Chapter 11
Blog Influence Index:
A Measure of Influential Weblog

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ABSTRACT

Although weblogs are a popular medium of communication, their influence on society is unclear. In particular, studies that investigate the impact and influence of blogosphere on the community and government have not been fully exploited. Such studies are important especially to the government in reshaping and realigning the policies related to new media. This article presents the outcomes of a study to identify measures on how to assess the influence of weblogs. At least four dimensions are critical for measuring weblog influence, which are recognition (number of in links and number of visitors), activity generation (number of comments and number of posts), novelty (number of out links), and credibility of a blog (number of information presentation type, number of factual errors, and number of hyperlink citations). It is hereby proposed that these dimensions make up a measure called the Blog Influence Index.

INTRODUCTION

A weblog allows users to post comments, images, video clips or links to other web pages (Herring et al., 2004; Trammel & Gasser, 2004; Bausch et al., 2002; Blood, 2002; Mortensen & Walker, 2002). Studies by scholars show that peoples participate in weblogging for many reasons (Akritidis, Katsaros, & Bozanis, 2009). A study by Efimova (2009), for example, reveals that people use weblog as personal thinking space. Weblogging is seen in this case as an alternative means to generate ideas and getting feedback from others in the blogosphere community. Recuaero (2008) conducted a study on selected webloggers in Brazil to ascertain their perceptions on the information they

publish. It was found that webloggers perceived what they publish as either personal information (about themselves) or useful information (general information). In addition, the study also identified five motivations for weblogging which are creating a personal space, sharing interaction, sharing knowledge, authority, and popularity.

Recuaero's finding is supported by another interesting study from Michael and Irit (2008) who identified seven areas of motivations or reasons for blogging activities which include self expression, introspection and artistic activity (similar to creating personal space), social contacts and documentation of life (similar to sharing interaction), sharing of information, knowledge, and interest (similar to sharing of knowledge), and recognition (similar to authority and popularity).

There are also studies which indicate that weblogs are used by certain group of influential people such as public and political leaders to gain support on their agendas or to sway peoples' opinion on specific public issues. Research by Kavanaugh et al. (2007) in Blacksburg and Montgomery County, Virginia, for instance, signifies that weblog can indeed be a very effective tool for political or opinion leaders. Political activists all over the world have long been using weblogs for campaigning purposes (Adamic & Glance, 2005).

The influence of weblogging should not be under-estimated (Gillmore, 2006; Keller & Berry, 2003). However, studies that investigate the impact and influence of blogosphere on the community and government are yet to be fully exploited. Such studies are very important especially to the government as they can help to reshape and realign the policies related to new media. Although there are several tools that can be adopted to assess blog influence, these tools have some weaknesses due to the use of inadequate measuring criteria. Furthermore, most of these tools are being used to rank blogs rather than measuring influence. Therefore, the main aim of this study is to identify criteria that can be used to measure blogs influence. Consequently, a Blog Influence Index is formulated.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The next section reviews existing studies related to the measurement of blog influence. Then, the phases involved in the development of the index are described. Next, a discussion on the formulation of the index is presented. The final part summarizes the outcomes and potential future work.

DIMENSIONS AND CRITERIA FOR BLOG INFLUENCE

Traditionally, a social media is considered a success through inbound links or the number of people subscribed to it. This criterion is however no longer credible and can be misleading. In fact, social media is a channel through which people connect, collaborate, participate, discuss, and make friends. As such, more criteria should be used to measure its success particularly in terms of influence.

Rank

In identifying the influence of blogs, several studies focus on the criteria in giving ranks to the blogs. The existing algorithms are used in giving ranks to web pages are not suitable to be applied on blogs due to sparseness and temporal aspects (Agarwal & Liu, 2008). This is because blogs in blogospheres are sparsely linked compared to web pages. Blog posts and bloggers influence eliminate over times faster than web pages. Some of the common algorithms applied on webpages are PageRank and HITS.

Several studies can be found which investigated the measures for blog success. Edelman, for instance, produces a social media index which proposes five criteria that can be used to measure any social media (Bentwood, 2007). The criteria are blog ranking (e.g., Google rank, Alexa rank, inbound links, number of subscribers), multi format (analysis of Facebook- number of friends), mini updates (analysis of Twitter - number of friends, followers, updates), Business cards

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