Personal blogs as online presences on the internet
Exploring self-presentation and self-disclosure in blogging

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Abstract
Purpose – The aim of this study is to investigate the creation of a virtual presence in personal blogs through self-presentation and self-disclosure. Five elements of self-presentation and self-disclosure were examined: the way bloggers present themselves in their blogs; the degree and frequency of disclosure of personal information in the blogs; the feelings or reactions bloggers have when posting or receiving a comment; the significance blogs have in the bloggers’ lives; and the subjects bloggers write about in their blogs.

Design/methodology/approach – An online survey was designed for the study and 90 bloggers from six Latin American countries who maintain a personal blog participated in the study. In the first phase a statistical analysis yielded quantifiable demographic data about the participants, the personal information they disclose in their blogs, and statistical data on feelings involved in blogging. In the second phase a content analysis examined the bloggers’ textual answers using open coding.

Findings – Findings show that bloggers created a virtual presence in their blogs perceived as a “protected space”. Bloggers reported feeling satisfied and drained when posting a new comment in their blog. Bloggers in this study described their blogs as being a part of their selves, a communication tool, a writing tool and their favourite hobby.

Originality/value – This study is relevant to the field of information behaviour because it provides an example of the fulfillment of different information needs through the creation of a virtual presence on a blog and examines the dichotomy present in blogging between the private and the public spheres.

Keywords Blogging, Self-presentation, Self-disclosure, Latin American blogosphere, Internet, Blogs

Paper type Research paper

Introduction
Online communication has become an integral part of people’s everyday lives so understanding the positive impacts of these media on is an important issue. Within the social media environment, personal blogs have become an increasingly popular place where people write about themselves, their innermost thoughts and experiences and post these writings in an online space accessible to all that in many cases becomes their personal presence in cyberspace.

The study of personal blogs is important to social media research because according to Technorati Media State of the Blogosphere (2011), 60 per cent of bloggers “blog for fun” and do not report any income, half of these bloggers said they prefer to express their “personal musings” when blogging. Blogs are often characterised by high amounts of self-disclosure (Chen, 2012; Herring et al., 2005; Viegas, 2005) that foster the development of social connections and the communication of one’s identity (Hollenbaugh, 2011; Nardi et al., 2004; Stefanone and Jang, 2007). The creation and communication of one’s identity online is related to the different bloggers’ motivations...
found in the literature (Bronstein, 2012; Lee et al., 2008; Li, 2005; Hollenbaugh, 2011; Nardi et al., 2004) such as a desire to document their lives, to share information with others, to practice their writing, and to create and maintain a network of social connections. The perception of a blog as a venue for self-expression has been revealed as a salient notion in blogging research. Bloggers are able to release emotional stress by venting feelings, thoughts and ideas in an online environment less threatening than face-to-face communication (Bronstein, 2012; Baker and Moore, 2008; Nardi et al., 2004).

The creation of an online presence through the communication of one’s identity is fostered by different elements of self-presentation and self-disclosure on blogs that have been investigated in the literature such as various types of anonymity in self-presentation (Schau and Gilly, 2003; Qian and Scott, 2007), profiles of disclosiveness (Hollenbaugh, 2010), environmental clues of self-disclosure (Stefanone et al., 2009), gender specific issues in blogging (Chen, 2012; Jang and Stefanone, 2011; Masullo Chen, 2012), subjective well-being and social benefits resulting from self-disclosure in blogging (Ko and Kuo, 2009) and the expression of emotions in blogging (Derks et al., 2008; Liao et al., 2011; Morris, 2011; Nardi et al., 2004). A few studies have delved into the feelings elicited by blogging in bloggers (McKenzie, 2008). Each of these studies has focused on a particular area or issue in blogging research. The current study wishes to provide a more complete picture of blogs as online spaces by investigating these areas conjunctively.

Latin American bloggers that maintain a personal blog were chosen as the population for the study because this part of the international blogosphere has yet to be investigated at length. Blogs and bloggers have been at the forefront of new media research in the USA (Hollenbaugh, 2010; Qian and Scott, 2007), Taiwan (Fu et al., 2012; Ko and Pu, 2011; Li et al., 2009), and Europe (Pedersen, 2009; Trammell et al., 2006; Viegas, 2005). Yet, few studies have focused on the blogosphere in Latin America despite the growing size of the bloggers’ population among internet users in this region. According to the Internet World Stats webpage there were an estimated 175 million internet users in Latin America in 2011, approximately 8.4 per cent of the world’s internet users’ population. Furthermore, there are an estimated 9.1 million bloggers in Latin America or 7.2 per cent of the region’s Internet users (Jeffrey Group, 2008). This is why, understanding blogging behaviour in this growing part of the blogosphere is significant to social media research.

The aim of the present study is to render a more holistic view of a blog as an online personal presence by examining five different elements of blogging:

1. the degree and the nature of the anonymity adopted in the bloggers’ self-presentation;
2. the frequency and depth of the disclosure of personal information;
3. the significance of blogs in the bloggers’ lives;
4. the topics depicted in the blog posts; and
5. the feelings or reactions that different aspects of blogging elicit in the bloggers.

Literature survey

Blogs as protected spaces

Computer-mediated environments (CME) in general and the internet in particular have allowed users to create and develop online identities and spaces that occupy neither space
nor time. Blogs are uniquely suited to enable the creation of an online presence. Mitra (2008, p. 459) states that when a person creates a blog “a voice has been placed in the cybernetic space where the traditional limits of real life could be irrelevant”. Unlike personal homepages that are more static and formal in structure, blogs are dynamic and interactive. Since they are easily updated, blogs foster spontaneity (Viégas, 2005) and offer a sense of intimacy that a personal homepage might not (Mitra, 2008). Blogs have become personal communicative spaces that offer different layers of interactivity which can be controlled or turned off completely. These multiple layers of interactivity create a personal “protected space” (Gumbrecht, 2005) that tends to be less adversarial and more reflective in nature where bloggers feel secure and comfortable to write. Blogs allow people to have more control over the information they disclose leading them to reveal online intimate information that is not easily expressed in person (Child and Agyerman-Budu, 2010).

Anonymity (or lack of) as a self-presentation strategy
Self-presentation refers to how people present themselves in a variety of ways, tailoring the images they convey to others that vary according to situational demands (Goffman, 1959). It is also called impression management, which emphasises people’s attempts to control how their self is presented (Min and Lee, 2011). The anonymous and textual nature of the internet facilitates self-presentation and allows individuals to deal with issues such as gender, ethnicity or religion and to overcome identity flaws or disabilities. This anonymity inherent in online communications enables individuals to express themselves freely and behave in ways not permissible or acceptable in their usual social sphere (Papacharissi, 2002). Online communication allow people to separate their actions online from their identity in real life because whatever they say or do online will not necessarily be linked to them. Although bloggers might not always be anonymous, they are invisible to their audience. The opportunity of being physically invisible amplifies the freedom and disinhibition that characterises online communications (Suler, 2004). Although the lack of non-verbal elements in online communication may render the interaction less rich, it allows individuals to have more control over the information they disclose and be more inventive in the way they present themselves online (Bargh et al., 2002).

Self-presentation patterns are closely related to the concept of anonymity that is defined by Marx (1999) as a state where a person is not identifiable. Blog services offer users different options of self-presentation in terms of anonymity, bloggers can choose to be totally anonymous, pseudonymous or identifiable. In both online and offline environments, anonymity can be either visual or discursive (Qian and Scott, 2007). Visual anonymity refers to the condition where the physical presence of a message source cannot be detected due to a lack of any visual representation of a person, such as pictures or video clips (Barreto and Ellemers, 2002; Lea et al., 2001; Postmes et al., 2001). Discursive anonymity, on the other hand, refers to the condition where verbal communication cannot be attributed to a particular source. Although the writing itself might reveal to a certain degree something about the message source, in an online environment people usually feel anonymous when their personal information (name, email, gender, location, etc.) is withheld (Qian and Scott, 2007). In a recent study, Scott et al. (2011) propose a different definition of anonymity. They posit that social anonymity is the degree of anonymity that individuals perceive the technology actually offers.
Self-disclosure

Self-disclosure patterns and the type of anonymity bloggers choose to adopt have a direct impact on the nature of the information disclosed on the blog. Self-disclosure refers to communication of personal information, thoughts, and feelings to other people (Archer, 1980). Since self-disclosure can be a frightening thing that might invite ridicule or rejection people are more likely to disclose personal information to a stranger, therefore not knowing their audience makes them feel secure that whatever is shared will not reach people in their social sphere. This is why Bargh et al. (2002, p. 35) compare online communications to the interactions one may have with “strangers on a train” where someone may disclosed intimate details of his life to a stranger sitting next to him on a train, details that he might never share with the people close to him.

Because of the relative anonymity that online interactions may offer, the risks of self-disclosure may be greatly reduced, and disclosers should be much less fearful of potential condemnation or rejection (McKenna and Bargh, 1998). In particular, self-disclosure appears to be prevalent in blogs. Miller and Shepherd (2004) argue that the rise of blogs as a venue for self-expression is the result of progressive loss of control over personal information that creates expectation for more information.

Understanding online self-disclosure is important since writing enables people to relax, enhancing physical health and subjective well-being (Ko and Chen (2009)), to establish and develop intimacy (Gibbs et al., 2006) and to manage their image online (Omazu, 2000). Other studies about self-disclosure on blogs have focused on personality predictors (Guadagno et al., 2007; Hollenbaugh, 2010), psychological and social predictors (Miura and Yamashita, 2007), the relation between self-disclosure and interpersonal communication (Jang and Stefanone, 2011), and the satisfaction of needs (Chen, 2012).

A number of studies (Miller and Shepherd, 2004; Papacharissi, 2004; Van House, 2004) confirm that blogs serve the purpose of personal expression well and represent an ideal medium for self-representation and the creation of an online presence. Blogs have become a communication genre strongly related to individuality, self-representation and self-disclosure.

Methods

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions Latin American bloggers have of a blog as a personal space through the examination of different blogging elements.

Research questions

- What type of anonymity is present in the bloggers’ self-presentation strategies?
- To what extent do bloggers see their blogs as a “personal space” by disclosing personal information?
- What is the nature of the blog as a personal space in terms of the subjects covered, the feelings or reactions that bloggers have when posting or receiving a comment and the significance of the blog in the blogger’s life?
- Is there a correlation between gender and age of the bloggers in the above examined parameters?
Data collection
The present study investigated different elements in the blogging activity of bloggers from six different Latin American countries. The findings presented in the study are taken from an online survey conducted for one month (January 15 to February 15, 2011) (see the Appendix, Figure A1)). Although the survey was developed specially for the study it incorporated previously documented parameters and its design paralleled other studies that examined similar subjects. The survey designed was short, simply designed and easy to answer to lessen many of the drawbacks of online questionnaires (Baron and Siepmann, 2000; Gunn, 2002). It was written in Spanish since it appealed to a Spanish speaking population. The online questionnaire was divided in four main sections:

(1) Bloggers’ demographic data: questions addressing the bloggers’ personal data such as age, time blogging, gender and education.

(2) Self presentation on the blog: questions asking bloggers about different elements of self-presentation.

(3) Disclosure of personal information: questions asking to what extent bloggers disclose personal information in their blogs.

(4) Open ended questions: questions requesting that participants describe in their own words the reactions or feelings elicited by blogging practices, the significance their blogs have in their lives and the topics they write about in their blogs.

Description of participants
The sample collected for the study consisted of regularly maintained personal blogs on the internet written in Spanish. The blogs in the sample were selected from the following two blog directories:

(1) Blog Directory – www.blogdirectory.com

(2) Blogalaxia – www.blogalaxia.com

These two directories were chosen among several other blog directories because blogs in two these sites are categorized by country and by type, thus allowing the researcher to easily identify personal blogs from the different countries. The country pages for Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Chile, Argentina, and Ecuador in both directories were examined to select personal blogs that conformed to the following criteria:

- The blog was classified in the directory as a personal blog.
- The blogger identified himself or herself and provided an email address for contact.
- The content of the blog was examined and it was confirmed that did not serve any commercial or marketing purpose.
- The blog had been updated in the last month.
- Entries for the two selected month must be accessible on the blog site through archives or continuous postings on the blog main page or other means.

A total of 300 blogs matching the above specified criteria were identified from the specified country pages at the two directories. This sample represents a census of all personal blogs.
listed in the specific country pages at two directories. Using the email address provided in
the blogs, the researcher sent emails to the bloggers inviting them to participate in the
study. The introductory email included a short explanation of the study and the address of
the web site containing the online questionnaire. Because blogging is an online activity,
contacting the bloggers and collecting the data online in their natural setting was the most
effective approach. Of the 300 bloggers initially contacted, 90 responded to the survey,
representing a 30 per cent response rate. This response rate concurs with response rates in
other studies about blogging (Guadano et al., 2007; Huang et al., 2007; Yu, 2007). All
participants were Spanish-speaking adults (18 years of age and older).

Data analysis
The survey consisted of a quantitative section designed to produce data for statistical
descriptive analysis that was complemented by a number of open questions in which
participants were asked to explain or extend their answers in their own words. The aim
of the study was not to characterise a particular population of bloggers but rather to
explore information disclosure behaviours in blogging practices therefore
generalisability of the findings was not an aim of the study.

The data analysis consisted of two phases. In the first phase quantitative responses
received from the survey were complied in a Microsoft Excel document and analysed
using descriptive and comparative statistics. This phase yielded quantifiable
demographic data about the participants, descriptive data about the information they
posted on their blogs, the bloggers' rating about the disclosure of personal information
and statistical data on feelings involved in writing and maintaining a personal blog.

The second phase of the analysis examined the bloggers' textual answers in which
they described in their own words their feelings towards different aspects of blogging,
the significance of their blogs in their lives and the topics they write about in their blogs.
Textual data were analysed based on the Grounded Theory approach (Glaser and
Strauss, 1967) that posits that theories should be “grounded” in the data collected in the
field and not imposed by a set of predispositions brought about by the researcher. Hence,
a grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it
represents. One does not begin with a theory, and then prove it. Rather, one begins with
an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge (Strauss and
Corbin, 1990). The intent of a grounded theory study is to explore a situation in which
individuals interact, take actions, or engage in a process in response to a phenomenon.

Three different groups of qualitative data were analysed separately: the reactions or
feelings elicited by blogging practices, the significance their blogs have in their lives
and the topics they write about in their blogs. Each set of data was analysed using
open coding. Following the grounded theory approach, open coding is a technique that
does not impose a fixed taxonomy in advance; instead, categories are creating during
the coding process and describe the data at hand (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The method
consists of identifying concepts and coding them into their respective
categories by constantly comparing them to the properties of the emerging category to
develop and saturate the category. Phrases were selected as the minimal information
unit, they were identified and then coded them into their respective categories by
constantly comparing these phrases to the properties of the emerging category to
develop and saturate the category. The categories that resulted from each analysis are
presented separately following the corresponding research question.
**Limitations of the study**

First, because participants self-reported the data, information is potentially biased since the survey measure was not standardised. Moreover, as is the case in online surveys, participants might have responded to the survey without sufficient forethought and therefore their answers might not fully represent their motivations and feelings about blogging. Second, findings represent only those bloggers who chose to participate in the study, therefore the sample might not adequately represent the overall population of bloggers who write personal blogs in Latin America. Third, participants were bloggers living in Latin America, therefore culture and lifestyle differences may not represent bloggers from other regions in the world.

**Results**

The following section presents the descriptive data resulting from the statistical analysis and the categories resulting from the content analysis of the bloggers’ textual answers.

**Description of the participants**

The bloggers that participated in the study were individuals who maintain a personal blog on the internet. Of the 300 bloggers contacted, 90 responded to the invitation to participate in the study. Table I presents the demographic data on the participants.

Table I shows that the majority of survey bloggers were young people from ages 18-35 (61.1 per cent, \( n = 55 \)), mostly men, 62.2 per cent (\( n = 56 \)) with a bachelor’s degree (83.3 per cent, \( n = 75 \)). These data concur with findings from three other bloggers’ studies that investigated the Chinese (Yu, 2007), the North American (Li, 2005) and the Spanish-speaking (Anonymous, 2009) blogospheres in which the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blogger background item</th>
<th>Percent of total</th>
<th>( n )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age range</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-35</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56-65</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>62.2</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade school education</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>62.2</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length of time blogging</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than a year</td>
<td>14.44</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>37.77</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4 years</td>
<td>35.54</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 4 years</td>
<td>12.22</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I. Description of participants
majority of bloggers were reported to be males between the ages of 18-35 with a college education. In addition, the majority of bloggers in this study were experienced bloggers who had maintained their blog for more than two years.

Self presentation
The first research question examined the issue of bloggers’ self-presentation strategies and the types of anonymity adopted by the bloggers. Almost half the bloggers (47.8 per cent, $n = 43$) identified themselves on their blogs using their real names, another 41.1 per cent ($n = 37$) used a pseudonym and 11.1 per cent ($n = 10$) presented themselves using a variant of their real name. Namely, only half of the participants adopted discursive anonymity as a self-presentation strategy, by not presenting themselves using their real names on their blogs. Posting a personal photograph on their blog is an additional way for bloggers to identify and present themselves. Among the bloggers, the majority (65.6 per cent, $n = 59$) posted a photograph of themselves on the blog while 34.4 per cent ($n = 31$) decided to be visually anonymous and chose not to do so. Correlation between age and photograph presentation in the blog shows that the majority of bloggers (78.9 per cent) over 46 years old posted their photograph. No significant correlation was found between gender and self presentation. An additional element of self presentation is the different forms of contact bloggers provided for their readers related to discursive anonymity that involves not being able to identify the name of a particular source or attribute a message to a particular source. The majority of bloggers did not seek discursive anonymity since 83.3 per cent ($n = 75$) posted an email address on their blogs, 30 per cent ($n = 27$) have an IM user name and 41.1 per cent ($n = 37$) posted a link to their profile in a social network. These findings concur with previous studies (Herring et al. 2004; Nardi et al., 2004; Viegas, 2005) in which the majority of bloggers used some form of identification.

Self-disclosure
To investigate the second research question three aspects of the disclosure of personal information on the posts were examined. Bloggers were asked to rate the depth (level of intimacy) of personal the information they disclose in their blogs, the frequency of the disclosure of personal information and to what extent their self-disclosure of personal information is a conscious act. Table II shows the ratings reported of the depth of the personal information disclosed in the blog.

Table II shows that only 21.1 per cent ($n = 19$) of bloggers reported writing about very personal issues and 55.6 per cent ($n = 50$) reported disclosing somewhat personal information. Correlation between age and disclosure of personal information shows that younger bloggers tend to disclose information they consider more personal. A total of 28 per cent ($n = 7$) of bloggers between the ages of 18 to 24 and 33.3 per cent
of bloggers between the ages of 35 to 34 reported disclosing very personal information. All of the bloggers over the age of 46 reported never disclosing very personal information in their blogs.

The second aspect of self-disclosure examined relates to the frequency in which bloggers disclose personal information. When asked how often they posted personal details of their lives on their blogs, 13.3 per cent \((n = 12)\) of bloggers reported disclosing personal information very frequently, 48.9 per cent \((n = 44)\) reported disclosing personal information often and 27.8 per cent \((n = 25)\) reported never disclosing personal information in their blogs.

Examining the third aspect of self-disclosure, bloggers were asked how often they have realized after publishing that they had disclosed information that was too personal. 51.1 per cent \((n = 46)\) did not believe they had ever disclosed information that is too personal and 34.4 per cent \((n = 31)\) did not believe they had disclosed information that is somewhat personal. No significant correlation was found between gender and the belief that information published was too personal after being published. Table III shows the correlation between age and frequency of disclosure of personal information that was considered too personal after publishing.

When correlating age and frequency of disclosure of information believed to be too personal after publishing, results show that younger bloggers realized they had disclosed very personal information after publication more frequently than older bloggers. Table III shows that 20.0 per cent \((n = 5)\) of bloggers between the ages of 18 to 24 and 26.7 per cent \((n = 8)\) of bloggers between the ages of 35-34 reported revealing information they considered too personal after publication. Moreover, findings show that bloggers over 46 are more cautious about the information they disclose since 42.1 per cent \((n = 8)\) reported that only occasionally have they disclosed information that appeared as too personal after publication and 47.4 per cent \((n = 9)\) reported never encountering this problem.

**Blogging topics**

The third research question explores the topics depicted in the blogs. The way bloggers describe the subjects or issues they write about in their blogs provides another element of the online presence being created on the blogs. Bloggers were asked to provide natural language terms that describe their blogging topics. The 90 participants provided a total of 357 labels, an average of 3.96 labels per blog. Linguistically, the labels provided can be divided into four major types. Table III presents the findings of the linguistic analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of disclosure</th>
<th>18-24</th>
<th>25-35</th>
<th>36-45</th>
<th>46+</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From time to time</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total within age groups</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage within age groups</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table III.** Correlation between age and frequency of disclosure of information considered too personal after publishing.
Table IV shows that the majority of labels assigned by Latin American bloggers to
describe their blogs were nouns (70.86 per cent) and compound nouns (12.04 per cent).
It also presents examples for each linguistic category. Findings show that the labels
chosen by the bloggers to describe the topics they blog about are natural language
words that reflect a wide range of interests and topics. Labels vary from simple nouns
that describe everyday things such as “love,” “friendship,” and “books,” to adjectives
that describe some issue (or the post itself) on the blogger’s life such as “offensive,”
“sarcasm,” and “attractive,” and verbs that described the subject of the post as an
action such as “dreaming.” Bloggers also provided geographical and proper names as
labels. Yu (2007) study on the Chinese blogosphere found that family and friends was
the most popular blog topic, followed by arts and culture.

Figure 1 shows a visual representation of the most popular labels provided by the
bloggers called a tag cloud. The size and boldness of the font represent the number of
times it appears in the sample.

**Feelings about blogging**
The second element investigated in the third research question are the bloggers’
feelings or reactions to different blogging activities. The interactivity of blogging is

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Linguistic breakdown</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Common responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simple nouns</td>
<td>70.86</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>Personal, work, photographs, recipes, window</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compound nouns (phrases)</td>
<td>12.04</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Social responsibility, international politics, augmented reality, daily life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjectives</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Happy, different, offensive, creative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical names</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Cuba, Medellin, Mexico, Cusco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Names</td>
<td>5.32</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Michael Foucault, Carlos Saavedra, Twitter, Tarot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbs</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Living, struggling, resisting, dreaming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table IV. Linguistic analysis of tags
based on the blogger posting a comment and receiving a reaction or comment from readers. Bloggers’ were asked to describe their feelings about posting new information and about receiving comments from readers.

Most respondents showed a positive reaction when adding a new post and selected “satisfied” (47.8 per cent, n = 43). Other responses were: “drained” (15.6 per cent, n = 14), “positive” (13.3 per cent, n = 12), “excited” (10.0 per cent, n = 9), “relieved” (2.2 per cent, n = 2), “hopeful” (3.3 per cent, n = 3), and “no special feeling” (4.4 per cent, n = 4). Four people (4.1 per cent) chose to write in the way they felt. Responses centred on themes of expectation of seeking reactions from others and happiness. When asked about the reactions or feeling that their readers’ comments elicited in them the majority of bloggers (75.6 per cent n = 51) reported being only slightly affected by their readers’ comments. Only one-third of the bloggers (31.6 per cent n = 6) over 46 years old reported being highly affected by their readers’ comments. Positive or supportive comments from their readers left a third of respondents (32.2 per cent, n = 29) feeling “pleased”. In descending order, the remaining participants felt “honoured” (22.2 per cent, n = 20), “valued” (14.4 per cent, n = 13), “connected” (14.4 per cent, n = 13), “excited” (8.9 per cent, n = 8), and “important” (1.1 per cent, n = 1).

Four people (4.4 per cent) reported that positive comments did not elicit any particular feeling. Negative comments or criticism to one of their posts left 41.1 per cent (n = 37) elicited in the bloggers feelings of “anger”. In descending order, the remaining participants felt “important” (13.3 per cent, n = 12), “upset” (11.1 per cent, n = 10), “honoured” (10.0 per cent, n = 9), and “excited” (3.3 per cent, n = 3), 21.1 per cent, (n = 19) of participants reported not being affected by negative comments. This question elicited the highest number of write-in responses. A total of 20 people chose to use their own words to describe their feelings after receiving a negative comment to one of their posts. Some participants did not find their feelings in the list provided, and chose to write in how they felt, using words such as “surprised,” “happy,” and “satisfied” for positive reactions and “sad,” “confused,” “angry,” “worried,” “frustrated,” “misunderstood” for negative reactions. Other write-in responses valued the negative comments, interpreting them as constructive criticism that could help them improve their blog “I always try to evaluate the comments and if they are reasonable I take them into account”, considering the public nature of their blogs “a blog in principle is open to allow readers to express their ideas freely” and acknowledging the fact that comments allow bloggers to connect with their audiences “I’m satisfied to know other opinions”. The majority of participants (60 per cent, n = 54) said the lack of comments on their posts did not affected them. In descending order, the remaining participants selected anxious (10 per cent, n = 9), upset (7.8 per cent n = 7), insignificant (5.6 per cent, n = 5), hopeful (2.2 per cent, n = 2), relieved (1.1 per cent, n = 1). A total of 12 people chose to write in their responses which centred on feelings of concern, frustration, sadness and confusion brought by the lack of comments.

The last element in the third research question asked participants to describe in their own words the meaning their blogs have in their lives. The open coding analysis based on the grounded theory approach revealed four different categories. The following section provides an description for each category and presents a few representative examples of the participants’ textual answers.
(1) *My blog is a part of me.* Some participants regard their blog as a very significant element in their lives, more than just a place to publish information. Participants describe their blogs as:
- … a basic element in my creative life.
- … like an X-ray of my life.
- … a reflection of myself on the internet.

(2) *My blog is a communication tool.* Participants view their blogs as a major communication tool through which they can express their feelings and thoughts, a tool that helps them share information and connect with people with whom they have something in common:
- My blog means a lot to me, is a way of achieving catharsis and communication.
- [My blog is] a window through which I can express myself.
- [My blog is] a window through which people can get to know me.

(3) *My blog is a writing tool.* Some participants describe their blog as a tool to practice and improved their writing skills:
- [My blog is] an easy way to do something that I love, that is to write.
- My blog is like a therapy. Since I started writing my blog I realized that writing is very good for me.
- [my blog is]… a long-term writing project.

(4) *My blog is my favorite hobby.* Some participants regarded their blogs has a hobby, something to do in their free time:
- My blog is my passion and my hobby.
- … a fun way to spend my time.
- … a distraction in time of leisure.

The findings presented in this section show that half of the bloggers adopted discursive anonymity by not identifying themselves using their real names while the majority of the bloggers chose not to be visually anonymous by posting a personal photograph on their blogs. A significant correlation was found between age and disclosure of personal information since younger bloggers disclosed highly personal information more frequently. Moreover, findings indicate that visual anonymity might negatively influence the degree and frequency of disclosure of personal information since the majority of older bloggers posted a personal photograph but refrained from disclosing highly personal information. The labels with which bloggers describe the subjects they write about reveal their blogs as a venue of self expression that allows bloggers to write about their everyday lives that reflects on the description of the blog as a communication tool and as a part of the blogger’s life. The roles assigned to the blogs by the bloggers focused on self-expression, communication and leisure.

**Discussion**

This study investigated blogs as virtual spaces were Latin American bloggers created an online presence. Bloggers who participated in this study were asked to self-report on
a number of factors related to their blogging activities: the way they present themselves on their blogs, the frequency and nature of the personal information they disclose, their feelings or reactions when posting and receiving a comment, the significance their blogs have in their lives and the subjects they blog about. In general, the demographic data on participants in this study is consistent with findings from previous bloggers’ surveys (Herring et al., 2005; Viegas, 2005) where the majority of participants were young adult males with a college education.

The way bloggers present themselves in their blogs and the nature of the information they choose to disclose are central issues in understanding the creation of an online presence on cyberspace. A large percentage of bloggers that participated in this study did not opt for either visual or discursive anonymity by identifying themselves in their blog by their real name, by posting a personal photograph, and by providing several forms of contact. These findings coincide with Hollenbaugh’s (2010) study in which bloggers chose not to be visually anonymous and behaved similarly online as they did offline. I would like to argue that a considerable number of bloggers in this study did not feel the need to hide their identity because the attenuation of physical distance that characterises online communications allowed them to be social anonymous, that is, they took advantage of the anonymity that technology offers (Scott et al., 2011). Lee et al.’s (2008) study supports this finding and posits that since self-disclosure depends on the perception that the information divulged is secured, blogs are perceived as protected spaces because they provide a dyadic (i.e. safe) boundary within which self-disclosure is considered secured. This boundary is created by the physical invisibility that characterises online communications that facilitates self-expression and gives bloggers the power over the content on their blogs and over the identity they choose to reveal or conceal from their audience. This is the reason why, feeling protected on their blogs, bloggers in this study published their real names, posted a personal photograph on their blogs and/or provided a contact point. This tendency towards self-presentation also was found in other studies (Chen, 2012; Herring et al., 2004; Nardi et al., 2004; Viegas, 2005). This point can be further illustrated by the participants’ comments that described their blogs “as a part of me” or as “a reflection of myself on the internet.”

Regarding the issue of self-disclosure, bloggers were asked to rate the depth (level of intimacy) of personal the information they disclose in their blogs, the frequency of the disclosure of personal information and to what extent their self-disclosure of personal information is a conscious act. Findings show that a large percentage of bloggers disclosed some kind of personal information frequently. No correlation was found between gender and the depth or frequency of self-disclosure. This finding contradicts Hollenbaugh’s (2010, p. 1664) study that found women “tended to be high on disclosiveness, writing primarily for themselves to archive and organize their thoughts”. When correlating age and self-disclosure findings in this study revealed that age negatively impacts bloggers’ self-disclosure, with younger bloggers revealing the most personal information on their blogs, concurring with previous studies (Lenhart and Fox, 2006; Ma and Leung, 2006). However, contrary to Qian and Scott’s (2007) study in which visual anonymity did not influence self-disclosure, findings in this study show that the majority of older bloggers did not opt for visual anonymity (i.e. posted a personal photograph on their blog) and reported very low or non-existing levels of self-disclosure. Findings on self-disclosure patterns revealed in this study show
that personal blogs are carefully edited rather than “tell-all” accounts of the bloggers’ lives, echoing Krasnova et al.’s (2010) claim that bloggers engage in “a conscious ‘privacy calculus’” when cognitively deciding whether or not to self-disclose.

To understand the participants’ subjective view of what their blog is about, bloggers were asked to label the subjects they write about in their blogs. The assumption behind this request was that labeling an item is an individual’s expression of how the object is represented in his or her mental construction. The labels provided reflected a wide range of subjects, actions, and emotions that symbolize a reflection of the bloggers’ lives as they perceive it. Lenhart and Fox (2006) also found that the majority of bloggers surveyed blogged on many different subjects. Findings from this study reveal that the majority of the labels in the data were nouns describing different aspects of the bloggers’ everyday lives and personal interests and hobbies as well as adjectives describing events or situations and verbs describing activities. These findings echo Trammel and Keshelashvili (2005) and Trammell et al. (2006) studies that made a content analysis of the topics depicted in Polish blogs and found that they represent a unique medium that enable bloggers to establish an online presence by being a reflection of their offline persona.

Bloggers’ feelings towards blogging and the significance blogs have in their lives were also investigated. Bloggers were asked to describe their feelings when they posted new information on their blogs and when their readers commented (or not commented) on their posts. Bloggers in this study described their reactions to positive comments as feeling honoured and valued by their readers and few noted that it was important for them to know that their readers identified with their opinions. Bloggers also expressed feelings of expectation to the prospects of comments from their readers. These findings coincide with data revealed in McKenzie’s (2008) study that found that when updating new information on their blogs, most participants reported having positive feelings such as satisfaction and excitement and others reported having feelings of relief and exhaustion. Lee et. al.’s (2008) study concurs with these findings and reveals that self-disclosure on blogs elicit positive feelings and a sense of enjoyment on bloggers. Ko and Chen (2009) also found that bloggers obtain positive emotional benefits through self-disclosure that have significant influence in their perception of subjective well-being.

When asked about their feelings when they received negative comments, several bloggers felt the need to describe their feelings in their own words, and participants in McKenzie’s study had the same reaction. However, unlike McKenzie’s findings that showed that bloggers rejected negative comments or were indifferent or amused by them, bloggers in this study described feeling angry and frustrated, but they also acknowledge the value of the negative comments as a way to get to know their readers’ opinions. Bloggers’ reactions to comments on their posts are closely related to the motivation of socialisation and to the motivation of self-expression that is driven by the bloggers’ need for self-reaffirmation (Hollenbaugh, 2010; Nardi et al., 2004; Walker, 2000). It is noteworthy to note that 60 per cent of bloggers reported not being affected by the lack of comments from their readers. This finding supports Schiano et al.’s (2004) study that posits that the blogger’s primary audience is the blogger him/herself because blogging is often used as an outlet for thoughts and feelings and Miller and Shepherd’s (2004) assertion that blogging is some kind of “private writing,” one that allows the writer to write freely and value his or her writing without having to worry
about the reactions of others. This point is strengthened by the description of a blog by participants as a “part of them”.

The significance bloggers assigned to their blogs is also connected to the different motivations for blogging found in the literature. When asked to describe in their own words what significance their blogs have in their lives, bloggers in this study described their blogs as: being a part of their selves, a communication tool, a writing tool and a favourite hobby. Bloggers relate to their blogs as a part of their online identity because blogs can become an emotional outlet or a positive way to channel their feelings and frustrations (Lee et al., 2008; Nardi et al., 2004). As Nardi et al. (2004, p. 44) notes “The format of frequent posts, diary-style, was both outlet and stimulus for working through personal issues”. In addition, blogs can act as communications tools because bloggers are motivated to blog to meet people that share their interests and to be a part of a community. Altman and Taylor (1973) argues that self-disclosure plays an important part in the establishment of human relationships that evolve in a process of progressive and reciprocal deepening of the mutual self-disclosure, that is, the process of socialisation occurs when readers comment or provide feedback to the bloggers’ posts. Interestingly, contrary to other studies (Bronstein, 2012; Hollenbaugh, 2010) participants did not regard their blog as a tool to document their lives.

Bloggers also described their blogs as writing tools. The attractiveness of practicing one’s writing skills by blogging is directly related to the medium appeal, that is, to the facility of creating new content and sharing it with others to read and react to it. Nardi et al. (2004, p. 227) described the need to write as “thinking by writing”, and claimed that people worked through their writing process by blogging and found out whether they had something interesting to say. Concurring with the findings of this study, several studies found that bloggers related to their blogs a favourite hobby (Bronstein, 2012; Hollenbaugh, 2011; Lee et al., 2008; Li, 2005; Trammell et al., 2006).

Conclusions
Blogs present a technology that creates a unique form of expression within the available technologies on cyberspace. They are versatile and friendly media that facilitate and support the creation of a virtual presence on the Internet and provide a safe haven for people who need or want to use online technologies to fulfill different needs. The study reveals that the online presences created in the blogs have an important role in the bloggers’ lives as an venue for self-expression, as a medium for socialisation and as a documenting tool. Bloggers reported frequently disclosing personal information in the blogs and the labels they assign to this information reflect a wide variety of subjects and interests that are in many ways a reflection of the bloggers’ lives.

In sum, the study show that Latin American bloggers were able to reconcile between the private elements of an online presence perceived as a secure and protected space with the public nature of blogs as online technologies.

Recommendation for further research
Additional research is needed to understand information disclosure patterns of different bloggers’ populations that have yet to be investigated. Moreover, it will be interesting to research self-presentation and self-disclosure patterns in different social media such as social networks and micro-blogging sites for example.
References


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**Personal blogs as online presences**


Further reading


Survey – My blog

This survey deals with different issues regarding your blog.

1. How do you identify yourself in your blog?
   a. using your own name
   b. using a pseudonym
   c. using a variant of your name

2. Do you present a personal photograph on your blog?
   a. Yes
   b. No

3. Taking into account the information you post in your blog please rate the following questions

   a. How personal is the information you usually disclose in your blog?
      4 – Extremely personal  3 – Very personal  2 – somewhat personal  1 – not personal at all

4. With what frequency do you disclose personal information in your blog?
   5 – Always  4 – Very frequently  3 – frequently  2 – from time to time  1 – never

5. How often have you published information that was too personal?
   5 – Always  4 – Very frequently  3 – frequently  2 – from time to time  1 – never

6. How much do readers’ comments affect you?
   4 – extremely  3 – a lot  2 – not much  1 – nothing

Please choose one option that better describes you feelings/reactions

7. How do you feel after posting a new post on your blog?
   a. Satisfied
   b. Nervous
   c. Intelligent
   d. Excited
   e. Positive
   f. Hopeful
   g. Relieved
   h. Exhausted
   i. If what you feel does not match the list can you please describe it in your own words?  

Figure A1.
The study’s survey  
(continued)
8. How do you feel when a reader adds a positive or favorable comment to one of your post?
   a. Honored
   b. Pleased
   c. Excited
   d. Valued
   e. Important
   f. Connected
   g. If what you feel does not match the list can you please describe it in your own words? ________________________________

9. How do you feel when a reader adds a negative or hurtful comment to one of your post?
   a. Important
   b. Excited
   c. angered
   d. valued
   e. upset
   f. If what you feel does not match the list can you please describe it in your own words? ________________________________

10. How do you feel when there are no comments to your posts?
    a. Upset
    b. Relieved
    c. Insignificant
    d. Anxious
    e. Hopeful
    f. It does not affect me
    g. If what you feel does not match the list can you please describe it in your own words? ________________________________


Appendix

About the author
Jenny Bronstein received her PhD in 2006 from the Department of Information studies at Bar Ilan University (Israel). Her research interests are in the application of social technologies in libraries, Personal blogs as online presences

Figure A1.