

Acceptance of blog usage: The roles of technology acceptance, social influence and knowledge sharing motivation

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Abstract

Recently, there has been a dramatic proliferation in the number of blogs; however, little is published about what motivates people to participate in blog activities. Based on the theory of reasoned action, we developed a model involving technology acceptance, knowledge sharing and social influences. A survey of 212 blog participants found strong support for the model. The results indicated that ease of use and enjoyment, and knowledge sharing (altruism and reputation) were positively related to attitude toward blogging, and accounted for 78% of the variance. On the other hand, social factors (community identification) and attitude toward blogging significantly influenced a blog participant's intention to continue to use blogs. Together they explain 83% of the variance of intention to blog.

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1. Introduction

The growth of Weblogs, also abbreviated to blogs, on the Internet has been phenomenal. Originally an online writing tool that helped its users keep track of their own online records, the blog quickly turned into a key part of online culture. The method provides an easy way for an average person to publish material of any topic he or she wishes to discuss in a web site. With a popular issue, a blog can attract tremendous attention and exert great influence on society. Famous examples include “War on Terrorism” after the September 11, 2001 attacks; the fall of Trent Lott; the controversies of the Iraq war; the 2004 US presidential elections; etc. [26]. The blog has become a new and significant way of information distribution.

Blogs have grown in popularity. According to a survey by Pew Internet & American Life Project, blog readership

increased 58% in 2004 [35]. The number of blogs in the U.S. also surged from 29,500 in 2000 to 5,340,000 in 2005 [34]. “Where there are eyeballs, there are business models” [41]. Studies have indicated that most blog readers and creators are young, affluent males with high online tenure [27] and that they are loyal online shoppers [16]. Bloggers also value the information in blogs. Thus, businesses and organizations are looking for ways to exploit blogs. For example, to increase the effectiveness of online ads, Google has utilized the uniqueness of each blog and tied its AdSense products to the individual blog. Companies such as Nike and Paramount Picture also advertise through selected blogs as new way to reach potential customers. In fact, the subject-focused nature of blogs has grouped Internet shoppers with similar interests, making it easier to search for targeted customers.

However, despite the great political and cultural influences and possible economic returns, it takes much effort to start and maintain an “active” weblog, which not only needs a host (blogger) to update the content regularly, but also requires blog readers to visit and frequently interact with it. Many blog sites have been abandoned soon after their creation [2]. The Perseus reported that they found that

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66% had not been updated in two months [22]. Moreover, attracting blog readers was an even harder task: indeed, on average a blog reader spent less than 2 min reading a blog [9]. Thus, the focus of our study was to investigate why blog participants (bloggers and readers) participated.

To participate in blogs, one needs to be willing to use blogging tools provided by blog-hosting services (e.g., Blogger.com and LiveJournal). Also, since blogging is an act of sharing, a new form of socialization, we focused our investigation on three aspects: namely technology acceptance, knowledge sharing and social influence. Findings were expected to shed lights on developing strategies to understand and promote blog usages.

2. Literature review

2.1. TRA and related studies

Over the past decade, TRA has become a widely accepted model for exploring an individual's behavior [17]. According to Fishbein and Ajzen, it advocates that a person's behavior is predicted by intentions, and that the intentions are jointly determined by the person's attitude and subjective norm concerning his or her behavior. In recent years, TRA has been used to explain individuals' use of IT (such as expert systems [30] and web site usage behavior [31]). TRA is a general model, which does not specify beliefs about a particular behavior. Therefore, while researchers have adapted TRA to explain social behavior, salient beliefs need to be considered for a specific extent. For example, Bock and Kim [6] proposed that customers' beliefs about expected rewards, association and contribution had an impact on their attitude toward knowledge sharing in the organization. Additionally, Lu and Lin proposed that customers' beliefs about a particular web site's content, context, and infrastructure had an impact on their attitude toward repetitive transactions on it. Moreover, Kolekofski and Heminger [28] investigated different beliefs including those about information, interpersonal qualities, about the organization, and regarding tasks that affect user's intentions to share information in an organizational setting.

2.2. Beliefs regarding technology acceptance

People's perceptions about blogging technology usage may be developed while they participate. To explain a user behavior, two influential beliefs: perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PE) were incorporated in TRA. Both of these influence the individual's attitude toward using a system, which, in turn, explain the individual's behavioral intention (BI) to use the system. Many studies have been aimed at finding the effect of additional factors that could influence behavior. In fact, research incorporating intrinsic motivation constructs, such as perceived enjoyment has been conducted [43,46]. They involved the pleasure and

satisfaction derived from performing a behavior [14], while extrinsic motivation emphasizes performing a behavior to achieve specific goals/rewards [45]. Since blogging is a voluntary act which attempts to achieve social interaction, we expected intrinsic motivation would have as much of an impact as extrinsic. Therefore, usefulness, ease of use, and enjoyment were proposed as the factors that reflected the user's beliefs in blog usage.

2.3. Beliefs regarding knowledge sharing

While knowledge sharing has been explored at the enterprise- and task-oriented-level, many other forms of knowledge sharing are also occurring due to the ubiquitous nature of the Internet. Among them, blogs can be considered as one of the major ways of knowledge sharing. However, little effort has been devoted on investigating factors that affect blog participants' attitudes. Understanding such issues would not only expand the researchers' horizon in knowledge sharing, but also allow blog-hosting service providers to provide more effective strategies in managing successful blogs.

In the past, knowledge sharing was viewed as a transaction process of knowledge markets, where the knowledge buyers and sellers needed to have reciprocal benefits from the exchange [10]. Thus, expected reciprocal benefits, reputation, altruism and trust were considered as the incentives for knowledge sharing. Nevertheless, factors contributing to the sharing intention were likely to vary in the blog community due to its characteristics. We therefore believed that other determinants affecting knowledge sharing behavior should be included in our study.

In general, social psychologists consider that knowledge sharing motivation has two complementary aspects: egoistic and altruistic [13]. The first was based on economic and social exchange theory. It includes economic rewards. Empirically, Bock and Kim combined the two theories with social cognitive theory to propose expected rewards, expected social associations and expected contribution as the major determinants of an individual's knowledge sharing attitudes. Moreover, Bock et al. applied these two theories to produce two antecedents of sharing attitude: anticipated extrinsic rewards and anticipated reciprocal relationships.

The second, altruistic motive, assumes that an individual is willing to increase the welfare of others and has no expectation of any personal returns. This resembles organization citizenship behavior (OCB), which is discretionary individual behavior, that is not directly or explicitly recognized by a formal reward system, and promotes the effective functioning of the organization [40]. Bolino et al. [8] further indicated that OCB would help develop a consolidated relationship between employees and lead to altruistic behavior with an organization. Hars and Ou [21] found that altruism drove students and hobby programmers to participate in open-source projects. Blogging is a voluntary act of sharing among participants. Therefore,

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