Blogging as a journalistic practice: A model linking perception, motivation, and behavior

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Abstract

As blogs have become a fixture in today's media environment, growing in number and influence in political communication and (mass) media discourse, research on the subject has proliferated, often emphasizing the high-profile conflicts and controversies at the intersection of blogging and journalism. Less examined, however, is the psychology of everyday citizen bloggers in this context. In studying a randomized sample of US bloggers, we attempt to puzzle out these questions: to what extent do bloggers (1) perceive their work as a form of journalism, and how might such a perception influence (2) their motivations for posting and (3) the topics around which they blog? Most critically, (4) this article constructs a model by which all these antecedents predict whether bloggers behave like professional journalists. Results indicate that bloggers who see their work as a form of journalism are more inclined to inform and influence readers, write about public affairs, and behave as a more traditional journalist.

Only a decade ago, 23 blogs existed on the internet (Blood, 2000). Today, the number is far more than 100 million and counting (Technorati.com, 2009a). Few technologies can boast such an accelerated rate of adoption, or claim to have had such a profound effect on interpersonal discourse (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2010). The topics of blogs – frequently

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modified webpages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence and often present links to related sites (Herring et al., 2007; Lowrey, 2006) – can range widely; some have a narrow focus while others include a mish-mash of subjects. In any case, blogs are interactive, non-synchronous webpages whose host posts messages and invites discussion around a particular issue or theme (see Gil de Zúñiga, 2009). The popularity of blogs has led to a number of academic studies (see Tremayne, 2007) that have explored blog content (e.g. Herring et al., 2007; Papacharissi, 2007), motivations (Huang et al., 2007; Kaye, 2007; Nardi et al., 2004), routines (Lowrey and Latta, 2008; Schmidt, 2007), and perceived credibility (Johnson and Kaye, 2007), among other things. As research on blogging grows, so does the need for empirically testing the relationship between blog use and one's interest and activity in public life, such as political participation online and offline (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2009; Puig and Rojas, 2008). This is especially true as we consider the intersection of blogging and journalism (Lowrey, 2006). While the nature of this nexus has been the source of great debate (Rosen, 2005; Singer, 2007), academic research has yet to fully unpack the notion of blogging as a journalistic practice, particularly from the perspective of the typical American blogger.

This article intends to fill that gap by examining the role of journalistic activities in blogging, primarily as manifest in the perceptions, motivations, and actions of everyday bloggers. Academics have long studied the roles of cognition and motivation in influencing behavior in the communication field (Bandura, 2001; Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Schwarz et al., 1991), particularly within the context of media framing and its effects on society (Hwang et al., 2006; Jasperson et al., 1998; Keum et al., 2005; Scheufele, 1999; Shah et al., 2002). Nevertheless, few scholars have undertaken research on the connection of these elements as they relate to the internet, and more specifically, to social networks sites and bloggers (Gil de Zúñiga, 2007; Gil de Zúñiga and Valenzuela, 2010). While previous research has explored bloggers' motives for blogging and their behaviors in content selection, the links from cognition to motivation and motivation to action are missing. The present research seeks to bridge this gap by investigating a specific path: (1) whether bloggers believe their blogs are a form of journalism, leading to how that perception influences their (2) motivation for blogging and (3) blog topic, and resulting in whether they (4) engage in journalistic acts, such as fact-checking and posting corrections, on their blogs. Through it all, we aim to shed light on a central question: why do some everyday bloggers adopt the norms of professional journalism?

Why bloggers blog: understanding motivation

Motivation is not a concept with a singular definition, but instead is a system of interconnected parts that function together – a foundation of factors that 'energize, direct, and sustain human behavior' (Steers and Porter, 1991). Motivation often arises from unfulfilled needs or wants. The drive to resolve those deficiencies results in the formation of individual goals that lead to action – hence the *cognition-motivation-behavior* pattern found in most studies of human psychology.[1] In essence, one recognizes something he or she desires, obtaining it becomes a goal, and that motivation guides behavior to fulfill the goal. Committing oneself to particular goals helps define self-identity, and maintaining that identity influences behavior (Wicklund and Gollwitzer, 1982). Each act

that reinforces self-identity contributes to an individual's overall sense of purpose and meaning, and this meaning represents the combined outcome of one's perception of the self and the motivations to achieve a goal (Klinger, 1977).

Such 'meaning-making' is evidenced in various aspects of life. For bloggers, it drives their online experience by allowing them to create 'a virtual space where they strategically construct their desired identities' (Jung et al., 2007). How bloggers see themselves and the purpose of their blogs may be related then to what motivates them to produce content. Although the topic of that content can vary widely, studies suggest that most blogs focus on relating personal experiences and thoughts (e.g. Herring et al., 2007; Huang et al., 2007; Papacharissi, 2007). Huang et al. (2007) categorized five motives for blogging: to seek information, to provide commentary, to participate in community forums, to document daily life, and to express oneself. They concluded that information creation and consumption and social interaction are the impetus for all blogging efforts, which is supported by other research (e.g. Kaye, 2005; McKenna and Pole, 2008).

A common thread among research on blog motivation is that bloggers feel the need to gather and disseminate information (Liu et al., 2007). This may begin to explain why some of the blogosphere's most popular sites are political blogs – such as the Huffington Post, Hot Air or Daily Kos – because few topics can generate such ferocious and contentious debates, and given that blogs, fueled by the internet's limitless space for commentary, present themselves as an ideal venue for such political discussion. The link between blogging and politics, particularly at the level of 'A-list' blogs with the highest traffic (Adamic and Glance, 2005), raises questions about the implications for civic life. Gil de Zúñiga and colleagues (2009) have found that blog readers tend to participate in politics more than non-readers. In fact, bloggers whose material primarily focuses on politics and public affairs see themselves as informers, whatever their particular political leanings may be, and believe they can spur their readers to become more engaged in politics (McKenna and Pole, 2008). They seem to be successful in this endeavor; many blog readers have become more politically active since they began reading blogs (Kaye, 2005).

By now, a number of studies in computer science and communications have taken up questions regarding the interrelationships and relative influence of political blogs (e.g. Adamic and Glance, 2005; Tremayne et al., 2006), as well as larger issues related to the growth and evolution of 'recommendation networks' in social spaces online (e.g. Leskovec et al., 2005, 2006; Marlow, 2006). Such research has often involved large-scale network analysis to develop models of influence and structure in the blogosphere and beyond. While certainly useful for its own methodological contributions, this work has neglected to address the psychology of the individual blogger – particularly as it relates to the oft-contentious intersection of blogging and journalism.

Blogging and journalism

The relationship of blogging and journalism has long been an uneasy one. Since the early years of blogging, scholars and practitioners have debated whether bloggers were, or could be, journalists, and whether journalists could or should also become bloggers (e.g. Andrews, 2003; Blood, 2003; Domingo and Heinonen, 2008; Haas, 2005; Lasica, 2003; Lowrey, 2006; Matheson, 2004; Robinson, 2006; Rosen, 2005; Rosenberg, 2009;

Singer, 2005, 2007). Broadly speaking, many bloggers lack the basic traits historically associated with journalists, such as covering beats, reporting with objectivity, and double-checking information (Tremayne, 2007). Instead, bloggers have largely taken on a different role – one of observation, analysis, and interpretation (Andrews, 2003). This role has brought some bloggers greater influence with the mainstream press, as in the political demotion of Senator Trent Lott, the CBS apology in the National Guard memo case and the resignation of *New York Times* Executive Editor Howell Raines over the Jayson Blair affair. These events are often cited as signals of the effect that blogging can have on mainstream media: scrutinizing their reporting, holding their feet to the fire, and keeping stories alive until large news organizations pay more attention (McKenna and Pole, 2008).

Early claims that blogs were a 'new genre of journalism' (Wall, 2005; cf., Robinson, 2006) gave way to the recognition that some blogs were doing journalism only some of the time (Blood, 2003; Domingo and Heinonen, 2008). Much of this debate hinges on how one defines 'journalism' (Deuze, 2005; Kaufhold et al., 2010; O'Sullivan and Heinonen, 2008). Lasica says it refers to 'individuals playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, sorting, analyzing and disseminating news and information – a task once reserved almost exclusively to the news media' (2003: 71). He and others (e.g. Blood, 2003) argue that the *practice* of journalism, not one's employment as a professional, determines who is a journalist, and that blogging should be seen as part of a larger news ecology. To be sure, however, few blogs cover news or public affairs, and most bloggers do not consider themselves 'journalists' (Lenhart and Fox, 2006). Nevertheless, even while the issue of bloggers behaving as journalists remains an open debate, the distinctions between professional and 'citizen' journalist appear to be blurring online: major blogs on politics appear to complement (as opposed to simply criticize) mainstream media (Reese et al., 2007); top blogs such as the Huffington Post fashion themselves as 'internet newspapers'; and some larger blog organizations have hired experienced reporters (Glaser, 2008), to say nothing of the explosion of blogs hosted by traditional news media (see Domingo and Heinonen, 2008).[2]

This blending of blog and mainstream writers may be due in part to bloggers' adherence to some norms of journalistic ethics (Cenite et al., 2009; Kuhn, 2007; Singer, 2007).[3] Bloggers seem to value accuracy, for many of them routinely make corrections to stories when alerted by readers or when receiving new information (Harper, 2005); they also put great emphasis on attributing their source material (Cenite et al., 2009). Impartiality, however, is another matter. Political bloggers often represent a certain point of view and discuss it with their readers. They do not create a firewall between news and opinion, which mirrors the trend of partisanship embraced by many in the European press and is reminiscent of the journalism practiced at American newspapers from before the nation's founding through the turn of the 20th century (Harper, 2005). This type of 'reporting' seems to be what blog readers expect and blog writers provide. Blog readers tend to look to blogs for expanded news and commentary, comparing that information to what they find in the traditional media (Kaye, 2005). This is especially true for those interested in politics, suggesting that they rely on bloggers to act as informers and watchdogs – two roles held exclusively by the traditional press until the rise of the internet.

Perceptions and practice in journalism

The research on blogging and journalism has served to highlight where they connect and how they differ, from the least-institutional 'citizen blogs' that challenge journalism from the outside, to the in-house 'media blogs' that are transforming journalism from the inside (Domingo and Heinonen, 2008: 7). However, this growing body of research has tended to privilege the perspective of *journalistic* bloggers, at the expense of better understanding the *everyday* citizen bloggers whose posts populate much of the blogosphere. Perhaps that is because few (if any) studies have been able to examine everyday bloggers in a randomized, systematic way. This study intends to address that void in the literature.

Moreover, this essay isn't merely a descriptive picture of the 'typical' US blogger (Lenhart and Fox, 2006). Rather, this study draws on an interdisciplinary set of theoretical frameworks to examine the interrelation of *perceptions* and *practices* of everyday bloggers, at the individual level of analysis. Psychology research opens a pathway for thinking about motivations, and how certain motives lead to certain actions; meanwhile, communication research on journalistic norms and values, coupled with an understanding of participatory media production (Deuze et al., 2007; Domingo et al., 2008) and its challenges to journalistic authority (Carlson, 2007; Lowrey, 2006; Robinson, 2006; Singer, 2007), allows us to examine the extent to which journalistic perceptions and motivations contribute to 'acts of journalism' among everyday bloggers.

Precisely what constitutes a *journalistic perception* in the current climate could be hard to identify, given the fluidity of journalism at this liminal moment between tradition and change (Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2009). Indeed, as O'Sullivan and Heinonen have found, journalists seem almost caught between two worlds: they increasingly feel like net-progressives, and yet 'there seems to be a prevailing "principle of continuity" in journalism' as professionals seek to hold fast to the practices and patterns (such as those on the 'print' side of newspapers) from which they have long drawn status and legitimacy (2008: 369). This latter point, however, highlights the enduring durability of so-called 'traditional' journalistic values, and thus encourages us to consider the degree to which citizen bloggers, operating outside the institutional jurisdiction of journalism, *perceive* their work as journalism and *practice* as such.

Hypotheses

Based on this discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed:

> H1. Perception of one's blog as a form of journalism will predict motivation to inform and influence readers, as opposed to other motivations.

Perception is the fundamental building block that leads to motivation to act. In this case, the literature suggests that bloggers are driven by their desire to communicate information and express themselves as a way to connect with others. Throughout the various studies of bloggers' motivations, collecting and delivering information was a central theme. At its most basic level, journalism peddles information. For blogs, too,

information is a commodity, and one that is largely accompanied by commentary designed to express personal opinion and influence others.

> H2. Perception of one's blog as a form of journalism, coupled with a motivation to inform and influence readers, will predict blogging about public affairs, as opposed to other topics.

The blogosphere is a rich source of diverse opinion and in perhaps no field is that so great as blogs concerning public affairs, politics, government, and related news. These types of blogs, generally referred to as public affairs blogs, are among the most frequently viewed and linked blogs (Technorati.com, 2009b). Compared to diary-like 'personal blogs', these non-personal issue blogs tend to be more journalistic in orientation (see Cenite et al., 2009); their primary mode is one of information-sharing, which also encompasses expressing opinions so as to influence others' beliefs and actions (McKenna and Pole, 2008).

> H3. All previous antecedents – perception of one's blog as a form of journalism, motivation to inform and influence, and blogging about public affairs – will predict bloggers' engaging in journalistic behaviors.

Journalism as a profession promotes certain tenets of 'good' journalism, such as the practices of verifying facts and running corrections. While much discussion has taken up the blogs-as-journalism question, little research has examined the potential connection of bloggers' perception of their work being a form of journalism with how that perception influences their motivation to blog and choice of blog topic, and ultimately guides how they behave in constructing their identity as a blogger and as a deontological journalist.

> RQ1. To what extent are the predicting relationships previously hypothesized – that is, (1) perception of one's blog as a form of journalism, (2) motivation to influence and inform, and (3) blogging about public affairs, all explaining bloggers' engaging in journalistic behaviors – direct explanatory paths or mediated effects?

Based on the hypotheses presented above, the following theoretical schema could be developed (see Figure 1). This diagram also serves as a theoretical proposition by which an empirical structural test is in order. This structural analysis should shed some light on the direct and indirect effects of how bloggers' perceptions, motivations and the topics they write about ultimately explain the degree to which they adhere to normative journalistic practices.

Method

This study uses data gathered by the Pew Internet and American Life Project (PEW).[4] The nonprofit organization's data have been analyzed in a number of contexts by social science researchers exploring the internet's impact on social life (Beaudoin, 2008; Cho et al., 2003; Ono and Zavodny, 2003). PEW uses the standard list-assisted random-digit
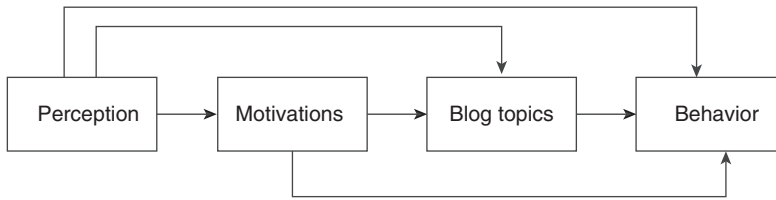
Figure 1. Structure of the theoretical model proposed

dialing method to ensure representation for listed and unlisted numbers – thus producing samples that represent all continental US telephone households (Bachmann et al., 2010).

The present study examines data collected through phone interviews with 233 self-described bloggers, 18 and older, who had been identified in previous PEW surveys. The interviews were conducted from 5 July 2005 to 17 February 2006; during that period, as many as 10 attempts were made to reach every sampled telephone number. PEW calculated a response rate of 71 percent for these callbacks to bloggers; response rates from the original surveys ranged from 28.4 percent to 34.6 percent. The margin of error for the complete data set on bloggers is ± 6.7 percent with respect to weighted data. PEW's results are weighted to compensate for nonresponse and match national parameters for sex, age, education, and race, all of which are US census definitions.[5]

The bloggers surveyed tended to be younger (with 54% under 30) than internet users generally (24% under 30), with a higher proportion of males (54%) than is typical for web users (49%). But bloggers (60% White non-Hispanic) were also found to be more ethnically diverse than internet users overall (74% White). These bloggers were highly connected, with 79 percent having a broadband link at home, compared with 62 percent of all internet users. About 54 percent of these bloggers said that they had never published their writing or media creations anywhere else. Some 95 percent of them accessed news online, 77 percent had created content online (e.g. photos, videos, stories and artwork), and 64 percent went online several times per day at home; all of those numbers are far higher – in some cases nearly three times as high – than similar categorizations for all internet users.

Measures

Control variables

Five standard demographic control variables were used as an initial control block in our regression model (Gil de Zúñiga, 2002; Rojas et al., 2010): respondents' *sex* (58.5% male; 41.8% female); *age* (median group: 25–34), with a distribution as follows: 18–24 (33.1%), 25–34 (22.7%), 35–44 (18.7%), 45–54 (14.2%), 55–64 (8.8%), 65 and older (2.5%); *level of education* (evaluated with a four-point scale: less than high school, high school incomplete, high school graduate, or college/vocational training after high school; *income* (measured on a nine-point scale in which the median was $40,000–$50,000); and *ethnicity* (White, Black, Hispanic, or Other).

Independent variables

Three sets of independent variables were deployed in our regression analyses. The first was perceiving one's blog as a form of journalism (perception); the second was a set of motivations for blogging (motivations); and the third related to the primary subject of one's blog (topic).

Perception

Perception was measured with a single item asking respondents whether they considered their blog a form of journalism (yes = 34%). The variable was dummy-coded (0 = no, 1 = yes).

Motivations

A factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted to identify underlying dimensions of motivations for blogging (see Table 1).[6] Each of these factors was converted into an additive scale; before creating the scales, the items were recoded so that higher values expressed stronger motivations. The three-item scale for *Informing and Influencing* (M = 2.68, SD = 1.98) had a mean inter-item correlation of 0.444 (ranging from 0 to 6). The three-item scale for *Expressing Self* (M = 3.44, SD = 1.81) had a mean inter-item correlation of 0.322 (ranging from 0 to 6). The two-item scale for *Bridging and Bonding* (M = 1.63, SD = 1.23) was somewhat less reliable (mean inter-item $r = 0.153$, range: 0–4).

Table 1. Factor analysis of motivations for blogging

	I Informing and Influencing	II Expressing Self	III Bridging and Bonding
To motivate others to action	**.822**	.009	−.054
To influence the way people think	**.764**	.262	−.183
To share practical knowledge or skills with others	**.756**	−.020	.337
To express yourself creatively	.207	**.792**	−.145
To entertain people	−.035	**.690**	.218
To document personal experiences and share them with others	.048	**.682**	.278
To stay in touch with friends/family	−.172	.084	**.758**
To network or meet new people	.189	.176	**.651**
Eigenvalues	2.276	1.585	1.053
% Variance	28.5	19.8	13.2

Notes: Extraction method: principal component analysis. Rotation method: varimax with Kaiser normalization. Primary loading of a variable on a factor is indicated by boldface type. N = 233

Topic

This block addressed the primary subject of blogs. When asked, 'What would you say is the main topic of your blog?' survey respondents could choose only one main topic. The 10 most commonly identified topics, which together accounted for 82 percent of all valid responses, were recoded into the following four categories: *Public affairs* (combining 'Politics and government' and 'General news and current events', this category included 16.8% of all responses); *My life* (for those who chose the category 'My life and personal experiences', which accounted for 38.7%); *Niche interests* (composed of 'Sports', 'Business', 'Technology', 'Religion/Spirituality/Faith', 'A particular hobby' and 'Health', which combined accounted for 19.3%); and *Entertainment* (i.e. movies, music, MP3 blogs), which as a single item included 6.8 percent of all responses. Each of these four new items was dummy-coded (0 = blog does not belong to this category, 1 = blog belongs to this category).

Criterion variables

As suggested by our hypotheses section, we used three criterion variables: motivation to inform and influence blog readers (H1); blogging about public affairs (H2); and engaging in journalistic behaviors (H3); informing and influencing already has been discussed; motivations for blogging were employed both as a dependent variable (H1) and later as an independent variable in H2 and H3. likewise, public affairs, described above, was dependent in H2 and independent in H3. journalistic behaviors, however, was constructed as a dependent variable only. In addition, as stated in RQ1, we would like to test our theoretical expression (see Figure 1) via structural equation modeling analysis.

Journalistic behaviors

This was measured with an additive index of six items measuring respondents' frequency in engaging in the following journalism-like behaviors: quote other people or media sources directly; post corrections to something you have written; discuss current events or news; include links to original source material you have cited or used in some way; spend extra time trying to verify facts you want to include in your post; and get permission to post copyrighted material. This new construct was recoded so higher values expressed more frequent engagement in such activities (M = 8.14, SD = 5.09, range: 0–18, Cronbach's α = 0.83).

Results

Before formally examining our hypothesized relationships, zero-order and partial correlations were calculated for the key independent and dependent variables together (see Table 2).

Journalistic behaviors was positively correlated with perceiving one's blog as a form of journalism ($r = 0.350$, $p<.001$), being motivated to influence and inform ($r = 0.234$, $p<.001$), and blogging primarily about public affairs ($r = 0.248$, $p<.001$). This

Table 2. Zero-order Pearson correlations and partial-order Pearson correlations

	Engaging in journalistic behaviors	Perceiving blog as journalism	Informing and Influencing	Expressing Self	Bridging and Bonding	Public Affairs (blog topic)	My Life (blog topic)	Niche Interests (blog topic)	Entertainment (blog topic)
Engaging in journalistic behaviors	—	.350***	.539***	.250***	.001	.378***	-.354***	.087	.116
Perceiving blog as journalism	.353***	—	.234***	.204***	-.018	.248***	-.147**	-.023	.074
Informing and Influencing	.572***	.242***	—	.211**	.040	.181**	-.277***	.166**	-.075
Expressing Self	.355***	.335***	.222**	—	.275***	-.013	.171**	-.127*	.120*
Bridging and Bonding	.128	-.021	.001	.261***	—	-.095	.237***	-.125**	.098
Public Affairs (blog topic)	.329***	.238***	.160*	.020	.040	—	-.357***	-.220***	-.122**
My Life (blog topic)	-.273***	-.041	-.324***	.005	.086	-.260***	—	-.388**	-.215**
Niche Interests (blog topic)	.011	-.031	.085	-.046	-.034	-.323***	-.299***	—	-.133**
Entertainment (blog topic)	.039	-.053	-.068	.202**	.153*	-.113	-.153*	-.135*	—

Notes: Top diagonal shows zero-order correlation coefficients. The bottom diagonals are partial Pearson correlation coefficients controlling for sex, ethnicity, income, age and education. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$; $N = 233$; $df = 226$ (for partial correlations)

relationship held its statistical significance after controlling for demographic variables of sex, ethnicity, income, age and education: journalism behaviors ($r = 0.353$, $p<.001$), motivation to influence and inform ($r = 0.572$, $p<.001$), blogging about public affairs ($r = 0.238$, $p<.001$).

With regard to the control variables in our regression analyses, it is worth noting that age was positively related to informing and influencing ($\beta = 0.261$, $p<.001$), indicating that younger people are less motivated to influence and inform readers – while at the same time more motivated to express themselves ($\beta = -.149$, $p<.05$; see Table 3). In Table 4, we find that women were more likely to blog about their personal life ($\beta = 0.176$, $p<.01$), while men were more inclined to discuss niche interests and hobbies ($\beta = -.254$, $p<.001$). Furthermore, in the same table we see that age and education were related to blogging about public affairs and one's personal life. Those older ($\beta = 0.241$, $p<.001$) and more educated ($\beta = 0.125$, $p<.05$) were more likely to cover news and politics, while those younger ($\beta = -.294$, $p<.001$) and less educated ($\beta = -.181$, $p<.01$) were more likely to blog about themselves and their experiences. Finally, from Table 5 we note that being male ($\beta = -.150$, $p<.05$) and better educated ($\beta = 0.216$, $p<.01$) were predictors of engaging in journalistic behaviors.

To test our hypotheses, we ran a series of hierarchal regressions. Control variables (i.e. demographics) were included in the first block, after which the following independent variables were introduced: perception toward one's blog as journalism (second block), motivations for blogging (third block), and blog topic (fourth block).

The first model explained 17.8 percent of the variance of informing and influencing, with journalism perception accounting for 6.5 percent of incremental variance (see Table 3). A perception of one's blog as a form of journalism ($\beta = 0.261$, $p<.001$) contributed positively and significantly to the criterion variable. However, bloggers' tendency to report this perception also predicts a motivation to express themselves. Thus, this

Table 3. Hierarchical regression models predicting motivations for blogging (H1)

	Informing and Influencing	Expressing Self	Bridging and Bonding
Block 1: Demographics			
Gender (female)	−.099	−.020	.106
Ethnicity (white)	.020	.044	−.082
Income	.073	−.087	−.057
Age	.297***	−.149*	−.018
Education	−.025	.112	−.159**
Incremental R² (%)	11.3***	3.3	5.3**
Block 2: Perception			
Perceiving blog as a form of journalism	.261***	.331***	−.013
Incremental R² (%)	6.5***	10.4***	0.0
Total R² (%)	17.8***	13.7***	5.3**

Notes: Cell entries are standardized regression coefficients (Betas). P-values with two-tailed significance: *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$; $N = 305$

Table 4. Hierarchical regression models predicting primary topic for blog (H2)

	Public affairs	My life	Niche interests	Entertainment
Block 1: Demographics				
Gender (female)	−.001	.176**	−.254***	−.048
Ethnicity (white)	−.083	.046	.028	.021
Income	.047	−.063	.174*	−.185**
Age	.241***	−.294***	.104	−.001
Education	.125*	−.181**	−.001	.065
Incremental R² (%)	10.3***	19.6***	12.1***	3.5
Block 2: Perception				
Perceiving blog as a form of journalism	.244***	−.083	−.035	.037
Incremental R² (%)	5.6***	0.6	0.1	0.1
Block 3: Motivations				
Informing and Influencing	.088	−.262***	.108	−.072
Expressing Self	−.039	.115*	−.096	.137
Bridging and Bonding	.000	.082	−.088	.160**
Incremental R² (%)	0.7	7.0***	2.5*	5.1**
Total R² (%)	16.6***	27.4***	14.8***	8.7**

Notes: Cell entries are standardized regression coefficients (Betas). P-values with two-tailed significance: *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001; N = 295

Table 5. Hierarchical regression models predicting the extent to which bloggers engage in journalistic behaviors (H3)

	Journalistic behaviors
Block 1: Demographics	
Gender (female)	−.150*
Ethnicity (white)	−.041
Income	.050
Age	.084
Education	.216**
Incremental R² (%)	9.2***
Block 2: Perception	
Perceiving blog as a form of journalism	.350***
Incremental R² (%)	11.3***
Block 3: Motivations	
Informing and Influencing	.495***
Expressing Self	.156**
Bridging and Bonding	.088
Incremental R² (%)	26.3***
Block 4: Primary topic of blog	
Public Affairs	.233***
My Life	−.046
Niche Interests	.059
Entertainment	.055
Incremental R² (%)	4.8***
Total R² (%)	**51.7*****

Notes: Cell entries are standardized regression coefficients (Betas). P-values with two-tailed significance: *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001; N = 232

finding partially supports Hypothesis 1: perception of one's blog as a form of journalism predicts having a motivation to influence and inform readers. In other words, the more people see their personal blog as a type of journalism, the more likely they will be motivated to blog because of their desire to share knowledge and shape opinion. Additionally, we note that our second model explained 13.7 percent of the variance of expressing self, with journalism perception accounting for 10.4 percent of incremental variance – another positive and significant finding ($\beta = 0.331$, $p<.001$), and not one initially hypothesized. Finally, in the third model of Table 3, the variance of bridging and bonding was not significantly explained by journalism perception.

Regarding our second hypothesis – that a perception of one's blog as a form of journalism and a motivation to influence and inform readers would predict blogging about public affairs – our model explained 16.6 percent of the variance of public affairs, with perception (5.6%) and motivations (0.7%) explaining some of the incremental variance (see Table 4). In this case, only journalism perception ($\beta = 0.224$, $p<.001$) was positively related to changes in the criterion variable. These results do not provide support for Hypothesis 2, according to which both a perception of one's blog as a form of journalism and motivation to influence and inform readers would be positively connected to blogging about public affairs topics. These findings do, however, provide additional support for the importance of perceiving one's blog as journalism as a correlate of blogging primarily about news, politics and current events. Additionally, we find that while journalism perception was not a significant predictor of other blog topics, informing and influencing negatively predicted blogging about one's personal life, perhaps reinforcing the outward (as opposed to self-focused inward) nature of the influence-and-inform motivation.

Finally, regarding our third hypothesis – that perceiving one's blog as a form of journalism, being motivated to influence and inform, and blogging about public affairs would predict bloggers' engaging in journalistic behaviors – our model explained 51.7 percent of the variance, with perception (11.3%), motivation (26.3%), and blog topic (4.8%) accounting for varying degrees of incremental variance (see Table 5). As predicted in Hypothesis 3, journalism perception ($\beta = 0.350$, $p<.001$), informing and influencing ($\beta = 0.495$, $p<.001$), and public affairs blogging ($\beta = 0.223$, $p<.001$) all contributed positively and significantly to the changes in the criterion variable of journalism behaviors. These findings provide evidence that the more bloggers see their blog as journalism, are motivated to inform and influence readers, and create content about news, politics, and events – as that happens, in concert – the more likely they are to engage in journalism-like behaviors.

Finally, we tested our proposed model to assess whether the hypothesized predicting relationships were only direct effects or also have indirect effects on our behavioral dependent variable (in this case, the exogenous variable). The structural model equation test indicated that the main effects were mediated as our hierarchical regressions show. Additionally, there was a direct explanatory path from the motivation that bloggers have to influence and inform others and adhere to journalist practices ($\beta = 0.45$). Also, the perception of one's blog as a form of journalism predicted the topic of the blog in a direct form ($\beta = 0.16$). All the mediating paths were also statistically significant (see Figure 2). The goodness-of-fit model yielded robust and reliable measures when compared to the
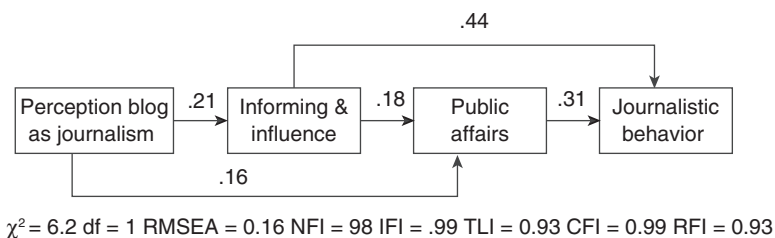
χ² = 6.2 df = 1 RMSEA = 0.16 NFI = 98 IFI = .99 TLI = 0.93 CFI = 0.99 RFI = 0.93

Figure 2. Structural equation modeling results for the theoretical model proposed

baseline model and other competing models. Nevertheless, the structure was initially constructed not in the light of these results but rather in the theoretical proposition we intended to test ($\chi^2 = 6.2$, df = 1, RMSEA = 0.16, NFI = 98, IFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.93, CFI = 0.99, RFI = 0.93).

Discussion

Results indicate that having a better understanding of the perceptions, motivations and topical focus of bloggers can help us clarify the blurring intersection online of blogging and journalism. As bloggers perceive their work as journalism, feel motivated to influence and inform, and blog about public affairs, they move from merely seeing their blog as a form of journalism to actually engage in journalistic behaviors, such as quoting sources, checking their facts, and posting corrections. These findings thus raise questions about the role of journalism in blogging – as well as the role of bloggers in journalism. The growing influence of blogs on users has sparked a controversy regarding the role of journalism in the new media landscape. Many observers, particularly journalists working in the mainstream media, have argued for a marked distinction between blogging and journalism, linking the former to freewheeling opinion and the latter to verifiable information (Regan, 2003).

We put this claim to an empirical test. This article provides evidence supporting the link that certain perceptions and motivations of bloggers lead to journalistic behaviors in their blogging practices. We first tested if perception of one's blogs as a form of journalism predicts having a motivation to share information and influence blog readers' opinions. The perception was found to positively predict the motivation. We then tested if the perception and motivation elements predict blogging about public affairs. Results indicated that the journalism motivation was not found to predict blogging about public affairs, while journalism perception did positively predict it. Findings provided partial support for the second hypothesis. Finally, we tested that our three key independent variables – journalism perception, motivation to influence and inform, and public affairs blogging – would predict bloggers' adoption of typical journalistic behaviors. All three explanatory variables were found to positively predict journalistic behaviors. This supports the last hypothesis. The entire theoretical model was then evaluated by structural equation modeling, yielding clear results on how to interpret the predicting relationship between bloggers' perception, motivation to blog and behavior as normative journalists.

Taken together, these findings indicate that the classic model of *perception-motivation-behavior* can validly explain a psychological mechanism through which bloggers adhere

to journalistic practices. Bloggers' journalism perception eventually leads them to act as journalists via activation of a motivation to inform and influence readers. The results lend support for the claim that blogging is not so much freewheeling opinion as about producing journalism, so long as bloggers regard their blogging as a form of journalism first. This perception explained a significant proportion of variability in the regression of journalistic motivation, and the perception and the motivation together contributed to explain a significant and large proportion of variability in journalistic behaviors. Furthermore, blogging about public affairs topics also explained a significant proportion of variability in the regression. People who view blogging as a form of journalism tend to have journalistic motivations and follow professional journalistic norms, in particular when they blog about public affairs.

The results also revealed interesting points for discussion. Findings indicate a deviation of bloggers from traditional journalism to some extent. The journalism perception was found to predict motivation to express one's self, which is not a journalistic norm in the conventional sense but may nonetheless be considered by bloggers as a form of journalism. Further, the motivation of self-expression also was found to predict journalistic behaviors. The findings indicate that bloggers do not necessarily require journalistic motivations to engage in journalistic practices when blogging. While some adopt journalistic behaviors through a motivation to inform and influence others, others do so to express themselves. Thus, in certain online settings, some people practice journalism with a not-so-journalistic motivation. This suggests that online journalism – in particular, blogging – has different characteristics that somehow diverge from the more traditional media.

The findings are further related to a distinctive characteristic of blogging. It has been observed that blogs give more importance to opinions and personal interpretation of public affairs than do the legacy news media. Even the most journalism-oriented bloggers could say that they blog to express themselves creatively or to document personal experiences and share them – answers treated as non-journalistic motivations here in this study. Hence, a journalism blog is very likely to function as a space for strong opinions, but perhaps in ways that are consistent with the deontological norms of traditional journalism.

It should be noted that we had a relatively small sample ($N = 233$); to some extent the survey design may limit the generalizability of our conclusions, particularly because this work is based on secondary data. Moreover, the US-centric nature of the data presents an inherent limitation, inasmuch as this data might not be readily generalized to bloggers around the globe. Nevertheless, as recent work has pointed out (e.g. Boczkowski, 2009; Reese, 2008), journalists are becoming more aware of and reflexive to their colleagues' work in the digital age, contributing to the spread of certain professional norms and practices in the developed world. Therefore, at the intersection of journalism and blogging, this study contributes to a wider understanding of everyday bloggers and their engagement with news behaviors. In saying this, we recognize that the very notion of what *is* journalism can be an ideological construction (Deuze, 2005); in this study, we operationalized the definition of journalistic behaviors based on a traditional professionalism well established in the US journalistic community (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2007). Observers might suggest that bloggers, by contrast, would define 'journalism' quite differently. However, if that were the case, this article would have found that those who perceive their

blog as a form of journalism act would also *deviate* from more traditional journalistic behaviors – when, in fact, they did not, as our analysis found.

We first hypothesized only linear relationships between key variables, not taking into consideration rather complex relationships such as mediation and moderation (see Baron and Kenny, 1986). Findings indicate that journalistic behaviors were predicted by blogging about public affairs and by the journalistic motivation of informing and influencing the public. However, the journalistic motivation was not found to predict blogging about public affairs, controlling for other demographic and key variables. A possible explanation for this situation is that the selection of blog topic is another journalistic behavior. This was another notable issue we tried to tackle in the analysis by putting the theoretical structure to test. Further results indicated that the motivation to inform the audience predicted both bloggers' behaving as professional journalists (direct path) and also posting about public affairs and current events (mediated path), which in turn also predicts adhering to journalistic practices.

Thus, both direct and mediated effects take place. All of the hypothesized relationships tested by our hierarchical regressions function as mediated paths going from perceiving the blog as a form of journalism, to informing and influencing the audience, to covering public affairs and current events, and ultimately, to adhering to journalistic practices; in addition, indirect effects from the motivations to influence and inform the public also predict behaving as a journalist. This finding also helped to clarify our assertion that the classic *perception-motivation-behavior* model explains well the hazy relationship of citizens emerging as producers of journalism – that is, bloggers being journalists. Nonetheless, there is an important caveat that relates to the nature of our data: all the responses are based on bloggers' self-opinion. Thorough content analyses of all blogs investigating whether bloggers actually engage in the practices they report performing would be best. Obviously, this reflects a suggestion for future research.

Blog journalism has some characteristics of traditional journalism while also deviating from its conventions (e.g. blogs' strong expression of opinion). Our findings provide explanation for both the convergence and divergence of blogging from traditional journalism. In this light, our study contributes to advancing knowledge about the nature of blogging by clarifying a psychological mechanism of bloggers who in fact behave like journalists.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1   It should be noted, however, that some research collapses perception and motivation into a single category because of their inherent similarity and the difficulty in parsing them apart, often referring to the combination as perceptions or motivations and, sometimes, attitudes or beliefs (Bandura, 1997; Cornelius, 1996; Glasman and Albarracin, 2006) This results in a pattern that associates only one of these elements to behavior, such as motivation-behavior, perception-behavior, or attitude-behavior.

2   Perhaps typifying this blurring line in blogging and journalism, Joshua Micah Marshall, a former traditional-media journalist who started the Talking Points Memo blog, won a Polk Award in 2008 for his blog's reporting on the politically motivated dismissals of US attorneys.

3   The Society of Professional Journalists lists four principles in its code of ethics: seek truth and report it, minimize harm, act independently, and be accountable (1996). The American Society of Newspaper Editors *Statement of Principles* encompasses responsibility, freedom of the press, independence, truth and accuracy, impartiality, and fair play (1996).

4   The authors would like to make clear that Pew Internet and American Life Project bears no responsibility for the interpretations or conclusions reached in this study.

5   Further details about the sample can be found at http://www.pewinternet.org/report_display. asp?r=186

6   Factor 1 was called *Informing and Influencing* because the variables that loaded high on this primary factor connoted an outward-oriented sharing of knowledge and shaping of opinions. Factor 2 was labeled *Expressing Self* because its variables dealt with creative and personal expression and entertainment. Factor 3 was called *Bridging and Bonding* because its variables spoke of forging new social connections and maintaining existing bonds with family and friends.

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