

# Politics as Usual in the Blogosphere

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## Abstract

In recent years, the emergence of weblogs, commonly known as blogs, are changing the way that people interact over the Internet. Two particular kinds of blogs have become particularly popular—political and personal/hobby oriented blogs. Each of these types of blogs foster a community of readers and writers. In this paper, we investigate how the notion of community is expressed through these two blog genres. We examine the differences between community aspects in political and personal blogs. We focus on four dimensions that are associated with community: activism, reputation, social connectedness and identity. Our results, based on a multilingual worldwide blogging survey of 121 political and 593 personal/hobby bloggers from four continents show significant differences in blogging practices across these genres.

## 1 Introduction

Spotlighted by the media, *blogs* have become the archetype for information technology successes. Blogs, short for weblogs, are webpages whose content are periodic, reverse chronologically ordered posts. With the advent of specialized blogging services such as Blogspot<sup>1</sup> and MSN Spaces<sup>2</sup> that have empowered the end user with free online publishing tools without the burden of having to learn HTML, blogging has become accessible to people from all walks of life.

No longer a niche community, bloggers are fast becoming an icon for postmodern pop culture. Based on online lookups, Merriam-Webster's dictionary site proclaimed “blog” to be the #1 word of the year (“Merriam-Webster’s”, 2004). Many people (including journalists) use blogs as an alternative to traditional news sources—for example, detailed live coverage of a tragic car accident that led to numerous deaths in Santa Monica, California was provided at the scene by *waxy.org*’s blogger (Ward, 2003).

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.blogger.com>

<sup>2</sup><http://spaces.msn.com>

As a case in point, blogs have been predominately featured in articles regarding their political activism and influence:

Back in 2002, Marshall helped stoke the fires licking at Trent Lott's feet, digging up old interviews that suggest his support for Strom Thurmond's racial policies went way back; Marshall's scoops found their way onto The Associated Press wire and the Op-Ed page of The New York Times...a platoon of right-wing bloggers launched a coordinated assault against CBS News and its memos claiming that President Bush got special treatment in the National Guard; within 24 hours, the bloggers' obsessive study...migrated onto Drudge, then onto Fox News...

*The New York Times Magazine, 2004* (Klam, 2004)

The above incident eventually led to Trent Lott's resignation as Senate Republican Leader. Many other examples of political influence abound. Dan Rather's recent resignation announcement from the *CBS Evening News* is thought by many to have been influenced by the work of bloggers who investigated the validity of documents purporting to question President Bush's National Guard service (WorldNetDaily.com, 2004). Bloggers also played a large role in fundraising for the recent Howard Dean 2004 U.S. democratic primary campaign (Manjoo, 2003). Finally, suspicions that President Bush was using a listening device for assistance during the presidential debate and worries over the validity of voting machines were echoed in the blogosphere (Lindorff, 2004; Drum, 2004).

Political blogs are often on the so-called "A-list" of blogs (Herring et al., 2005). A cursory glance at blog popularity rankings provided by Technorati<sup>3</sup> and The Truth Laid Bear<sup>4</sup> reveal a preponderance of political blogs such as Instapundit, Daily Kos and Wonkette in the top 100. Such high profile political blogs easily garner over 350,000 hits per day (Klam, 2004). HitWise, a website influence ranking firm, estimates that the most popular political blog receives over 0.0051% of all Internet visits per day (BBC, 2004)—a rather high percentage for the whole web.

Yet, despite the fame high-profile political blogs have gained, the majority of blogs are *not* political in nature. Recent studies have shown that most blogs serve as a personal journal and are sparsely connected nodes in the blogosphere network (Herring et al., 2004, 2005). Recent studies by Nardi et al. (2004b) have investigated the motivation behind this underrepresented group of bloggers. For example, some personal bloggers blog to document their lives, whereas others blog to hone their writing skills.

As opposed to past Internet virtual community technologies, blogs are unique in that they foster communities of writers. Whereas other technologies like multi-user dungeons (MUDs) explicitly encourage reciprocal relationships, in blogs the primary relationship is always with respect to the writer. Readers are able to participate in a blog writer's community through the creation of comments and inbound links. Nardi et al. (2004a) liken a blog to a radio:

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<sup>3</sup><http://www.technorati.com>

<sup>4</sup><http://www.truthlaidbear.com>

Just as with radio, the blogger can broadcast messages of their own choosing, without interruption. Limited feedback analogous to listener call-in on a radio station is possible with comments on blog posts. The comments remain “subservient” to the main communication in the posts, just as a talk show host or deejay dominates listeners.

Thus, with this combination of linkage and writer-centric tools, *communities of practice* revolving around a specific, often dynamically changing topic can readily form (Wenger et al., 2002).

While political and personal/hobby blogs both share the aforementioned characteristics of blogs in general, at the same time they each have very different attributes. The anecdotal evidence so far seems to point out that political bloggers often dominate the mainstream consciousness of how blogs are perceived. What is it that makes these blogs so predominant? Moreover, anecdotal evidence seems to point out that personal bloggers make up the majority of the blogosphere, and yet evidently have less visibility in the mainstream consciousness. What is it that, despite their large numbers, makes personal bloggers much less a visible, collective force of influence? Furthermore, the purpose of these two genres seem to diverge. Media coverage (Klam, 2004) seems to indicate that political bloggers seek to influence others through a large social community. On the other hand, research (Herring et al., 2004, 2005; Nardi et al., 2004a,b) has indicated that personal bloggers often blog for personal fulfillment and to seek other's opinions within a smaller community network.

In this paper, we are interested in how a blog's primary content can effect the blogger's notion of community. We ask: How does a blog's genre affect how bloggers experience a sense of community? We are in particular interested in comparing and contrasting two distinct and popular genres—the political and personal/hobby blog. Do political bloggers form a community distinct from personal/hobby bloggers? How can we resolve the paradox that a minority genre is most influential in the blogging community, whereas the majority genre exerts little influence in the blogging community? To address these questions, we conducted an international study of bloggers from four continents.

## 2 Related Work

Due to its recent fame there have been a number of quantitative and qualitative studies seeking to characterize blogs. Herring et al. (2004) describe a study of 203 blogs from blog.gs where most blog authors were found to be young adult males located in the USA who create personal style journals that are updated almost daily. An average of 0.65 links and 0.3 comments were found per post. A social network analysis of blogs carried out by Herring et al. (2005) note that A-list blogs (which often have a political slant) have a large influence and centrality in the blogosphere network. The majority of blogs, in contrast, were found to be sparsely and sporadically connected. Bar-Ilan's more focused analysis of 15 “professional” topic-oriented blogs discovered that the majority of posts describe or quoted embedded links that led to a variety of targets such as other blogs, news items and content sites (Bar-Ilan, 2004). In-depth

studies of blogging using ethnographic techniques by Schiano et al. (2004) have shown bloggers to use blogging in a cornucopia of roles—from diaries of personal expression to travelogue progress reports. In a further elaboration, Nardi et al. (2004a) provide an activity theory analysis framework for understanding blogging. Krishnamurthy’s work follows the burst of activity on blogs after 9/11; he creates a taxonomy of blogs by splitting them into four quadrants with two axes: personal vs topical and individual vs community (Krishnamurthy, 2002). Finally, our forthcoming work (Su et al., 2005) details that while cultural differences in blogging communities exist, overall the blogging community shares remarkable similarities with each other despite geographic distances.

## 3 The Global Blogging Community

Though the concept of community has many different aspects, in this paper we have chosen to focus on several dimensions of a community that according to Preece and Maloney-Krichmar (2003) are particularly relevant: activism, reputation, social connectedness and identity. We discuss these facets in the following sections, as well as our hypotheses.

### 3.1 Activism

In the popular media, blogging is perhaps most recognized as an enabler for collective action. Thus, some bloggers seek to influence events in their world through their blogs. Nardi et al. (2004a) noted that bloggers wrote entries to “*express opinions and advice, often with a clear statement of particular actions they wished their readers to take.*” Numerous examples can be found in the use of blogs during the recent U.S. presidential campaign. Many new blogs sprung into existence to organize people around specific events, such as boycotting Sinclair Broadcasting sponsors (Davis, 2004). In addition, bloggers will often encourage others to blog: “*blogging and readers together beget the social activity of blogging*” (Nardi et al., 2004a). We predict that political bloggers will have a higher activism score than personal/hobby oriented bloggers.

### 3.2 Reputation

In this dimension of community, we ask to what extent do bloggers value how others perceive their blog? In other words, how *accountable* are bloggers for their content, and how important is their blog’s reputation to them? For some, blogging is mainly for themselves. On the other hand, Nardi et al. (Nardi et al., 2004b) note that:

Most bloggers are acutely aware of audience...calibrating what they will and will not reveal. Many bloggers explained that they have a kind of personal code of ethics that dictates what goes into their blogs, such as never criticizing friends or pressing political opinions that are openly inflammatory. Not that bloggers eschew controversy...but they typically express themselves in light of their audience.

How does accountability and reputation compare in blogs that are political, versus blogs that are personal in nature? We predict that reputation will be more valued with political bloggers than personal/hobby bloggers.

### **3.3 Social Connectedness**

Many bloggers feel a sense of community and belonging with other bloggers. Blogrolls, trackback links and comments can hint at a blogger's connections. In fact, such social-network links are often used by blog ranking services such as the Blogdex aggregator to determine popularity. The particular blog lists or blog rings that a blog belongs to are also indicative of a blogger's social circle. For example, specialized forums and listings for Asian-American bloggers such as Rice Bowl Journals exist and blog rings such as UC Irvine's LiveJournal community cater to a specific group (students at UCI).

As one aspect in our exploration of blog communities, we are interested in how people feel connected to others through blogging. How has blogging fostered friendship? Finally, how connected are people to other blogs via links and comments? Due to the recent coverage of collective action within the political community of bloggers, we predict that political bloggers will be more socially connected to other bloggers than personal/hobby bloggers.

### **3.4 Identity**

Herring et al. (2004) note that:

...many bloggers include explicit personal information on the first page of their blogs...a full name (31.4%), a first name (36.2%), or a pseudonym (28.7%). More than half (54%) provide some other explicit information (e.g., age, occupation, geographic location)...the identity of the author is apparent to some extent in most blogs.

Donath (1998) describes how identity is critical in virtual community interactions, yet the medium affords people the opportunity to either conceal or reveal identity. Blog writers (as do readers) have full control over what aspects of their identity are revealed. Blog services will often provide a "profile" page which bloggers can fill out for inquisitive readers. Pseudonyms provide an identity while maintaining privacy for others. Aliases are utilized not only by bloggers, but also in references to other people in entries. Blogs allow one to freely assert their own identity without social stigmatism: for example, Iranian women are using blogs as an outlet for expression in a traditionally conservative society (Hermida, 2002). We predict that personal bloggers will hide their identity more readily than political bloggers.

## **4 East vs West**

Geert Hofstede's quantitative study at IBM is well known for revealing ten dimensions where cultures differ (Hofstede, 1991). Hofstede found noticeable clustering of Eastern

and Western cultures across dimensions. Of particular interest is Hofstede's individualism index and power distance index. The individualism index measures how much people freely assert their opinions (despite possible clashes), and how much people expect to have to fend for themselves in society. The power distance index measures how much people expect and accept unequal power distributions in society. Western cultures were found to have to have a higher individualism index than Eastern cultures. Conversely, Western cultures were found to have a lower power distance index than Eastern cultures. This, according to Hofstede, partly stems from the collectivist nature of Eastern cultures, versus the individualist nature of Western cultures. These characteristics of Eastern and Western cultures may originate from the following two points:

1. Western cultures advocate democracy and freedom, while Eastern cultures emphasize loyalty. A possible basis for Western culture can be found in the ancient Greek concept of *Paideia* (Jaeger, 1945), “the process of educating man into his true form, the real and genuine human nature”—the training of one for liberty (freedom) and nobility (the beautiful). This, compounded with the French Revolution’s ideals of civil rights, equality before law, procedural justice, and democracy, forms a cohesive backdrop for Western society. On the other hand, one of the key features of Confucianism, the classical representative of Eastern culture, is loyalty. It is a doctrine which often asks for the blind, unquestioning obedience to a ruler from the ruled.
2. Whereas Western cultures value an ego-centric ideology, Eastern cultures encourage one to look at the world in a holistic manner (from the viewpoint of the interrelationship between individuals and society). Based on the aforementioned Western concepts of *Paideia* and equality, Western society encourages the individual’s opinions about society. However, in the East, Taoism emphasizes “oneness”—that since entities (including ourselves) are interdependent and constantly redefined due to circumstance, we can come to see all things as they are, and that we ourselves are a simple part of a larger, current moment. This understanding of oneness leads one to an appreciation of life’s events and our place within them as miraculous moments which “simply are”.

From these basic precincts of Western and Eastern cultures, we can derive some hypotheses about the predicted popularity of political blogging in these cultures. With point (1), we can conjecture that Western culture encourages free participation in politics and that it is their explicit right and duty to express their political opinions. On the other hand, Eastern culture may encourage apathy in politics—politics are only of interest to politicians (rulers), and politics is merely a group of rules that one has to obey, rather than a group of rules one can comment on or attempt to change. Of course, there are exceptions in history where people in Eastern cultures have risen to protest an oppressive regime. With point (2), we can conjecture that if a political issue arises in a society, people in Western cultures may readily speak out their opinions, whereas people in Eastern cultures would rather adjust themselves to cater to the society. Finally, despite these differences rooted in historical cultural differences, political expression in modern Western culture may simply just be more widespread than in modern Eastern culture which can be reflected in blogs. Hence we predict that Eastern cultures will have fewer politically motivated blogs than Western cultures.

## 5 Methodology

Data for our study was gathered via a web-deployed survey that was targeted for blog *writers*. Participation in the survey was strictly voluntary and all respondents were informed that their responses would be anonymous. We used Quask's FormArtist<sup>5</sup> software to develop an English language version of the survey, and custom Ruby<sup>6</sup> based cgi-scripts to generate unicode encoded Javascript surveys for our Asian language versions.

Demographic questions on the survey were adapted from the *GVU Center's WWW Surveys* (n.d.). Questions related to dimensions described in Section 3 were gleaned from observations of current blogs, conversations with bloggers and research papers, e.g. Nardi et al. (2004b). Our final English survey version had 51 questions. Native speakers of (traditional and simplified) Chinese, Japanese and Korean translated the English survey. Afterwards, reverse translation was used to verify that the questions were in fact equivalent to their respective English counterparts. We hosted a website that provided an FAQ, explanation of our research goals and contact information to field inquiries regarding our blog survey. The English language survey was deployed in early summer of 2004, and the Asian language survey was deployed in late summer of 2004. Both were active for a six month period.

To gain an appropriate sample of blog authors, we used several methods to advertise our survey: 1) The first author advertised the survey on a blog, blogsurvey.blogspot.com, with trackback features, 2) We registered our survey blog in major blog search databases, 3) Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds were augmented to allow readers to be notified of changes. RSS is an XML communication standard that allows a web developer to easily publish updated content in a format easily understood by a number of RSS aggregators. 4) We added blogs who advertised our survey to our blogroll, 5) We created a template email asking bloggers to fill out the survey and to also post an entry encouraging readers to fill out (and further propagate a link to the survey in their own blogs), and 6) We also posted information about our blog on blogging forums and IRC chats, and 7) word-of-mouth.

During the deployment process, we received many insightful comments and criticisms issued by bloggers. Some pointed out minor mistakes in spelling, while others had higher level questions regarding our research. Even some of the more popular "monster" bloggers took time out to personally respond back and advertise our survey.

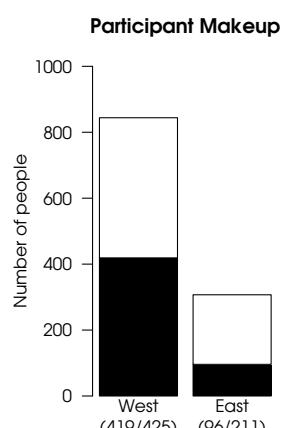
## 6 An Overview of International Blogs: Demographics and Purpose

A total of 1404 participants filled out our survey. From this total, we extracted 1232 valid participants who were then grouped into distinct regions or countries. Over 200 respondents were excluded from our analysis because we did not have a critical mass

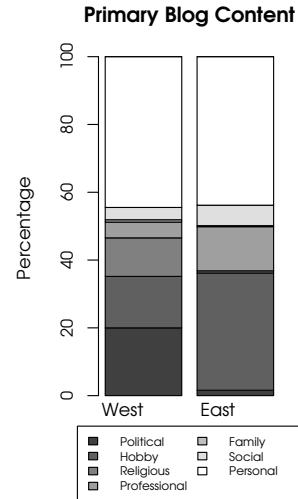
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<sup>5</sup><http://www.quask.com/en/home.asp>

<sup>6</sup><http://www.ruby-lang.org>



**Fig. 1:** The regions where valid participants (#female/#male, female=black, male=white) were living at the time they filled out the survey.



**Fig. 2:** The primary content indicated by bloggers from Western and Eastern regions in the survey.

of respondents that we felt could be classified into a “common” regional culture. Those classified in the Japanese, Chinese and Taiwan groups were only those who lived in their respective countries and spoke the official language as well. We did not apply this requirement to respondents of Southeast Asian countries, where English is often fluently spoken. Fig. 1 summarizes the number of participants from what we deemed as Eastern and Western cultures. Western regions consist of U.S., Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Ireland, Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, and the U.K. Eastern regions consist of China, Japan, Taiwan, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. We believe that our response rates were in part related to the vigor with which we pursued participants from certain countries. For example, we lacked resources to actively recruit Korean participants and received only 13 responses from Korea.

Fig. 2 shows what bloggers from Eastern and Western cultures considered to be the primary content of their web page. Interestingly, though personal oriented blogs were the largest category in both cultures, Eastern cultures had a larger proportion of hobby oriented blogs. Additionally, Western blogs had far more political blogs than Eastern bloggers. A chi-squared test revealed significant differences in the percentage of personal and hobby oriented blogs across Eastern and Western cultures ( $\chi^2 = 72.41, p < 0.001$ ). A chi-squared test also revealed significant differences in the percentage of political blogs across Eastern and Western cultures ( $\chi^2 = 41.48, p < 0.001$ ). The ratio of political to personal/hobby blogs in Eastern cultures was approximately 1 to 50, whereas the ratio of political to personal/hobby blogs in Western cultures was approximately 1 to 3.

## 7 Analysis of Community

Questions were grouped according to the dimensions of community described in Section 3: activism, reputation, social connectedness and identity. To measure the internal consistency of the questions grouped into these categories, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was calculated, which is the degree of interrelatedness among items (Cortina, 1993). Or, more formally,  $\alpha$  is the total proportion of a scale's total variance that can be attributed to a common source (DeVellis, 2003). Questions whose addition to the category brought  $\alpha$  below 0.60 were dropped. Question scores were then linearly combined, with their weights determined by principal component's analysis (PCA). The principal component is the best linear combination which accounts for the most variance in the items. Thus, we obtained a single score from a combination of survey question scores that were related together. See the Appendix for details on what questions were combined. Statistical significance was determined via the ANOVA and Mann-Whitney (nonparametric) tests. Nonparametric tests were used when the data was not normally distributed.

Table 1 lists each principal component and their statistics. Analysis was carried out with the R<sup>7</sup> language for statistical computing. The next sections describes the results of our analysis with each dimension of community.

Dimension	Cronbach's $\alpha$	% Total Variance Explained	Eigenvalues
Reputation	0.64	52.02	5.28
Activism	0.84	85.96	5.10
Social Connectedness	0.79	39.38	8.58
Identity	0.61	77.57	8.58

**Table 1:** Principal Component Values

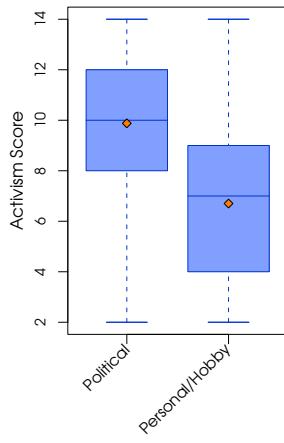
### 7.1 Activism

Fig. 3 depicts a box plot diagram. It pictorially represents a five-number summary. The line across the box represents the median, and the diamond represents the mean. The bottom and top of the box represents the first and third quartile, respectively. Points that lie outside of the whiskers (the end points of the lines) are outside values (not within the 1.5 interquartile range). Each box plot corresponds to the principal component scores for a particular country.

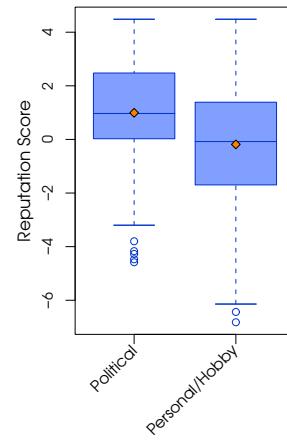
The box plots (Fig. 3) indicate that political blogs more actively seek to influence others, when compared to personal blogs. An ANOVA revealed significant differences ( $F(1, 775) = 10.61, p < 0.001$ ) between political and personal/hobby content oriented blogs in the activism dimension.

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<sup>7</sup><http://www.r-project.org>



**Fig. 3:** Box plots of activism across political and personal/hobby content oriented blogs. High values indicate more concern with activism.

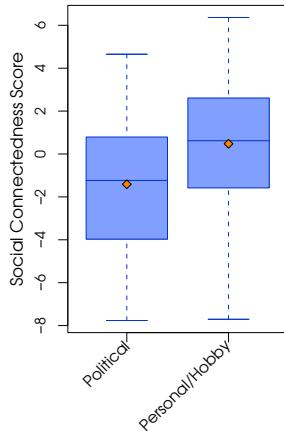


**Fig. 4:** Box plots of reputation across political and personal/hobby content oriented blogs. High values indicate more concern with reputation.

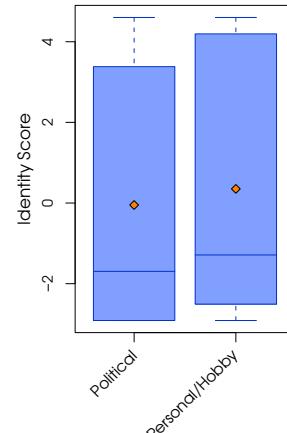
## 7.2 Reputation

Fig. 4 illustrates that political bloggers seem to value their blogs reputation more than personal bloggers. An ANOVA revealed significant differences ( $F(1, 748) = 5.19, p < 0.001$ ) between political and personal/hobby content oriented blogs in the reputation dimension.

## 7.3 Social Connectedness



**Fig. 5:** Box plots of social connectedness across political and personal/hobby content oriented blogs. High values indicate lower social connections.



**Fig. 6:** Box plots of identity across political and personal/hobby content oriented blogs. High values indicate one who reveals less of his or her identity.

An ANOVA revealed significant differences ( $F(1, 729) = -6.49, p < 0.001$ ) be-

tween political and personal/hobby content oriented blogs in the social connectedness dimension. The box plots (Fig. 5) show that bloggers with personal/hobby content indicated *less* social connections than their political oriented peers.

## 7.4 Identity

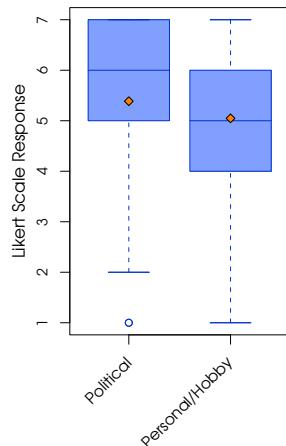
It was observed that personal bloggers seemed to reveal slightly less of their identity than political bloggers (Fig. 6). A Mann-Whitney test revealed significant differences ( $W(1, 769) = 33919, p < 0.05$ ) between political and personal/hobby content oriented blogs in the identity dimension.

# 8 Other Questions Relating to Community

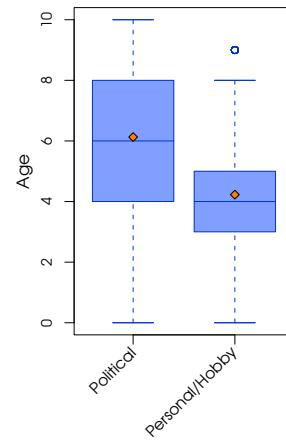
In addition to the four community dimensions, we also examined differences in how conscious different bloggers reported to be of their readers.

Fig. 7 depicts agreement to the following statement: *When I write my blog entries, I am conscious of my readers*. Political bloggers seem to be more aware of their audience when writing entries when compared to personal/hobby oriented blogs. A Mann-Whitney test revealed significant differences ( $W(1, 777) = 47692, p < 0.05$ ) between political and personal/hobby content oriented blogs.

Fig. 8 depicts box plots of age groups across political and personal/hobby oriented blogs. An ANOVA test revealed significant differences ( $F(1, 788) = 9.88, p < 0.001$ ) between political and personal/hobby content oriented blogs. The results seem to indicate that political bloggers are older than personal/hobby content bloggers.



**Fig. 7:** Box plots of “*When I write my blog entries, I am conscious of my readers*” across political and personal/hobby content oriented blogs. High values more agreement with this statement.



**Fig. 8:** Box plots of age groups across political and personal/hobby content oriented blogs. High values indicate an older group.

## 9 Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper, we investigated whether political and personal/hobby bloggers experience community differently. Our analyses indicates that, yes, differences do exist. In particular, political bloggers: 1) Seek to influence others more than personal/hobby bloggers; 2) Value how others perceive their blog's reputation more than personal/hobby bloggers; 3) Are more socially connected than personal/hobby bloggers; 4) Indicated they reveal more about their identity than personal/hobby bloggers; 5) Are more conscious of their readers when writing entries than personal/hobby bloggers; 6) Are in an older age group than personal/hobby bloggers; and 7) Are almost nonexistent in Eastern cultures. These results largely confirm our hypotheses in Section 3 and Section 4.

Our results suggest that personal and political bloggers have very different goals in using blogs as a means for social interaction. The blog is well-suited for both political and personal expression, but in different ways. For political expression, it is a means for conveying late-breaking news fast. Not only can blog writers post information from any news source, any reader can contribute news immediately through email. On election day in the U.S., numerous examples were found of readers sending in reports to blogs of how voting was proceeding at local sites. These eye-witness reports served to give people who were geographically distant a clear picture of experiences in different states. Political blogs also provide a forum for discussion on topics that are expected to be political. Such forums can be especially valuable for people who feel alienated from the dominant culture and feel that there are scarce channels to express themselves (Elms, 1976). Through expression in a blog, one can align oneself with like-minded people though one's local community may express contrary views. Another factor that has been attributed to leading to involvement in politics is the need for control in one's own life (Renshon, 1974). Writing or contributing to blogs enables one to broadcast their message to the world in a relatively effortless fashion. Whereas political bloggers intend to influence others (as our results show) through information or opinions, personal bloggers intend to express and get reactions to their expressions (Herring et al., 2004, 2005; Schiano et al., 2004; Nardi et al., 2004a,b).

There is an interesting paradox in blog affordances for personal blogs. People can also broadcast their message to the world yet they have the option to keep their identity secret. People can vent anger, reveal desires, and exact revenge without fear of repercussion. This is consistent with our results showing that personal bloggers reveal identity less than political bloggers.

Political bloggers aim to influence; personal bloggers aim to express feelings that are personal and there is tacit understanding among people associated with a personal blog that these feelings are tied to the writer or contributor. Political blogs contain both facts and opinions but the opinions must be well-informed. Opinions as rants lose credibility fast in the political arena. This is one way to interpret our finding that political bloggers are more concerned about their reputation than are personal bloggers.

Daniel Drezner, a prominent political blogger<sup>8</sup>, posed the following conundrum (Drezner and Farrell, 2004):

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<sup>8</sup><http://www.danieldrezner.com>

Weblogs occupy an increasingly important place in American politics. Their influence presents a puzzle: given the disparity in resources and organization vis-à-vis other actors, how can a collection of decentralized, nonprofit, contrarian, and discordant websites exercise any influence over political and policy outputs?

Drezner partially answers the question by viewing political blogs as a focal point for the general media on the whole. Due to its gained credibility within media giants such as ABC's *The Note*, political blogs have also gained influence. Our results point out that the political blogger is a different breed from the personal/hobby blogger. More socially connected, and with a greater drive to influence others, this group of generally older bloggers constitute a formidable collective. We believe that part of the political blogging community's success is due to the unique characteristics the politically minded blog writers share.

## 10 Limitations of our study

Results from our survey can potentially suffer from *self-selection* bias (Wild and Seber, 2000). To achieve good respondent numbers, we did not limit our respondents to a restricted demographic sample of bloggers. As a result, systematic bias can be introduced, and thus we can only say with some confidence that our sample will represent those blog writers who are willing to fill out our survey. In addition, our results are more indicative of political bloggers from Western cultures, rather than Eastern cultures (due to the small number of political blog participants from Asian cultures in our survey). While we cannot say these results are wholly representative of blog authors in general, we believe that our data is, nevertheless, a good contribution to a deeper understanding of the blogging community.

## 11 Acknowledgments

Much of the work in developing the survey was due to Tosin Aiyelokun, Louise Barkhuus, Xuefei Fan, Jon Froehlich, Brandon Herdrick and Kelly H. Kim. We are grateful to Paul Dourish for technical assistance with the survey. Robert Newcomb provided invaluable statistical consultation.

## 12 Appendix: Dimensions of Community

### Reputation

The reputation of my blog is important to me.

It is important to me that my friends/colleagues/acquaintances offline know of my blogs' reputation.

It is important to me that I regularly create meaningful blog entries.

The appearance of my blog is important to me. (e.g. no typos, consistent format, color scheme, easy to browse).

## **Activism**

It is important to me that I influence others through the opinions stated on my blog.  
It is important to me that my blog can influence events in the world.

## **Social Connectedness**

About how many blogs do you directly link to from your main blog page (i.e., not including blog entries and comments)?

How often do you currently comment on other blogs?

How many people do you think read your blog per day (your best estimate)?

How often do you receive comments on your blog?

How often do you get e-mails regarding your blog?

Since starting a blog, I have become more connected with people like me.

How long have you been reading blogs (your best estimate)?

How long have you been writing your blog (your best estimate)?

How many different blogs do you regularly read during a week?

## **Identity**

As a blog writer, do you actively try to conceal your real-world identity (maintain anonymity)?

How often do you use aliases (nicknames) instead of real names in your blog entries (e.g. when you refer to other people)?

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