

Who Blogs in 2010?

An Updated Look at Individual Differences in Blogging

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ABSTRACT

Research suggests gender and personality differences are predictive of general Internet use. Specifically, people high in openness and women high in neuroticism are more likely to keep a blog. Given the rapidity of change owing to technological advances, the authors sought to re-examine the validity of these findings in an era where other forms of online interaction are prevalent. Specifically, the authors sought to replicate and expand on these findings and to examine other individual difference factors that may predict who is likely to maintain a blog. Participants filled out multiple personality measures, demographic characteristics, and reported on their blogging behavior (e.g., writing blog entries and reading blogs). Results replicated the prior research, indicating that openness predicted blogging to a greater degree than any other personality trait. Moreover, results also revealed that individuals high in self-consciousness and those who saw more of their “true self” on the Internet were more likely to blog. These findings suggest that in addition to openness, individual differences, such as self-focus and personality, predict who is likely to blog.

Keywords: *Blogging Behavior, Blogs, Gender, Individual Differences, Online Self-Expression, Social Interaction, Weblogs*

INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the basic ways in which individuals express themselves. With the advent of the Internet and other forms of new media, individuals now have other avenues to express themselves through writing, such as keeping a blog. Weblogs (or “blogs” as they are colloquially known) are personalized web pages,

typically maintained by a single author, that contain entries listed in reverse chronological order (Herring, Scheidt, Wright, & Bonus, 2005). The first reported blog appeared in 1997 (Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Swartz, 2004). Since then, the number of blogs online has continued to rise as more blogging platforms have become available, making it easier to create and maintain blogs through which people describe anything, from movies to politics to sports to personal issues (Guadagno, Eno, &

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Okdie, 2009). Owing to this steady increase in blogging, researchers have begun to examine the question: Who is likely to blog?

In a recent study by Guadagno, Okdie, and Eno (2008), the authors examined the personality traits (as measured by the Big Five Inventory-Short Form; Benet-Martinez & John, 1998) of bloggers compared to non-bloggers. They found that men and women high in the Big Five personality trait of openness and women high in neuroticism were more likely to report engaging in blogging. These results suggest individuals engage in blogging behavior due to (1) the relative anonymity that blogging provides as a comfortable form of social interaction, made necessary by their high neuroticism, and (2) their openness to new technology.

Owing to the rapidity of change common with any new technology, contemporary trends in online communication are changing. The current study attempted to replicate the findings of the relationship between the Big Five constructs and blogging, but also look at more specific motivations associated with openness or neuroticism that may provide a plausible and more specific explanation for why a person would engage in behavior as labor-intensive as blogging. Thus, the current study examined other potential personality moderators that have been hypothesized to predict blogging (Amichai-Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2003; Guadagno et al., 2009).

BLOGGING AND ONLINE SELF-EXPRESSION

Individuals are increasingly using the Internet as a means of self-expression and interpersonal communication as opposed to a place for solely gathering information (Postmes, Spears, & Lea, 2002). This increase has led to more personalization and a decreased sense of anonymity for those using the Internet for interpersonal means (see Bargh & McKenna,

2004; McKenna & Bargh, 2000 for a review). One form of online self-expression following this changing trend is blogging. Most blogging platforms allow users with little technological savvy to create blogs with ease by providing templates to individuals so that they can begin posting almost immediately. Additionally, most blogging platforms afford individuals the opportunity to upload pictures of themselves and their families to their blog page (i.e., increasing personalization) and provide authors control over the size of their readership.

Much of the research that has examined blogging as a form of online self-expression has taken place in the United States and suggests that a high percentage of the world's bloggers reside in the United States (Herring et al., 2005). While the growth of blogging is slower outside the United States (Trammell, Tarkowski, Hofmohl, & Sapp, 2006), Japanese is the most commonly used language for writing blogs, with English a close second (Sifry, 2007). Moreover, research examining blogging trends across countries suggests similar patterns of behavior to that reported of the United States (Pedersen & Macafee, 2007).

While bloggers across countries appear to behave similarly, research suggests that individuals who blog may have different characteristics than the general Internet population. Specifically, in the United States, bloggers are more likely to be young, urban, educated, and Caucasian, and are more likely to engage in e-commerce (Lenhart & Fox, 2006). Within the United States, 57 million individuals report reading blogs and eight million US citizens report keeping a blog (Lenhart & Fox). Outside of the U.S., research identifies the presence of 70 million blogs (Sifry, 2007), indicating that over 100 million blogs have been created worldwide. The high number of blogs worldwide begs the question: Are there individual differences that make some individuals more likely to blog than others?

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN BLOGGING

The Big Five and Gender

While few studies have examined the motivation of bloggers, there is ample research reporting individual differences in general Internet use (Amichai-Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2003; Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2000). These general trends allow for the generation of hypotheses on the motivation of bloggers. Specifically, research has noted that differences in individuals' propensity to and motivations for using the Internet may vary by personality factors such as the Big Five. For example, individuals low in sociability (i.e., extraversion) and high in emotional reactivity (i.e., neuroticism) report being better able to express their real-selves online compared to face-to-face (FtF) contexts (Amichai-Hamburger, Wainapel, & Fox, 2002; Rice & Markey, 2009).

Additionally, gender predicts Internet use, such that women high in neuroticism and extraversion tend to use the Internet for social services (e.g., searching for and chatting with others). Men high in extraversion use the Internet for leisure services, such as web sites with sexual content, while men high in neuroticism utilize the Internet to access information (Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2000). Despite the ample research on individual differences in general Internet use, there is little empirical data on specific Internet activities and even less on the motivation for such activities. Thus, it is unclear whether individual differences in general Internet behavior translates to online activities such as blogging.

Despite the paucity of empirical research on blogging and other Internet behaviors, there are some studies that have examined individual differences and motivations for blogging. Guadagno et al. (2008) examined whether one could predict an individual's blogging behavior using gender and the Big Five Factor Model of Personality (McCrae & Costa, 1986). This model of personality suggests that individuals' personalities are made up of five core factors: Extraversion (sociability), openness (imagi-

nateness, open to new ideas), agreeableness (cooperativeness), conscientiousness (self-control), and neuroticism (emotional reactivity; McCrae & Costa, 1986).

To investigate whether the Big Five would predict the likelihood for an individual to keep a blog, Guadagno et al. (2008) collected data from two samples of undergraduates in two settings—online and in a classroom. Based on prior literature on general Internet use (Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2000), the authors anticipated that gender and personality—particularly high neuroticism—would predict one's decision to blog. Guadagno et al. (2008) assessed participants' online activities as they related to both writing and reading blogs. All participants in both samples also took the Big Five Inventory-Short Form (Benet-Martinez & John, 1998). A quarter of the participants in the first sample and 16 percent of those in the second sample kept blogs. Most participants who kept blogs reported being the sole author and writing about personal experiences, such as relationships and daily experiences—a finding that is consistent with prior research (Lenhart & Fox, 2006). Moreover, the majority of the participants in both samples reported using their real names in their blogs, making them identifiable to their audience. Results of the studies indicated that The Big Five model of personality did predict blogging. The authors reported that those high in openness and neuroticism were significantly more likely to blog than others in the samples. However, when the samples were combined, gender interacted with personality to predict blogging. Specifically, women high in neuroticism were more likely to blog.

The results provided by Guadagno et al. (2008) supported the idea that gender, openness, and neuroticism predict blogging. The authors suggest that, as blogging is a new form of online self-expression, individuals high on the Big Five factor of openness (i.e., willing to try new things) may be the first to adopt new technology such as blogging as a means for self-expression. Moreover, the authors speculate that individuals high in neuroticism may blog in an effort to feel more connected to others, thereby

reducing loneliness. This is consistent with past research indicating that loneliness mediates the relationship between neuroticism and Internet use for women (Amichai-Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2003). Thus, women may be using the Internet in an attempt to feel less lonely. Finally, the results of Guadagno et al. (2008) suggest this may be true of women but not men and are in line with past research suggesting that bloggers are likely to be identifiable (Herring et al., 2005; Huffaker & Calvert, 2005; Viegas, 2005). While the results of Guadagno et al. (2008) revealed general characteristics of individuals likely to blog, it is probable that other, more specific, individual difference characteristics exist that may explain motivational aspects of blogging. The Big Five personality factors are, by design, broad traits that do not immediately explain the motivation for a behavior as complex and specific as blogging, particularly when the traits are measured by a short form of the personality scale with no subscales. Therefore, we can begin to ask what other individual characteristics might predict an individual's propensity to blog.

Self-Consciousness and Self-Disclosure

Self-awareness theory (SAT; Duval & Wicklund, 1972) proposes that individuals can focus attention inward toward themselves or outward towards others. Perhaps individuals who have a heightened focus inward on the self (i.e., those high in self-consciousness) might be more likely to blog than those whose attention is focused outward (i.e., those low in self-consciousness). Research suggests that individuals who are high in state self-consciousness (i.e., self-awareness), have greater attitude-behavior consistency and are better at introspection (Pryor, Gibbons, Wicklund, Fazio, & Hood, 1977). Additionally, self-disclosure (i.e., making intimate things about oneself known to others) has been correlated with high self-consciousness (Franzoi & Davis, 1985; Franzoi, Davis, & Young, 1985). Moreover, women are more likely to self-disclose than men (Dindia & Allen, 1992) and increased self-disclosure has been found in

online environments (Joinson, 2001). Thus, to the extent that individuals blog about aspects of their lives, those higher in self-consciousness may be more likely to view blogging as another means for self-disclosure and be more likely to blog.

The Self Online

As indicated above, communication over the Internet differs markedly from communication occurring face-to-face (FtF; see McKenna & Bargh, 2000 for review). These differences, such as feelings of anonymity and attenuation of physical appearance, may make it easier for individuals to express who they really are online compared to interactions occurring FtF. Researchers have argued that individuals may differ to the extent that they can express their "true self" (i.e., who they really feel they are) via FtF communication due to environmental constraints (McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002). Thus, McKenna et al. (2002) argue that there are likely individual differences in the degree to which individuals express more of their "true self" online compared to FtF due the unique qualities of online communication. Additionally, some individuals report being better able to express their true self over the Internet (Bargh, McKenna, & Fitzsimmons, 2002). Individuals who report being better able to express their "true self," or Real Me online, are more likely to form close relationships online, move those relationships offline, and maintain those relationships for longer periods of time (McKenna et al., 2002). Therefore, if individuals feel better able to express their "true self" online, it is likely that they may see blogging as viable outlet for self-expression and self-disclosure.

METHOD

The present study examined the ability of personality factors, gender, and other individual difference factors to predict blogging. Specifically, it attempts to replicate previous research suggesting that females high in neuroticism and openness to new experience will be likely

to blog (Guadagno et al., 2008). Additionally, the authors predicted that individuals who were high in self-consciousness would be more likely to blog than those low in self-consciousness. Moreover, it was predicted that individuals who believe more of their “true self” is expressed on the Internet would be more likely to see the Internet—owing to its unique features—as a viable avenue for self-expression and consequently be more likely to blog.

Participants

A total of 526 undergraduate participants (140 males and 386 females) completed the study. Ethnicity was self-reported. In the sample, 442 participants identified themselves as White, 57 as Black, 11 as Hispanic, eight as Asian/Pacific Islander, and eight as mixed. The age of participants ranged from 16 to 44, with a mean age of 18.7 years ($SD = 1.55$). Of the 526 participants, 45 (8.6%) reported keeping a blog and 213 (40.5%) reported reading the blogs of others.

Procedure

Upon arriving to the laboratory, participants were informed that they would be filling out personality and demographic measures. In addition to providing demographic information, participants completed the following scales: The Big Five Personality Inventory-Short Form (Benet-Martinez & John, 1998), the Self-Consciousness Scale (Scheier & Carver, 1985), the Loneliness Scale-Short Form (Hays & DiMatteo, 1987), the Internal-External Scale (Rotter, 1966), the Risk Propensity Scale (Meertens & Lion, 2008), the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Ames, Rose, & Anderson, 2006), and the Real Me Scale (Bargh et al., 2002). All scales are described in greater detail below.

Participants also answered questions about whether they blogged, how many blogs they maintained, whether they read blogs, how much time they spent maintaining their blogs, how often they updated their blogs, and the topics about which they blogged. This last question was worded, “To what extent do you write about

the following?” and participants were given a list of topics (see Table 1 for the list). For each topic, they provided a rating on a Likert scale (1 = “not at all,” 7 = “a lot”). Participants who identified themselves as bloggers also indicated whether they blogged using their full name, only their first name, or a screen name.

Measures

Big Five Personality Inventory-Short Form

The Big Five Inventory-Short Form is a 44-item scale that measures an individual’s Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism (Benet-Martinez & John, 1998). Participants are given one sentence fragment, “I see myself as someone who...,” and for each item that completes the statement (e.g., “is talkative”) they are asked to indicate the degree to which they agree that the item applies to them using a nine-point, Likert-like scale (1 = “strongly disagree”, 9 = “strongly agree”).

In the original study by Guadagno et al. (2008), openness and neuroticism both positively correlated with blogging. In the case of neuroticism, the effect was gender specific in that it applied to females but not males. For the current sample, all traits showed adequate reliability ($.71 \leq \alpha \leq .82$), except for conscientiousness ($\alpha = .57$). Because of this low reliability score and because it is not necessary for replication, conscientiousness was not examined further.

Self-Consciousness Scale

The Self-Consciousness Scale is a 22-item scale comprised of three subscales: Private Self-Consciousness, Public Self-Consciousness, and Social Anxiety (Scheier & Carver, 1985). Participants read statements about themselves (e.g., “I’m always trying to figure myself out.”) and indicate the degree to which the statement applies to them using a four-point, Likert-like scale (0 = “not at all like me, 3 = “a lot like me”). Private Self-Consciousness is defined as “the tendency to think about and attend to more

Table 1. Mean responses to the question, “To what extent do you write about the following?”

Topics	Mean	Standard Deviation
Your daily experiences	5.64	1.53
You	5.44	1.70
Your friends	5.00	1.72
Your family	4.27	1.91
Your relationships	3.89	2.10
Sports	3.40	1.86
News	3.02	1.79
Politics	2.53	1.95
Technology	2.27	1.30
Celebrities	2.04	1.40
Fictional stories	1.69	1.40
Finance/stocks	1.40	1.01

Notes:

$n = 526$

Higher values indicate more time spent writing about that topic.

covert, hidden aspects of the self, aspects that are personal in nature, and not easily accessible to the scrutiny of other persons—for example, one’s privately held beliefs, aspirations, values, and feelings” (Scheier & Carver, p. 687). Public Self-Consciousness, conversely, describes aspects of the self that are on public display. Finally, Social Anxiety describes the degree of apprehension one feels concerning one’s ability to meet public expectation in such a display. In the current sample, all three subscales showed adequate reliability ($.78 \leq \alpha \leq .79$).

This scale was included to more closely examine one’s motivations for blogging. A positive relationship with Public Self-Consciousness and Social Anxiety may indicate a strong desire for human connection through indirect means. High Private Self-Consciousness among bloggers may indicate a desire to express ideas about one self.

Loneliness Scale-Short Form

The Loneliness Scale is an eight-item scale designed to measure the adequacy of one’s

subjective level of social support (Hays & DiMatteo, 1987). In this scale, participants read statements (e.g., “I feel left out.”) and indicate their level of agreement using a Likert scale (1 = “strongly disagree,” 7 = “strongly agree”). This measure was included to examine the possibility that the neurotic nature of bloggers is associated with social isolation and to see if blogging is an attempt to mitigate that isolation. Higher scores on this scale are associated with greater feelings of loneliness. For the current sample, the scale showed adequate reliability ($\alpha = .79$).

The Internal-External Scale

The Internal-External (I-E) Scale is a 29-item scale (23 I-E items and six filler items) that measures an individual’s locus of control (Rotter, 1966). For each item, participants read two statements and indicate which they agree with more. Previous attempts had been made to create a Likert-like scale for this construct, but concern has been expressed regarding the resultant scales’ high correlations with social

desirability (Rotter, 1990). Higher scores on this scale indicate a more internal locus of control (i.e., the individual feels that they typically can exert control over a situation). This scale was included to determine whether one engages in blogging activity as a means of exerting control over one's environment. For the current sample, reliability was slightly low ($\alpha = .63$), which is predictable, given the dichotomous nature of the items.

The Risk Propensity Scale

The Risk Propensity Scale is a seven-item scale that involves a person's tendency to engage in risky behavior (Meertens & Lion, 2008). Participants read a series of statements (e.g., "I take risks regularly") and indicate their degree of agreement with each statement using a nine-point, Likert-like scale (1 = "strongly disagree," 9 = "strongly agree"). Scores on this scale could provide a clearer picture of both the openness and neuroticism dimensions: do individuals engage in blogging due to a lack of fear of expressing their ideas (openness), or do they engage in blogging due to a fear of expressing their ideas in a face-to-face setting (neuroticism)? For the current sample, this measured showed adequate reliability ($\alpha = .80$).

The Narcissistic Personality Inventory

The Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI-16) is a 16-item scale that measures one's tendency to inflate one's own importance (Ames et al., 2006). Participants read a series of statements (e.g., "I think I am a special person.") and indicate their level of agreement using a Likert-scale (1 = "strongly disagree," 7 = "strongly agree"). The act of blogging assumes that others care about what one has to say (otherwise, why not simply keep a journal?). Because individuals high in narcissism are thought to have an inflated sense of importance, they may also have a desire to be heard. However, narcissists are also thought to possess a strong desire for external validation (Kernberg, 1975), so highly narcissistic individuals may avoid blogging because of the relative anonymity and its lack of direct

feedback. For the current sample, this measured showed adequate reliability ($\alpha = .70$).

The Real Me Scale

The Real Me Scale is a four-item scale that asks one to compare the intimacy of one's "real life" friendships with one's Internet friendships (Bargh et al., 2002). Questions and their Likert-scale response options are as follows: "How much more do your internet friends know about you than your real-life friends?" (1 = "a lot less," 7 = "a lot more"), "How many things do your internet friends know about you that you cannot share with your real-life friends?" (1 = "a lot less," 7 = "a lot more"), "To what extent do you express different characteristics of yourself on the internet than you do in real life?" (1 = "not at all," 7 = "almost all my characteristics"), and "To what extent would your family and friends be surprised if they were to read your E-mail and/or newsgroup postings?" (1 = "not at all surprised," 7 = "very much surprised").

RESULTS

Characteristics of Bloggers

Forty-five participants (29 females and 16 males) identified themselves as bloggers. Their mean age was 18.82 ($SD = 1.13$). When asked how much time per day they spent maintaining their blogs, the most common response (20 out of 45 participants) was approximately one hour. Most bloggers (36 out of 45) reported maintaining a single blog. When asked how often they updated their blogs, 14 reported "daily," 15 reported "weekly," 15 reported "monthly," and one reported "yearly." When asked whether they used their real names or screen names to identify their blogs, 22 participants reported using a screen name, ten reported using their first name only, and 13 reported using their full names. By far the most common topic of blogs involved the author (Table 1). The least common topic involved stocks and finance, which is not surprising given the age of the bloggers in the current sample.

In order to determine the psychometric characteristics of individuals involved in blogging, logistic regressions were conducted using the scores on the aforementioned scales as predictor variables and whether the participant kept a blog as the outcome variable. Age and gender were used as covariates.

Big Five Traits

First, in attempt to replicate the results of Guadagno et al. (2008), we examined scores from the Big Five Personality Inventory (except for conscientiousness, which was excluded due to low reliability in this sample). When openness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism were simultaneously used as predictors, along with participant age and gender, only openness proved to be significant, (Wald ($df=1, n=526$) = 9.62, $B = -.42, p < .01, Exp(B) = .66$), such that higher openness scores predicted a greater likelihood of blogging. However, extraversion was a marginally significant predictor, (Wald ($df=1, n=526$) = 2.78, $B = .22, p < .10, Exp(B) = 1.24$), such that lower extraversion scores predicted a greater likelihood of blogging. No other predictors were significant.

An additional analysis was conducted to see if neuroticism significantly predicted whether females choose to blog, as had been the case in the study by Guadagno et al. (2008). To test this, we used neuroticism as a lone predictor and whether one maintained a blog as the outcome variable, but we only examined the female participants. The result was not significant ($p = .45$). Given the small sample of participants who actually blog, the inability to replicate this specific effect is not entirely surprising.

Self-Consciousness Scales

We also conducted a logistic regression to simultaneously examine all three subscales of the Self-Consciousness Scale, along with participant age and gender. Private Self-Consciousness was a significant predictor, (Wald ($df=1, n=526$) = 12.87, $B = -.13, p < .01, Exp(B) = .88$), such

that higher scores on this measure were more likely to predict blogging. No other significant predictors were found.

Other Scales

To examine the other scales, we conducted regression analyses using the remaining constructs as lone predictors (along with participant age and gender). None of them significantly predicted one's blogging status. In order to examine the finding by Guadagno et al. (2008) that females with neurotic traits were more likely to blog, we examined whether the Loneliness Scale predicted blogging among females, but this relationship was non-significant as well.

We conducted a final analysis on this dependent variable in which we included all the significant and marginally significant predictors in the same analysis to see which one showed the strongest relationship with one's tendency to blog. Openness, extraversion, and private self-consciousness were included, along with participant age and gender and only private self-consciousness (Wald ($df=1, n=526$) = 5.20, $B = -.08, p < .05, Exp(B) = .92$) remained significant, while only openness (Wald ($df=1, n=526$) = 3.31, $B = -.26, p < .07, Exp(B) = .77$) remained marginally significant.

Relationships of Bloggers and Non-Bloggers

In addition to the personality scales described above, we assessed whether online relationships were more intimate than "real life" relationships of bloggers when compared to non-bloggers. We did this using the items from the Real Me Scale (Bargh et al., 2002).

For the first item, "How much more do your internet friends know about you than your real-life friends?" (1 = "a lot less," 7 = "a lot more"), bloggers showed significantly higher scores on this item ($M = 2.36, SD = 1.38$) than non-Bloggers ($M = 1.80, SD = 1.30$), $t(524) = 2.72, p < .01$. For the second item, "How many things do your internet friends know about

you that you cannot share with your real-life friends?” (1 = “a lot less,” 7 = “a lot more”), bloggers again showed significantly higher scores ($M = 2.29$, $SD = 1.73$) than non-Bloggers ($M = 1.66$, $SD = 1.19$), $t(524) = 3.25$, $p < .01$. For the third question, “To what extent do you express different characteristics of yourself on the internet than you do in real life?” (1 = “not at all,” 7 = “very much”), bloggers again showed higher scores ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 1.69$) than non-Bloggers ($M = 2.12$, $SD = 1.45$), $t(524) = 3.77$, $p < .01$. Finally, for the item, “To what extent would your family and friends be surprised if they were to read your E-mail and/or newsgroup postings?” (1 = “not at all surprised,” 7 = “very much surprised”), bloggers again showed significantly higher scores ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 1.83$) than non-Bloggers ($M = 1.92$, $SD = 1.36$), $t(524) = 2.99$, $p < .01$.

The four Real Me items were highly reliable ($\alpha = .78$), and when we combined them into a composite variable, such that higher scores indicated a more authentic online personality, bloggers ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 1.29$) showed significantly higher scores than non-bloggers ($M = 1.87$, $SD = .99$), $t(254) = 4.26$, $p < .01$. It should be noted, however, that the scores were rather low (less than 3 out of 7), so while the scores provided by bloggers were not especially high, they were significantly higher than non-bloggers.

Personality Differences Between Bloggers

We examined trait differences between bloggers to see if those who used their full names when blogging differed on the dimensions of interest. There was no differences between bloggers and non-bloggers in terms of private self-consciousness, openness, and neuroticism, but there was an effect for extraversion, $F(2, 42) = 4.09$, $p < .05$. When the individual categories were examined using a Bonferroni post-hoc analysis, individuals who used their full names ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 1.50$) were significantly less

extraverted than those who use only their first names ($M = 5.93$, $SD = 1.19$), $t = 2.76$, $p < .05$. However, there was no significant difference between individuals who used their full names and those who used a screen name ($M = 5.24$, $SD = 1.22$). We limited the number of analyses conducted to examine differences between bloggers because, in the current sample, that involves only 45 participants.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In terms of characteristics of bloggers, the study produced a few clear findings. Like the study by Guadagno et al. (2008), openness was the most powerful of the Big Five traits in terms of predicting blogging. This should not be surprising, since blogging is associated with not only personal openness (i.e., willingness to talk about one's self and one's opinions), but also an openness to new ideas (i.e., to new technologies, to the concept of blogging). Unlike the study by Guadagno et al. (2008), there was no relationship between neuroticism and blogging for the current sample, both in terms of neuroticism as a trait construct and in terms of other indicators of negative emotion. Bloggers did not show significantly higher levels of social anxiety, loneliness, helplessness (as measured by the I-E scale), or narcissism. Private self-consciousness (i.e., being cognizant of one's private thoughts and values) was the most significant predictor of blogging among the characteristics measured. Although an inward focus may be related to neurotic behavior (Raskin & Terry, 1988), this did not appear to reach the level of pathology or distress for the current sample.

Thus, it seems that openness and private self-consciousness drove the decision of participants in this sample to blog, and herein, we may be given a better picture of the appeal of blogging. Rather than viewing blogging as the behavior of reclusive individuals who are

pathologically self-absorbed or angry at the world, the bloggers in this sample seem to be concerned about their own thoughts and values and being able to express these in a coherent way via a relatively new technology.

James Pennebaker has conducted numerous studies on the beneficial effects of communicating about life events on our cognitive processes (Pennebaker & Bell, 1986; Pennebaker, Mayne, & Francis, 1997; Pennebaker & O'Heeron, 1984). Talking has been shown to lead to a reorganization of information about the event and a more thorough understanding of the event (Meichenbaum, 1977; Silver & Wortman, 1980). Writing about the event can have a similar effect (Pennebaker & Bell, 1986), even if the writing has no audience. In addition, if the issue is distressing, communicating one's thoughts about it prevents rumination, suppression, and other maladaptive coping strategies (Pennebaker & O'Heeron, 1984; Pennebaker, Mayne, & Francis, 1997).

In this way, bloggers can be seen as journal writers who happen to make their journal available to the public. This also provides one explanation for the differences between bloggers and non-bloggers on the Real Me Scale items: bloggers may find that their internet friends understand them better than their "real life" friends because bloggers may feel that they represent themselves better online than during face-to-face interactions. When an interaction takes place in written form, one can re-read and edit the material until it says exactly what they want it to say, unlike a normal conversation.

The model proposed by these results is as follows: Many individuals in our current sample of bloggers were motivated to understand their private selves (according to the Private Self-Consciousness measure). Therefore, they wrote extensively about themselves in their blogs (Table 1). Thus, bloggers felt closer to the people who read these personal revelations than people who did not (according to the Real Me Scale scores).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Even though 526 individuals participated in this study, only 45 regularly blogged (8.6%). This is a far lower percentage than the 15.8% reported in the study by Guadagno et al. (2008). Thus, it is important to remember that this is merely a small sample of people engaging in a very specific activity. In fact, this drop in percentage is corroborated by recent research suggesting that the use of blogging for online self-expression has been declining with the introduction of other online social network options (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) that are growing in popularity (Jain, 2010; Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010; Mui & Whoriskey, 2010). In addition, this sample is comprised of young adult, amateur bloggers, not middle-aged individuals or professional journalists. Although a comparison between a young adult, student sample and a middle-aged or professional sample may have some points of overlap, one would expect qualitative differences as well.

Another interesting future direction for this research would involve using a similar methodology to compare the characteristics of bloggers with individuals who engage in other online social behaviors. Consider the findings of the current study in a comparison of bloggers versus Twitter users, for example. Individuals may engage in blogging in order to sort out and re-categorize their thoughts about their private selves, but that probably cannot take place within the context of Twitter, because the medium is limited to 140 characters (e.g., "2b or not 2b? OMG!"). Similarly, although it is perfectly possible for a blogger to be socially reclusive, that does not appear to be a necessary aspect of blogging. Even with Internet access readily available, without this drive for self-understanding and self-expression, socially anxious individuals could more easily occupy their time with video games, fantasy football, Facebook, or pornography.

Finally, some of the measures used in this study involved short forms of the constructs, and in these cases, the number of subscales is limited. For instance, we may have a better picture of the relationship between blogging and neuroticism if more specific facets of the construct were available for analysis. Specifically, DeYoung, Quilty, and Peterson (2007) found that Neuroticism can be broken down into “Volatility” and “Withdrawal” using the Big Five Aspects Scale, and in this particular sample, the failure of the former facet to produce an effect may have led to suppression of the latter. Similarly, if the 40-item NPI (Raskin & Terry, 1988) were used instead of the NPI-16, specific subscales of narcissism could have been analyzed to see if bloggers craved attention, but did so in an indirect way, which would have led to ambiguous unidimensional scores we found. However, we should remember that, although the study did feature over 500 participants, less than ten percent of those were bloggers, constraining the actual number of statistical analyses one could potentially conduct.

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