Chapter 25

Women Bloggers Seeking Validation and Financial Recompense in the Blogosphere

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ABSTRACT

Previous researchers investigating motivations for blogging have suggested mainly intangible benefits: for instance, documenting the author's life, providing commentary and opinions, expressing deeply felt emotions, working out ideas through writing, and forming and maintaining communities and forums. The research detailed in this chapter focuses on the materialistic motivations of women bloggers in the U.K. and U.S. The author suggests that a need for validation and a strong financial stimulus should be added to this list of incentives.

INTRODUCTION

This is not going be one of those spiritually uplifting blogs in which I name every fetus I've ever lost and then derive comfort from the fact that I have so many little angels looking down on me from heaven. No, this is going to be an angry blog, so please spare me the lectures about my attitude....I get plenty of opportunities to be a smiley-faced trooper in my real life. This is the only place where I get to be plain old pissed off at the universe.

The aim of this chapter is to investigate the motivations of women who blog, and the audience for whom they consider themselves to be writing. What makes a woman, like the one in the passage quoted above, write about her anguish, her hopes, her feelings of loss and pain and her plain anger in a publicly accessible website, where her words can be read by total strangers all over the world? What makes writing a blog different for a woman from simply writing in a diary or constructing a personal web page? And what, in particular, attracts women to journal blogging – North American studies suggest that more than half of all journal blog authors are women, that they persevere longer and write more (Henning, 2003) and that at least 50% of bloggers

in particular are female (Herring, Kouper, Schiedt, & Wright, 2004).

This chapter summarises research into the motivations of women bloggers in the U.K. and the U.S. undertaken between 2005 and 2007 (see also Pedersen, 2006; Pedersen & Macafee, 2007; Pedersen 2007a). It suggests that female bloggers in particular are motivated by a need for validation and that there is a growing financial motivation to be found in the blogosphere, amongst men and women, but of particular interest to women looking for ways of earning income from home.

BACKGROUND

From a handful of link-driven, internet-filtering sites in 1997 (Blood, 2000), blogging has taken off rapidly. The basic form of a blog is generally accepted to be brief, dated posts, collected on one web page. They are chronologically ordered rather than by topic or argument. At first, the use of blogs was restricted to those who had the necessary advanced programming skills. Such early blogs were primarily link-driven sites with editorial commentary – so-called *filter blogs*. However, with the introduction of free or inexpensive and easy-to-use blogging services, such as Blogger since 1999, the number of blogs has expanded rapidly (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2004). In 2008, the blog-tracking directory Technorati claims to be tracking over 112 million blogs. Filter sites have been joined by a second type of blog – the *journal blog*, which is essentially an online diary. The newer journal blogs have a commentary concentrated style, which may also include links and reader responses, depending on the theme and purpose of the blog. Whereas filter blogs are heavily reliant on links to and from their site and the comments of readers, researchers have suggested that journal blogs tend to have smaller audiences and fewer links to other sites (Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2003 Herring, Kouper, Scheidt, & Wright, 2004). Links-driven

filter blogs tend to be focused on external events, while journal bloggers write about events in their own lives. However, it is important not to make too rigorous a distinction between the two types of blog – *filter bloggers* often write about their own lives and thoughts and *journal bloggers* will comment on external events such as politics and international affairs.

While blogging as a form of online social interaction has attracted a growing amount of academic investigation in recent years, until recently the majority of such research has focused on the North American experience. This imbalance is now being redressed in relation to non-English language blogging. For example, examination of the state of the Polish blogosphere by Trammell, Tarkowski, Hofmokl, and Sapp (2006), Tricas-Garcia and Merelo-Guervos' work on the Spanish blogosphere (2004), and Abold's (2006) discussion of the use of blogs in the 2005 German election campaign. Work on the Asian blogosphere has also developed rapidly (for example, see Hsi-Peng & Kuo-Lun, 2007; Miura & Yamashita, 2007) There has also been a limited amount of research into the U.K. blogosphere. Discussion of gender issues within the U.K. blogosphere has been undertaken by Pedersen and Macafee (2007) while Auty (2005) has investigated the blogs of U.K. politicians. Thelwall and his team have undertaken interesting research into bloggers' reporting of and reaction to events such as the London bombings and the Danish cartoon controversy, demonstrating that blog search engines offer a unique retrospective source of public opinion (Thelwell, 2006; Thelwall, Byrne, & Goody, 2007; Thelwell & Stuart, 2007).

From the outset, journal blogs have been associated with women. The research of teams led by Herring, for example, suggests that women write more diary-like blogs while male bloggers write more of the opinion-focused ones (Herring & Paolillo, 2006), and that journal bloggers are at least 50% female (Herring et al, 2004), while Henning (2003) suggests that women bloggers

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