for further study: This study was limited to southern Taiwan university students who were taking English classes, but further studies could include all of Taiwan or other places around the world, or a comparison between bloggers from Taiwan and the United States. Also, other types of e-learning such as collaborative blogging, email, Google documents, and interactive chats could be analyzed.

Recommendations for teachers:

University teachers should be aware of the amount of time students spend blogging and that students mostly post about their personal daily lives. Students are focused on interpersonal relationships, possibly even more than their studies. To further develop this existing interest in blogging, teachers can consider ways to integrate blogging into their curricula such as through online collaborative projects and report writing.

6. References

- [1] Andergassen, M., Behringer, R., Finlay, J., Gorra, A., & Moore, D. (2009). Weblogs in Higher Education: Why Do Students (Not) Blog?. *Electronic Journal of e-Learning*, 7(3), 203-214. Available online at www.ejel.org.
- [2] Banks, D., & Said, Y. (2006). *Data mining in electronic commerce*. Statistical Science, 21(2), A Special Issue on Statistical Challenges and Opportunities in Electronic Commerce Research 234-246. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27645752>.
- [3] Brookover, S. (2007). *Why We Blog*. *Library Journal*, 132(19), 28-31. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- [4] Catherall, P. (2005). *Delivering e-learning for information services in higher education*. Oxford, England: Chandos Publishing.
- [5] Clyde, William, & Delohery, Andrew. (2005). *Using Technology in teaching*. New Haven, USA: Yale Univ Pr.
- [6] Coyle, S., Jones, T., & Kirk Pickle, S. . (2009). *E-learning programs come in all shapes and sizes*. *Learning and Leading with Technology*, 37(2), Retrieved from http://www.learningandleading-digital.com/learning_leading/20090910?pg=16&pm=2&fs=1#pg16
- [7] Goodfellow, R., & Lea, M. R.. (2007). *Challenging e-learning in the university*. Berkshire, England: McGraw-Hill.
- [8] Huang, C., Shen, Y; Lin, H. and Chang, S. (2007). Bloggers' Motivations and Behaviors: A Model. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 47(4), 472-484. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- [9] Kolb, L. (2009). Myspace can be a learning tool. *Learning and Leading with Technology*, 37(4).
- [10] Lankshear, C., & Knobel, M. (2003). *Do-It-Yourself Broadcasting: Writing Weblogs in a Knowledge Society*. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- [11] Peters, R. (2009). *Hooked on classroom blogging*. *Learning and Leading with Technology*, 36(6), Retrieved from http://www.learningandleading-digital.com/learning_leading/200904?pg=28&search_term=blog&search_term=blog#pg28
- [12] Ryan, R.M. & Connell, J.P. (1989). Perceived Locus of Causality and Internationalization: Examining Reasons for Acting in Two Domains. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57 (5), 749-76.
- [13] Tuan, H.L., Chin, C.C. & Shieh, H.H. (2005). The development of a questionnaire to measure students' motivation towards science learning. *International Journal of Science Education*, 27 (6), 639-654.
- [14] Wang, Y.S. (2003). Assessment of learner satisfaction with asynchronous electronic learning systems. *Information & Management*, 41, 75-86.
- [15] Xiao, Y. & Lucking, R. (2008). The impact of two types of peer assessment of students' performance and satisfaction within a Wiki environment. *Internet and Higher Education*, 11, 186-193.
- [16] Zawilinski, L. . (2009). *Hot blogging: a framework for blogging to promote higher order thinking*. *The Reading Teacher*, 62(8), Retrieved from <http://www.reading.org/Publish.aspx?page=/publications/journals/rt/v62/i8/abstracts/rt-62-8-zawilinski.html&mode=redirect> doi: 10.1598/RT.62.8.3

Appendix A (Note: Students were given a Chinese version.)

Blog Research Survey Questions for college/university students in southern Taiwan
Thank you for taking this survey. For the sake of this research, we are defining the word "blog" as website on the Internet where personal information is shared such as Blogger, Facebook, MySpace, Wretch, etc. We are researching the reasons why students choose whether or not to blog.

	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly agree
1. I have a blog because I felt pressured to start one.					
2. I feel that college students should have a blog.					
3. It's my school's policy that all students should have a blog.					
4. I have a blog because I want the teachers to think I'm a good student.					
5. I would feel bad about myself if I didn't have a blog.					
6. If I didn't have a blog, it would bother me.					
7. I have a blog because I want to express my ideas.					
8. I have a blog to check whether the content I post is correct or not.					
9. I believe that the thoughts I share on my blog are important to other college students.					
10. When I considered starting a blog, I thought it would be fun.					
11. Whether blog creation is difficult or easy, I am sure that I can develop it.					
12. I am not confident about understanding blog creation and HTML scripting.					
13. I am sure that I can do well with blogging.					
14. No matter how much effort I put in, I cannot learn the blog interface.					
15. When blog creation is too difficult, I give up or only do the easy parts.					
16. During blogging, I prefer to ask other people to work the interface rather than figure it out for myself.					
17. When I find the blogging interfaces difficult, I do not try to learn them.					
18. Having a blog makes it easy for me to discuss questions and share with other educators.					
19. Having a blog enables me to learn what I need in order to be a better student.					
20. I enjoy having a blog.					
21. Having a blog is an effective approach to improve my critical thinking skills.					
22. I am satisfied with the overall quality of my blog.					
23. I worry that blogging is demanding too much of my time.					
24. Blogging is getting more difficult.					
25. I worry about getting enough comments					

and visitors on my blog.					
26. I worry that no one will like my ideas on the blog.					
27. I wonder if I am giving up study time for blogging.					
28. I try to make my blog better than my classmates' blogs.					
29. Blogging takes up much of my free time.					
30. My school allows me to access my blog.					
31. I receive an adequate number of comments on my blog					
32. I feel a need to post a new entry several times a week.					
33. Maintaining a blog is a complicated process.					
34. Maintaining a blog requires a great deal of discipline.					
35. Blogging involves a lot of technical abilities.					
36. I don't know how blogging will affect my future.					
37. Blogging is a skill easily learned by most people.					
38. Blogging has no feedback about the technical aspects of blogging (other than content).					
39. I always have to learn new technology to keep up with blogging.					
40. People who leave comments on my blog show a great deal of integrity.					
41. I can rely on the people who comment on my blog.					
42. The people who comment on my blog are very trustworthy.					
43. People who comment on my blog are considerate of my feelings, and I am considerate of theirs.					
44. People who comment on my blog are confident in my ideas, and I am confident in theirs.					

Demographics:

1. Age range: ___ 18 – 22 ___ 23-29 ___ 30 - 39 ___ 40 – 49 ___ 50 - 59 ___ 60 +

2. Nationality: ___ Taiwanese ___ Vietnamese

Other (Please indicate.) _____

3. Year in School: ___ (1 – Freshman) ___ (2-Sophomore) ___ (3-Junior) ___ (4-Senior) ___ in 5 – year vocational high school (Year ___)

Other: _____(Please indicate.)

4. Length of time you've had a blog: _____(months)

Please answer the following:

1. Why do you have a blog?
2. What do you usually post on your blog?
3. Have you considered quitting blogging? _____ Why?
4. If you have never had a blog, what is the reason?