



Getting close from far away: Mediators of the association between attachment and blogging behavior



Leora Trub^{a,*}, Tracey A. Revenson^b, Stephen Salbod^a

^a Pace University, New York, United States

^b Hunter College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 21 October 2014

Keywords:

Blog
Attachment
Facebook
Internet
Anxiety
Avoidance

ABSTRACT

Since their inception in the 1990s, blogs continue to play a major role in online culture, having increased fivefold in the last six years. Blogs may serve unique functions for individuals with higher levels of attachment avoidance and anxiety. The study tests a theoretically grounded mediational model of the associations between attachment anxiety and avoidance with the outcome variable of blogging intensity. Desired anonymity and motivations for blogging are proposed to mediate that relationship. One hundred and forty-three adult bloggers completed online questionnaires that contained standard measures of attachment anxiety and avoidance (ECR; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998) and measures of blogging behavior developed for the study. Path analysis was used to test the mediational model. The mediational hypotheses were partially supported. Attachment anxiety was related to greater blogging intensity, and personal and interpersonal motivational factors mediated this relationship. Attachment avoidance was associated with lower levels of blogging intensity and higher levels of anonymity, but anonymity did not mediate the relationship between attachment avoidance and blogging intensity. The findings suggest that attachment offers a useful lens for understanding online behavior and how it meets interpersonal needs.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

When the World Wide Web was created over two decades ago, few foresaw how it would profoundly alter almost every dimension of people's lives. Early researchers of the Internet's impact upon people's social networks and connectedness to others attempted to make sweeping claims about its role in either facilitating or degrading social support (e.g., Kraut et al., 2001; Silverman, 1999). The next generation of researchers dismantled such one-sided arguments by comparing Internet users in terms of personality traits including shyness, extraversion, introversion and neuroticism; demographic indicators such as gender, and psychological characteristics such as loneliness and social anxiety (Amichai-Hamburger, Wainapel, & Fox, 2002; Chak & Leung, 2004; Ebeling-Witte, Frank, & Lester, 2007; Guadagno, Okdie, & Eno, 2008; Hardie & Tee, 2007; Swickert, Hittner, Harris, & Herring, 2002; Ward & Tracey, 2004). This study of attachment brings yet another perspective to our understanding of the impact

of peoples' earliest experiences of security with caregivers on the use and function of online relationships in adults' emotional lives.

2. Literature review

2.1. Prevalence of blogging and its role amongst other social media

Blogging came into existence in the 1990s as a way for people to keep online diaries or share thoughts and impressions on particular topics with others. At the time, it represented a unique phenomenon of computer-mediated communication, encompassing both creating an individualized homepage (unlike communal forums) and participating in an online community (unlike personal homepages). Blogs usually involve a series of posts written by its author(s), but a great deal of a blog is often devoted to the comments and thoughts of others about the author's posts. Bloggers are thus engaged in the parallel processes of presenting and cultivating an online "self," and receiving and responding to feedback from others on that identity, all in virtual space (Hourihan, Bausch, & Haughey, 2002).

By 2004, blogs had entered into mainstream online culture, with more than a quarter of Internet users reading blogs (PEW, 2005). The role of blogging shifted when the well-known social

* Corresponding author at: Psychology Department, Pace University, 41 Park Row, New York, NY 10038, United States.

E-mail address: ltrub@pace.edu (L. Trub).

networking site, Facebook, opened its doors to the public in 2005, and with the introduction of micro-blogging sites (which require users to share thoughts in no more than 140 words at a time). Between 2006 and 2009, the popularity of blogs decreased significantly for teenagers, and slightly for young adults, suggesting that certain functions once being served by blogging were instead being served by these new alternatives for relating to others online. Meanwhile, adults were gravitating to blogging, with those between 34 and 55 increasing their use by at least five percentage points in the same time period (PEW, 2010). This suggested another trend: that blogging continued to meet certain needs, particularly for adults, that were not simply transferred to social networking sites or micro-blogging sites. The most recent statistics reveal 181 million blogs worldwide, up from 36 million in 2006 (Nielson, 2012).

2.2. Research on blogging

Research on people's motivations for blogging and how bloggers manage relationships with their readers began to take hold in 2004. A key finding was the crucial role played by the blog's readership in the continued maintenance of the blog (Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004; Qazvinian, Rassoulia, & Adibi, 2007; Trevino, 2005). A second finding was that bloggers tended to maintain control over the frequency and nature of interaction with readers; they wanted feedback, but maintained control over the flow and content of the blog (Gumbrecht, 2005; Nardi et al., 2004). As pointed out by Nardi et al. (2004), "Bloggers wanted to express themselves without the 'threat' of immediate feedback." One explanation given for this seeming inconsistency between a blogger's connection to and distance from readership was the importance of maintaining asymmetry in the relationship, both in terms of maintaining a distinction between the roles played by blogger and reader, and also in the timing of interactions. The lack of immediacy rendered blog interactions less intense than face-to-face interaction: "a kind of preserve, a refuge from the intense interaction of other forms of communication" (Nardi et al., 2004, p. 7). This idea, which led one researcher to dub blogs "protected space" (Gumbrecht, 2005), provides evidence for the possibility that some bloggers may have difficulty regulating intense affect in face-to-face communication and thus prefer more asymmetrical interaction.

The asymmetry extended to the communication "rights" of bloggers and their readers (Gumbrecht, 2005; Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2004; Hodkinson, 2007). While the motivation to keep writing depended on the presence of readers (Qazvinian, Rassoulia, & Adibi, 2007; Trevino, 2005), readers were "regarded not as equal participants in a communal forum but as guests or visitors [who must] respect the sovereignty of their host [by] refraining from direct criticism" (Hodkinson, 2007, p. 16). To maintain this asymmetry, bloggers found ways to control the frequency and emotional intensity of interaction (Gumbrecht, 2005; Nardi et al., 2004). These findings suggest that some people who blog might have difficulty feeling entitled to be themselves without concern for the reactions and expectations of others. The presence of a non-critical audience can provide a sense of acceptance without as much pressure to conform, offering a safe space to share thoughts and feelings. This dovetails with the finding that bloggers tend to score high on private self-consciousness (awareness of private aspects of the self that are not easily observable) and reassurance seeking (demanding significant and sometimes excessive contact with others in attempt to reassure oneself of one's worth) (Miura & Yamashita, 2007).

One aspect of blogging that differentiates it from other social networking media is the often chosen option to remain anonymous, and about half of people who blog do so under a pseudonym

(PEW, 2006). Disclosure of personal and intimate information is positively correlated with bloggers' perceived anonymity online which may mean that anonymity enhances bloggers' comfort level with sharing personal thoughts and feelings by offering protection against rejection, ridicule, and the vulnerability of disclosing personal information to people in their lives (Qian & Scott, 2007). This finding echoes previous research suggesting that Internet interactions enable more openness, honesty and willingness to communicate negative aspects of the self that people might wish to express in real life but feel unable to (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006). Thus, some blogs intended to be an emotional outlet may at the same time need to stay hidden from family and friends, who might be personally affected by the bloggers' words.

Personal blogs have been found to be an outlet for individuals who report low levels of satisfaction with their friends and tend to rely on counter-therapeutic coping strategies such as self-blame and venting, who then may use blogs to cope with distress in situations where they feel inadequately supported by offline relationships (Baker & Moore, 2008). Like journals, blogs can enable reflection and insight, and reduce distress through expressing and processing painful emotions. In addition, blogs offer the author the opportunity for validation and feedback in a relatively safe and less vulnerable setting (Miura & Yamashita, 2007). Similarly, blogs can be facilitative of identity development and assertiveness for introverted or neurotic individuals, who have been found to locate their "real" selves on the Internet, as opposed to extroverted and non-neurotic people locate their "real" selves through traditional social interactions (Amichai-Hamburger et al., 2002).

These and other research studies identifying individual differences in the impact of technology use on well-being highlight the importance of identifying personality variables that play a critical role in determining the impact of blogging and other forms of Internet use for different people. In the following section, attachment theory is explored as a theoretical framework for further understanding the interpersonal dimension of blogging, which may offer an organizing framework for the personality traits and discomfort with self-expression highlighted above.

2.3. Attachment theory

Attachment theory, which explains people's behaviors in close relationships, is introduced here as a theoretical framework for deepening understanding of the interpersonal dimension of blogging. The field originated with John Bowlby's observations about infants' need for proximity with their caregivers, particularly in moments of insecurity (Bowlby, 1959). This gave way to the conceptualization of distinct attachment styles in children based on the behaviors they exhibit upon separation and reunion with the caregiver. The three main styles were secure, insecure-avoidant and insecure-anxious (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). With the growth of attachment theory to encompass adult romantic relationships, the discovery of attachment styles in adulthood that corresponded with Ainsworth's original attachment categories suggested that the same motivational system that underlies the close emotional bond between parents and children exists for adults in emotionally intimate relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). These three types were then broken down into Likert-scale items, factor-analyzed and turned into two continuous dimensions (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998).

The first dimension, attachment anxiety, refers to how much a person worries that a partner will not be available or adequately responsive in times of need. This preoccupation with intimacy and abandonment is rooted in the fear that the self is not deserving of love, and reliance upon the constant love and approval of the partner to feel worthy. The second dimension, attachment avoidance, refers to how much a person distrusts his or her relationship

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/350394>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/350394>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)