

# Chapter 5

## Understanding the Video Bloggers' Community

**John Warmbrodt**  
Consultant, USA

**Hong Sheng**  
Missouri University of Science and Technology, USA

**Richard Hall**  
Missouri University of Science and Technology, USA

**Jinwei Cao**  
University of Delaware, USA

### ABSTRACT

*Video blogs (or vlogs) are a new form of blogs where each post is a video. This study explores a community of video bloggers (or vloggers) by studying the community's structure as well as the motivations and interactions of vloggers in the community. A social network analysis of a list of personal vloggers identifies the community's structure. Open-ended interviews with core vloggers in the sample provide in-depth understanding on the motivations and interactions of the vloggers. Overall, the results indicate that the vloggers' community exhibits a core/periphery structure. Such a community is formed based on shared interest and active interactions. In addition, the rich communication provided in video blogs allows for a more personal and intimate interaction, making vlogs a potentially powerful tool for business applications.*

### INTRODUCTION

Blogs are journal based web sites that typically use content management tools to allow the authors to post contents on the websites (Gordon, 2006). Video blogs (or vlogs) are blogs where each post is a video. Although a post may also include text

to provide context for the video, the focus of the post is a video. The use of videos provides more freedom for video bloggers (vloggers) to express their opinions/views and interact with their viewers more directly and interactively (Miles, 2003). Vlogging also fulfills a few social needs such as being connected, finding validation for one's

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experience and ideas, and being a producer as well as a consumer (Luers, 2007). Each vlogger interacts with other vloggers and together they form vloggers' communities.

Just as the number of blogs has increased significantly in the last few years, vlogging has become increasingly popular as well. In January of 2005, Mefedia, an online directory of vloggers, listed just 617 vlogs. As of August 2009, this number had increased to 27,782 (Mefedia.com, 2009). As a relatively new but popular form of blogs, vlogs use rich media and allow for more direct interactions, therefore, have great potential for business applications. For example, traditional media outlet ABC News in January 2007, signed Amanda Congdon, who became popular as the host of the highly popular video blog Rocketboom, to host a video blog on ABC News (Holahan, 2006). This example illustrates that vlogs can not only serve as web based journals for everyday users, but can also be used by businesses to directly communicate with their customers or promote new products.

Despite the increasing popularity and importance of vlogs, little academic research has been done to study the vloggers' community, or the interactions among vloggers. As the main motivation for vlogging is to socially interact with other vloggers (Luers, 2007; Miles, 2003), it is important to study the interaction in this new type of virtual community. Specifically, this paper seeks to identify and understand the structure of the vloggers' community, the motivation and characteristics of vloggers forming the community, and the interactions within the community.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Blogs and Vlogs**

Blogs are typically based upon similar content management software tools. These software tools allow their authors to quickly post new content to

their blogs in what has been described as "pushbutton publishing for the people." (Schiano, Nardi, Gumbrecht, & Swartz, 2004, p. 1). Bloggers usually have common goals and interests. Based on Armstrong and Hagel's (1996) categorization, blogs can be viewed as communities of interests. Compared to physical communities, virtual communities such as blogs provide a way for people to socialize with others but also maintain a distance from others, and can usually break down societal and organizational barriers (Kiesler, 1986).

While blogs are traditionally text based, the same tools can be used to post videos. A vlog, as mentioned before, is a type of blog that consists of videos posted to a blog. Videos posted on the blogs are typically no longer than five or ten minutes in length (Luers, 2007). Vlogging became popular due to the decreasing barriers of entry to Internet video publishing. Much of the initial success of vlogs comes from video hosting websites such as blip.tv (<http://blip.tv>) and Youtube (<http://www.youtube.com>) which offer free hosting. These video hosting sites allowed vloggers to combine current blogging technology with hosted videos to create vlogs. The videos posted to the vlog typically start with a brief intro that lets the viewers know what they are watching. Some vlogs use a format very similar to television shows. Since vlogs use existing blog technology, they typically allow the viewers to leave text comments, creating a more intimate and interactive experience than traditional media.

There are three main types of vlogs: personal vlogs, news shows, and entertainment orientated vlogs (Luers, 2007). Personal vloggers talk about or even share their life experiences captured by a video camera and are thus more of a personal media than a television show. News shows are informal newscasts on a wide variety of topics. An example of a news show is Rocketboom (<http://www.rocketboom.com>). These shows are somewhat similar to a newscast found on TV, but more interactive, focused on web culture, and informal. Also there are vlogs that exist for purely entertainment rea-

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