Perceived Credibility, Loneliness, and Self-disclosure on Blogs

by

Kevin Lo Chun Ho

Graduation Project

Presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of
The Chinese University of Hong Kong
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Science in
New Media

Supervisor:
Prof. Louis Leung

School of Journalism & Communication
The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Hong Kong
April 2006

Perceived Credibility, Loneliness, and Self-disclosure on Blogs

Abstract

The purpose of this exploratory study is to investigate the degree to which bloggers view blogs credible, examine the effects of perceived credibility of blogs and degree of loneliness experienced by blogger on blogs usage, and explore the relationships between the levels of self disclosure in blogs in five dimensions (i.e., intent, amount, positive-negative, control of depth, and honesty) and the perceived credibility of blogs and loneliness of bloggers. Data from a convenient sample of 403 respondents, aged 10-30, show that most bloggers strongly or moderately agreed that the content of blogs are complete, believable, accurate and biased. Contrary to what was hypothesized, results also show that perceived credibility of blogs and loneliness of bloggers were not related to level of blogs use, but were found significantly linked to different dimensions of self-disclosure in blogs. People who judged the content of blogs credible tended to be more intimate, more honest, more aware of what they were disclosing, and disclosed greater amount about themselves in their blogs. Similarly, the lonelier the bloggers, the more negative, the less honest, less aware and less amount in the self-disclosure of themselves. In addition, people who were young, the more personal and intimate, and the more they were aware of their disclosure were predictive of levels of blogs writing in days per week. Besides, bloggers who were consciously aware of their disclosure tended to be better educated and less lonely. Those who disclosed more about themselves appeared to be older, less lonely, and preceived blogs to be credible. Furthermore, older non-students who are less lonely tended to disclose more positive about themselves in blogs. Young male students bloggers who perceived blog as credible, tended to reveal intimate and personal things about themselves. Finally, those who reported always honest in their self-disclosure in blogs were generally older and perceived the contents in blogs to be credible. Implications of this research will be discussed.

Perceived Credibility, Loneliness, and Self-disclosure on Blogs

Introduction

Blog (or weblog) is a hierarchy of text, images, media objects and data, arranged chronologically, that can be viewed in an HTML browser.[1] Latest Nielsen/Netcast survey says blogs increased from estimate 30,000 in 1998 to 29.3 million visitors in 2005[2] and 80,000 blogs are created everyday in the world.[3] Through the format of blog, it is possible for users to share their day-to-day experience, thoughts and poems to a mass audience and at the same time audience can also response to the blogs. Tweney (2002) describes blogging as "a vehicle for personal expression because it is an easy way to capture, comment on, and keep abreast of interesting bits of information."[4]

Blogs nowadays can be categorized into two basic types: personal blogs and portal-type blogs. Personal blogs (or online diary) are written primarily by a single person and can range from articulated essays to "trivial thought bubbles". Portal-type blogs can serve to aggregate content by offering links to personal blogs, news stories, discussion threads, etc.[5]

Some studies show that blog in the US was initially used as online diary that users can write on personal issues. It is believed to be a safe way to expose ones idea or personal experiences without the fear of criticism.[6] However after the event of 9/11, more people offer the news and information through the blogs. Blogs nowadays have become the alternative source of information other than online newspapers. During the wartime in Iraq, people around the world who switched on their computer to read the blog written by a "Baghdad Blogger" called Salam Pax rather than turned on the television set,[7] they believed that Salam Pax gave them an in-depth information that ignored by most traditional media.

Drezner (2004) states that blogs function as a rare combination of distributed expertise, real time collective response to breaking news, and public opinion barometer.[8] Also Ryan

(2004) says Blog users are politically interested and active, while their numbers are small, their influence may exceed their readership.[9] Therefore the blogs are influencing U.S. politics, the top five political blogs together attract over half a million visitors per day. Blogs increasingly serve as a media for ordinary citizen to express their views on international relations and influence a politicians' decision making.

The blogosphere (the all-encompassing term to describe the universe of blogs) in Hong Kong is that the majority of the blog users are students (80%). About 70% of them write blog for personal purposes and only 30% of the users share their view of politics and social issues.[10] It shows that blog in Hong Kong in this stage is still mainly used as online diary (personal blog). It is a worthy goal to see how people think the information of the content of blog is credible, and predict when there are more political blogs, the power on the politics and social issues will be. Also by studying the activities of bloggings, it can help to understand whether blog can provide an alternative way for lonely people to disclose themselves to others.

This study will investigate (1) to what degree will blog users view blogs as credible, (2) examine the effects of perceived credibility of blogs and degree of loneliness experienced by blogger on blogs usage, and (3) explore the relationships between the levels of self disclosure in blogs in five dimensions (i.e., intended disclosure, amount, positive-negative, control of depth, and honesty-accuracy) and the perceived credibility of blogs and loneliness of bloggers.

Literature Review

Media Credibility

Media Credibility is generally defined as the worthiness of being believed, and it is often measured as a multidimensional construct consisting of believability, accuracy, trustworthiness, bias, and completeness.[11]

Research has shown that internet as a whole should be judged as a credible source of news and information that more users have turn to news sites sponsored by traditional media.[12] The question remains on the level of credibility should place in certain online communication media such as e-mail, instant messenger and blogs. Critics suggested that the Web should be judged as a credible source of information since anyone could post information on the blog, and these sites created by individuals spouting their views often appeared as credible as those hosted by reliable sources.[13] However, according to the 2003 Pew Research Center for the People and the Press Internet Survey, only 4 percent of online Americans refer to blogs for information and opinions that they believe such sites lacked editorial oversight and did not have the professional and social pressures to provide accurate and unbiased information.

Johnson and Kaye (2004) found that people relied on the internet for news and information were more likely to judge blog as credible and because they provide more depth and more thoughtful analysis than is available in other media.[14] Cristol (2003) states that users may find blogs more credible since they are independent rather than controlled by corporate interests, bloggers may discuss issues traditional media shy away from because they might hurt corporations. However, a leading blogger, Sean-Paul Kelley of the Agonist was accused of stealing information from a subscription intelligence service and posting it to his own blog[15]. It remains an argument against that the information of blogs are provided by bloggers are not personal at all. On the other hand, research also stated that a blog is "a disclosure of the blogger's biases" that they do not undergo editing to avoid misinformation.[16] However Balkin (2004) pointed out that the blogosphere has some built-in correction mechanisms for ideological bias, as bloggers who write about political subject cannot avoid addressing arguments made by people with different point of views.[17]

In Hong Kong, since the blogosphere is not mature enough when compared with other region, the following research question and hypothesis are posed to understand the

blogosphere in Hong Kong:

RQ$_1$:   To what degree will bloggers view the content of blogs credible?

H$_1$:   Bloggers who score high on perceived blog credibility will read blogs and write

blogs more often.

Loneliness

Loneliness can be defined as a chronic, distressful mental state whereby an individual

feels estranged from or rejected by peers and is starved for the emotional intimacy found in

relationships and mutual activity.[18] Peplau and Perlman (1982) stated that feelings of

loneliness involve the feelings of isolation, feelings of disconnectedness, and feelings of not

belonging. These feelings in turn are thought to reflect the discrepancy between one's

desired and one's actual relationships.[19] Loneliness, however, has been found to be

associated with "more time spent alone, fewer date, fewer close friends, and less time spent

with close friends."[20, 21, 22] Peplau (1982) stated that lonely people usually have negative

self-evaluation to themselves and often indicate that they are in social deficit.[23] In addition,

social perceptions of lonely people are generally unfavorable. They are often hesitated to

communicate with others and disclose their feeling in FTF communications.[24]

With the explosive growth of CMC use and the variety available, there is a clear

potential for relationship initiation and formation (Scharlott & Christ, 1995).[25] Blogs

provide a unique opportunity for a non-face-to-face communication mode. Stritzke,

Nguyen, and Durkin (2004) state that it may be more conducive for some individuals,

particularly shy people, to interact in an online environment as opposed to traditional FTF

interactions.[26] Stritzke, et al. (2004) has also found that the absence of verbal and

non-verbal cues (e.g., eye contact, facial expressions, and pauses in speech) in an online

environment might provide a "safeness" for shy individuals where in turn make them less

shy. This potential safeness can also be attributed to the individual's ability to control the

breadth and depth of self-disclosure. McKenna, Green, and Gleason (2002), Scharlott and Christ (1995), also found support for CMC helping some individuals to overcome communication barriers, such as shyness and appearance inhibitions.[27,28] Chung, Donghun (2003) also reported that CMC users who have greater loneliness are likely to have more specialized ways of communicating in CMC situations.[29] Therefore lonely people who are hesitant to express their feeling and point of view may have an alternative way by writing personal blog, which in turn may provide a less threatening medium to lonely people that they may prefer non-face-to-face communication mode for self disclosure. Based on this conceptualization, the following hypothesis and research question are posed:

H_2:   Bloggers who score high on loneliness will spend more time reading blogs and writing blogs.

Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosure is conceptualized as "any message about the self that a person communicates to others, including thoughts, feelings, and experiences"[30]. It is a way to show others who we are and what our needs are.[31] Past researches also show that loneliness may motivate people to disclose themselves more in computer mediated communication. However, Leung (2002) reported that loneliness and self-disclosure cannot be simply related in a unidirectional causal way. Instead, they are more likely to influence each other or are part of the same package that tend to co-occur with no particular causal relation[32]. In this study we will focus on the five dimensions of self-disclosure conceived by Wheeless and Grotz (1976): (1) Intent to disclose, (2) Amount of disclosure, (3) Positive-Negative nature of disclosure, (4) Control of depth and (5) Honesty.

Past researches showed that since anyone could express their thought on blogs, which were lacked editorial oversight, bloggers do not have the professional and social pressures to provide accurate and unbiased information[33].   Therefore blogging would promote a

high degree of self-disclosure that blogs provide a safe channel for people to expose their ideas or personal experiences without the fear of being criticized.

Recent researches in CMC also suggested that CMC and general Internet-based behavior can be characterized as containing high levels of self-disclosure.[34] Wallace (1999) claims that the tendency to disclose more to a computer is an important ingredient of what seems to be happening on the internet.[35] In order words, internet users usually have higher level of self-disclosure during CMC-based relationships than FTF relationships. Besides, most CMC, such as text based blog, allows individuals to construct messages after serious consideration therefore enabling them to express their "true" self (Bargh & McKenna, 2004)[36]. CMC would also discourage awareness of others and encourage anti-normative, aggressive, uninhibited behavior through a corresponding reduction in self-focus. [37] Therefore, blog may be a safe communication channel for lonely people for disclosing their own feeling. However, Leung (2002) suggested that although the characteristic of low social presence in CMC led the communication seems to be more impersonal and then lower the social risk of being embarrassed and disappointed, lonely people who are unwilling to disclose themselves and receive little personal information from others would find themselves less satisfying the relationship and then prone to loneliness.[38]

Under the above circumstances, what will the content of self-disclosure be when people perceived content of blog as credible in terms of depth, honest, positive-negative, amount and intent? Will the lonely people disclose more intimate, honest, positive, large amount and aware of what they are disclosing on blogs? Based on this conceptualization, the following research question is raised:

RQ$_2$:   What is the relationship between the depth, honesty, positive-negative, amount
             and intent dimensions of self-disclosure on blogs and (a) perceived blog
             credibility and (b) loneliness?

RQ$_3$:   To what extent can perceived credibility of blogs, loneliness, self-disclosure on

blogs, and demographics predict the level of writing blogs?

RQ$_4$:   To what extent can perceived credibility of blogs, loneliness, and demographics

predict the depth, honest, positive-negative, amount and intent dimensions of

self-disclosure on blogs?

Methods

Sampling

Data for this exploratory study were collected in a snowball method, the target of this study was bloggers aged 10-30 since it is observed that people in this age group use blog most often. A web-based survey questionnaire were created on http://www.my3q.com e-mailing to the researcher's mailing list composing of colleagues and friends.   The link of the questionnaire were also posted on the forum of the youth related website and in turn all of the respondents were encouraged to forward the questionnaires to their mailing lists. Participation in this research was entirely voluntary. The questionnaire was written in English and conducted in Chinese.

The final sample was 403, and all respondents were blog users and those aged over 30 were eliminated. The majority of the participants were female (76%), ranging in age from 15 to 24 years (80%). As regard to education, about 34% were F4-F5 students and 32% were tertiary educated. Meanwhile, majority (67%) of the participants were full time students.

Measurements

The questionnaire was designed on the following aspects: 1) Media Credibility, 2) Loneliness, 3) Self-Disclosure, 4) Blog Usage, and 5) Demographics of the respondents.

Media Credibility.

Media Credibility was measured as a multi-dimensional construct, consisting of believability, accuracy, trustworthiness, bias and completeness. Respondents were asked to rate the degree that they find the information or content on the blog to be believable, accurate, trustworthy, biased and complete on a 5-point scales (5 = strongly agree, 1= strongly disagree). The 5-dimensions were combined into a credibility index with data ranged from 1 to 25.   The mean score of the index was 15.45 (SD = 2.82), and its reliability was at $\varepsilon = 0.67$.

Loneliness

Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale was used in this study. In this scale, respondents were asked to self-report how they experience the emotions concerning their interpersonal relationship expressed in the 20-item measure using a four point scale (4 = often, 1 = never).   Due to concerns about how the negative wording of the items may have affected the responses, a revised version of the scale was developed that included 10 items worded in a negative or lonely direction and 10 items worded in a positive or non-lonely wordings.[39]   The mean score of the scale was 39.50 (SD = 9.13), and its reliability of the scale was high, with alpha equal to 0.86.

Self-disclosure

A Revised Self-disclosure Scale, developed by Wheeless & Grotz (1976), was employed in this study to examine how bloggers reveal themselves in blogs. Respondents were asked to respond to a series of 31 self-disclosure items when they are blogging on the degree to which statements reflect how they talk about themselves in general. Five dimensions of self-disclosure in blogging were measured by using a 7-point Likert type scale (7 = strongly agree, 1= strongly disagree): (1) Intent to disclosure, (2) Amount of

disclosure, (3) Positive – Negative nature of disclosure, (4) Control of depth, and (5) Honesty. Factor analysis using Varimax rotations yielded the above five factors with eigenvalue greater than 1.0, varience explained 62.64% (as shown in Table 1). According to the theoretical assumption, the above five factors are consistent with the expected constructs derived:

Intent to disclosure *(eigenvalue = 2.94, 14.02% varience)*: Consisted of four items measuring the awareness of self-disclosing on blogs. This factor had the highest mean score of 5.79 with Cronbach's alpha equals 0.82.

Amount of disclosure *(eigenvalue = 1.18, 5.60% varience, Cronbach's alpha = 0.71)*: Four items were included which indicates the amount of disclosure in blogs about themselves. The mean score of this factor was the third highest of 4.93 with Cronbach's alpha equals 0.77.

Positive – Negative *(eigenvalue = 1.53, 7.27% varience)*: Four measurement statements were used to measure how positive or negative disclosures about the respondents on blogs. The mean score of this factor was 3.92 and Cronbach's alpha was 0.77.

Control of depth *(eigenvalue = 5.51, 26.23% varience)*: Five items were used to reflect how personal and intimate the disclosures were about themselves when blogging. The mean score of this factor was 3.60 which was the lowest, indicating that the majority of respondents did not disclose themselves freely about their intimate and personal secret on blogs. The Cronbach's alpha of this factor was 0.83.

Honesty *(eigenvalue = 2.00, 9.52% varience)*: Four statements were used to gauge the extent of honesty, accuracy, openness and sincerity about respondents' experience on blogs. The mean score of this factor was the second highest of 5.04 and Cronbach's alpha was 0.84.

< Insert Table 1 about here >

Blog Usage

Blog use will be measured by asking respondents (a) how many days in a typical week they write blog and read blog and (b) how many minutes they write blog and read blog on a typical session.

Demographics

Traditional demographic variables will be measured in this study as control variables. They are: (1) gender, (2) age, (3) education, and (4) employment status.

Data Analysis

Asides from the factor analysis discussed above, Pearson's correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationships between blog usage (i.e., days per week and minutes per session) and blog credibility, loneliness, five dimensions of self-disclosure in blogs and demographics. Besides, regression analyses were also used to identify the predictors for the level of writing blogs and self-disclosures on blog.

Findings

Perceived Credibility of Blogs

As shown in Table 2, 41.3% of bloggers moderately to strongly agree that the content of blogs are credible and 30.9% of them thought that blogs are not credible and the remaining were undecided (27.8%). When the credibility index was broken into 5 components (believability, accuracy, trustworthiness, bias and completeness), most bloggers strongly or moderately agree that the content of blogs are complete (66.8%) and believable (54.6%). Bloggers also moderately to strongly agree that the content of blogs are accurate (40.2%). However there were 65.4% of bloggers moderately or strongly disagree that blogs are un-biased. Blog users seemed to acknowledge that trustworthiness of blogs

were questionable, 34.5% of them strongly or moderately disagree blogs are trustworthy, 33.3% thought that blogs are trustworthy, and the remaining were undecided (32.3%).

< Insert Table 2 about here >

Perceived Credibility, loneliness and Blog Usage

As shown in Table 3, correlational analysis indicate that blog usage (both in blog writing and reading), on both days per week and hours per day, were not significantly correlated to loneliness and credibility. This suggests that bloggers did not increase or decrease their level of writing or reading blogs because they perceived the content of blogs were credible or feeling loneliness. As a result, H_1 and H_2 were not supported.

< Insert Table 3 about here >

Perceived Credibility, Loneliness and Self-disclosure

Results as shown in Table 3 from the correlational analyses indicate that perceived credibility of blogs is significantly related to the control of depth (r = 0.26, p<0.001), honesty (r = 0.19, p<0.001), amount (r = 0.13, p<0.05) and intent (r = 0.12, p<0.1). This indicates that the more credible people perceived blogs, the more likely they would tend to be more intimate, more honest, disclosed greater amount and more aware of what they were disclosing on blogs. No significant relationship was found between valence of self-disclosure and perceived credibility of blogs.

Furthermore, significant relationships between loneliness and self-disclosure were also found in Table 3, valence (r = -0.36, p<0.001) is the strongest negative correlate of the loneliness. Intent (r = -0.18, p<0.001), amount (r = -0.14, p<0.05) and honesty (r = -0.11, p<0.1) are also significant negatively correlated. These findings suggest that lonely people

tend to be more negative, less aware of what they were disclosing, reveal less their feelings and less honest in self-disclosure on blogs. No significant relationship was found between control of depth of self-disclosure and loneliness.

Predicting the Level of Writing Blogs

Regression results in Table 4 show that the level of writing blogs, on days per week, was significantly predicted by the age of bloggers ($\beta = -0.23$, $p<0.001$), amount ($\beta = 0.21$, $p<0.001$), control of depth ($\beta = 0.13$, $p<0.1$) and intent ($\beta = 0.10$, $p<0.1$) dimensions of self-disclosure. This indicates that heavy users of blogs tends to be young, write about themselves more, more personal and intimate, and more aware of what they were disclosing on blogs. The regression equation explained 13 percent of the variance.

< Insert Table 4 about here >

Predicting the Self-disclosure on Blogs

As shown in Table 5, regression analysis shows that the intent in self-disclosure on blog was significantly predicted by education ($\beta= 0.17$, $p<0.05$) and loneliness ($\beta= -0.15$, $p<0.05$). This suggests that bloggers who were more aware of what they were disclosing tended to be more educated and less lonely. The regression equation explained 4 percent of the variance.

Amount of self-disclosure on blogs was analyzed and found it was significantly predicted by credibility ($\beta = 0.11$, $p<0.1$), loneliness ($\beta = -0.10$, $p<0.1$) and age ($\beta = 0.10$, $p<0.1$). This mean bloggers who disclose more about themselves appeared to be older, less lonely and perceived blogs to be more credible. The regression equation contributed 3 percent of the variance.

Furthermore, valence of self-disclosure was found to be significantly predicted by

loneliness (β = - 0.32, p<0.001), age (β = 0.24, p<0.05) and employment (β = 0.16, p<0.05). This shows that older non-students who were less lonely tended to disclose more positive and desirable things about themselves in blogs. A total of 17 percent of the variance were account for.

Meanwhile, control of depth of self-disclosure on blogs was analyzed and four predictors were found: credibility (β = 0.27, p<0.001), age (β = -0.21, p<0.05), employment (β = -0.15, p<0.05) and gender (β = -0.21, p<0.10). This suggest that for young male students who had high regard for the credibility of blogs tended to write more personal and intimate things about themselves on blogs. The regression equation explained 10 percent of the variance.

Finally, honesty of self-disclosure was analyzed to be significantly predicted by credibility (β = 0.17, p< 0.05) and age (β = 0.12, p<0.1). This indicates that bloggers who were older and judged the content of blogs to be credible were more honest in disclosing themselves on blogs. The regression equation contributed 4 percent of the variance.

< Insert Table 5 about here >

Conclusions and Discussion

This study surveyed bloggers online to examine how credible they viewed blogs and helped to clarify our understanding of the relationship among the perceived credibility on blogs, loneliness, self-disclosure and blog use. Specifically, this research helps our understanding on four ways.

Firstly, most bloggers strongly or moderately agreed that the content of blogs is credible (41.3%), which is consistent with Johnson and Kaye's (2004) study. When further analyzed the 5 components of blog credibility, most bloggers thought the content of blogs are complete (66.8%), believable (54.6%) and accurate (40.2%). An important reason is that

the content of blog is mainly personal and its purpose is to update friends on happenings in their lives, they usually view it as primary information which has high level of completeness, believability and accuracy. On the other hand, there were 65.4% of bloggers moderately or strongly disagree that blogs are un-biased. It is also consistent with Glenn Reynolds (2003) stated that most bloggers have strong views that they express openly which result in disclosing their bias in the content of blogs. However, bloggers acknowledged that the content of blog is trustworthy is still questionable, only one third of them strongly or moderately agreed that blog is trustworthy but one third of them disagreed. One possible explanation is that people may consider traditional journalism as the hallmark of trustworthiness, untrustworthy is likely seen as a virtue by bloggers. When compared with the results by Johnson and Kaye (2004), we found that bloggers in Hong Kong have the same view as other regions about the credibility of blogs, which indicate that most bloggers thought that the content of blogs is credible; regardless of their cultural background and where they live in.

Secondly, perceived credibility and loneliness are not related to the level of blog use (both writing and reading) among the bloggers. There was no support found that bloggers perceived blog as credible or feeling of isolation will turn to write blog. Although anyone can post information on the blog which are not bound by standard of professional journalist and they can express their feelings openly, people did not increase their level of blog use. The possible reason is that most of the bloggers in Hong Kong are students (80%) and about 70% of them write blog for personal purposes[40], therefore the level of credibility of blog cannot motivate them to write blog more. Besides, despite the unique characteristic of blog that provide a less threatening medium to lonely people to disclose themselves in a non-face-to-face communication mode, lonely people did not look upon blog as a safe medium to initiate friendship. It is inconsistent with the study of Stritzke et al. (2004) that blog is more conducive especially for shy people in an online environment that absent of

verbal and non-verbal cues which make them more feel safe in communication[41] as well as CMC could help some individuals to overcome communication barriers such as shyness and appearance inhibitions.[42,43] However, in this study lonely people did not report their purpose of using blog, therefore it is no surprise to find there is no significant relation between blog use and perceived credibility of blog and loneliness, and it can be explained by that blogging is a trendy activities among youngsters and they use blog for different purposes. For example, some people may write blog to communicate with friends but other may write blog to express their view about news or issues happened in their daily lives. Therefore it appears that blog is no longer an alternative communication channel but become a very popular communication tools among the youngsters, regardless of their perception of blog credibility or feeling lonely when they are using blog.

Thirdly, perceived credibility of blogs is directly related to the control of depth, honesty, amount and intent of self-disclosure. This means people who perceived the content of blog as credible will tend to disclose more intimate, honest, disclosed greater amount and more aware of what they were disclosing on blogs. This finding is in line with the study by Finberg and Stone (2002) that since there were lack of editorial oversight and social pressures to provide professional and unbiased information[44], people can express themselves openly and more personal. However, the finding is not consistent with the study by Balkin (2004) that there were some built-in correction mechanisms for ideological bias[45]. It can be explained by that most bloggers in Hong Kong are students and the majority of blogs are for personal purposes, bloggers in Hong Kong do not worry about the accuracy of the blog being questioned, which is different from the blogosphere in other countries.

On the other hand, loneliness was found inversely related to valence, intent, amount and honesty. This indicates that people who are lonely would be more negative, less aware of what they were disclosing, reveal less their feelings and less honest in self-disclosure on blogs. It is consistent with the study of Jones (1981) and Louis (2002) that lonely people do

not trust others and therefore they are not willing to tell the truth and less personal in their blogs.[46,47] This study also shows that the characteristic of the absence of verbal and non-verbal cues in blog cannot motivate lonely people to disclose more during blogging.

Furthermore, the level of writing blog is significantly related to the age of bloggers, amount, control of depth and intent of self-disclosure. This suggests that people who write blog are usually young, and write more about themselves, more intimate and more aware of what they were disclosing. This finding is consistent with the blog study in Hong Kong that the majority of bloggers are students (80%). Students usually spend more time on writing blog for personal purposes and therefore they wrote more about themselves and more intimate. Besides, as they spend more time on writing blogs, they should be more aware of what they are writing about in order to express their feeling.

Results from regression analysis shows that the intent in self-disclosure on blog was positively predicted by education but negatively predicted by loneliness. This indicates that more educated people who are less lonely would be more aware of what they were disclosing when writing blogs. This finding is expected since educated people are well trained to express in words so they should be conscious to know what they are disclosing to others. On the other hand, people who are less lonely will disclose openly and therefore more aware of what they are disclosing on blog. Furthermore, amount of self-disclosure on blogs was positively predicted by credibility and, age but negatively predicted by loneliness. Bloggers tended to disclose more about themselves appeared to be older, less lonely and perceived blogs to be more credible. It can be explained by that older people are more willing to share their thought and life experience to others on blogs and lonely people tend to disclose less because their social perception are usually unfavorable, they found their relationships with others are unsatisfied and avoided to discuss about social matter on blog. On the other hand, valence of self-disclosure was found to be significantly predicted by loneliness, gender and employment. This shows that older non-students bloggers, less likely

to be lonely, tended to disclose more positive and desirable things about themselves in blogs. This finding is expected as adults do not often show their worry and unhappiness to their friends in order to protect their dignity. Also lonely people usually have negative self-evaluation to themselves and therefore they would express undesirable things about themselves on blogs. Meanwhile, gender and perceived credibility of blog are positive predictors for the control of depth of self-disclosure, whereas age and employment are negative predictors. This suggest that for young male student bloggers, who had high regard for the credibility of blogs, tended to express themselves more intimately on blogs. This can also be explained by that young male students usually spend more time on writing blog for personal purposes and therefore they wrote more about themselves and more intimate. And since the content of blog is not bound by professional oversight, they can express their thought and experience openly on blog. Finally, honesty of self-disclosure was positively predicted by credibility. This suggests that older bloggers who tended to judge the content of blogs to be credible were more honest in disclosing themselves on blogs. It can be explained by that older people are more acknowledge that their blog are not bound by other parties, therefore they can disclose themselves more honestly.

There are limitations in this study. One is that since the sample were collected in a snowball method, the results may not be generalized to current population in Hong Kong. However, as Babbie (2004) stated that although in situations where random probability sampling is not possible, non-probability sampling is acceptable.[48] Drawing random probability sample of students is suggested for further study since they are the main users of blog in Hong Kong in this stage, and the results would be more generalized to the blogosphere in Hong Kong. Second, the traditional method of data collection may not be applicable to the internet. It is because the sample size in this study is only a small population of all blog users, it is a challenge to reach all bloggers with delivering e-mail and posting URL on specific forum. Third, the data are gathered during the early stage of

the development of blog in Hong Kong, therefore the use of blog may change in the future. Future studies are suggested to examine if people change their view toward blog when the purpose of using blog in Hong Kong change. Finally, this study did not establish the causal relationship among perceived credibility of blog, loneliness, self-disclosure and blog use. Panel study design is recommended to specifically observe the effects of certain variables.

Table 1. Factor Loadings of 21 Self – disclosure Items in Blogging (N = 403)

	Mean	SD	Factors				
			1	2	3	4	5
Intent							
1. When I wish, my self-disclosures are always accurate reflections of who I really am.	5.65	1.16	0.686				
2. When I express my personal feelings, I am always aware of what I am doing and saying.	5.81	1.05	0.809				
3. When I reveal my feelings about myself, I consciously intend to do so.	5.74	1.14	0.803				
4. When I am self-disclosing, I am consciously aware of what I am revealing.	5.94	1.05	0.771				
Amount							
5. I do not often talk about myself. (R)	5.10	1.46		0.776			
6. My conversation lasts the least time when I am discussing myself. (R)	4.50	1.52		0.783			
7. I often talk about myself.	5.46	1.28		0.575			
8. Only infrequently do I express my personal beliefs and opinions. (R)	4.65	1.70		0.658			
Positive - Negative							
9. On the whole, my disclosures about myself are more negative than positive. (R)	4.39	1.53			0.760		
10. I normally reveal "bad" feelings I have about myself. (R)	3.03	1.43			0.592		
11. I often reveal more undesirable things about myself than desirable things. (R)	3.88	1.44			0.836		
12. I usually disclose negative things about myself. (R)	4.36	1.45			0.841		
Control of Depth							
13. I intimately disclose who I really am, openly and fully in my conversation.	4.39	1.52				0.581	
14. Once I get started, my self-disclosures last a long time.	4.11	1.47				0.696	
15. I often intimate, personal things about myself without hesitation.	3.23	1.76				0.811	
16. I feel that I sometimes do not control my self-disclosure of personal or intimate things I tell about myself.	2.94	1.69				0.765	
17. Once I get started, I intimately and fully reveal myself in my self-disclosures.	3.33	1.63				0.836	
Honesty							
18. I always feel completely sincere when I reveal my own feelings and experiences.	5.18	1.32					0.734
19. My self-disclosures are completely accurate reflections of who I really am	4.77	1.36					0.767
20. My statements about my feelings, emotions, and experiences are always accurate self-perceptions.	5.20	1.18					0.756
21. I am always honest in my self-disclosures.	5.00	1.33					0.809
Eigenvalue			2.94	1.18	1.53	5.51	2.00
Varience explained (%)			14.02	5.60	7.27	26.23	9.52
Cronbach's alpha			0.82	0.71	0.77	0.83	0.84

Table2. Frequencies of 5 Items in Blogs Credibility.

Description about Blogs	*Strongly disagree/ moderate disagree*	*Are undecided*	*Strongly agree/ moderate agree*
Believable	17.1%	28.3%	54.6%
Accurate	22.3%	37.5%	40.2%
Trustworthy	34.5%	32.3%	33.3%
Un-biased	65.4%	23.3%	11.6%
Complete	15.3%	17.9%	66.8%
Total	30.9%	27.8%	41.3%

Notes : Mean = 15.45, Std. Deviation = 2.82

The scale used was 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree.

Table 3. Correlations Analysis of Credibility, Loneliness, and Self-disclosure.

	Credibility	*Loneliness*
Level of Use in Blogs		
Blogs Writing (days per week)	0.01[#]	-0.04[#]
Blogs Writing (hours per session)	-0.02#	-0.002#
Blogs Reading (days per week)	0.05[#]	-0.02[#]
Blogs Reading (hours per session)	-0.003[#]	-0.05[#]
Self-disclosure		
Intent	0.12*	-0.18***
Amount	0.13**	-0.14**
Positive–Negative	n.s.	-0.36***
Control of depth	0.26***	n.s.
Honesty	0.19***	-0.11*

[#]p<=0.1; *p<=0.1; **p<=0.05; ***p<=0.001; n=403.

Table 4. Regression Analysis of Demographics, Credibility, Loneliness, Self-disclosure in Blogging and Level of Writing Blogs.

	Level of Writing Blogs
	Frequency (days per week)
Demographics:	
Gender (Female = 0, Male = 1)	n.s.
Age	-0.23***
Education	n.s.
Employment	n.s.
Credibility	n.s.
Loneliness	n.s.
Self-disclosure in Blogging	
Intent	0.10*
Amount	0.21***
Positive-Negative	n.s.
Control of Depth	0.13*
Honesty	n.s.
R^2	0.16
Adjusted R^2	0.13

[#]p<=0.1; *p<=0.1; **p<=0.05; ***p<=0.001; n=403.

Table 5. Regression Analysis of Demographics, Credibility, Loneliness and Self-disclosure in Blogging.

Predictor Variables	Self-disclosure in Blogging				
	Intent	Amount	Positive-Negative	Control of Depth	Honesty
Demographics:					
Gender (Female = 0, Male = 1)	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	0.10*	n.s.
Age	n.s.	0.10*	0.24**	-0.21**	0.12*
Education	0.17**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Employment (student = 1)	n.s.	n.s.	0.16**	-0.15**	n.s.
Credibility	0.09[#]	0.11*	n.s.	0.27***	0.17**
Loneliness	-0.15**	-0.10*	-0.32***	n.s.	n.s.
R^2	0.05	0.05	0.18	0.11	0.05
Adjusted R^2	0.04	0.03	0.17	0.10	0.04

[#]p<=0.1; *p<=0.1; **p<=0.05; ***p<=0.001; n=403.

References

[1] Winer, Dave (2003)"What makes a weblog a weblog?"

[2] Nielsen/Netcast survey 2005

[3] Willis 2005

[4] Tweney, Dylan (2002) " Are you blogging yet?"

http://www.business2.com/articles/web/print/0.1650.43097.00.html

[5] Foley, John (2002) "Blogging for dollars"

http://www.informationweek.com/shared/printableArticle?doc_id=IWK20020719S0001

[6] Plasenicia, William (2003) Web Logs Get Personal Hispanic

[7] Daniel W Drezner, Henry Farrel (2004) Web of Influence, Proquest Social Science Journals P.32

[8] Daniel W Drezner, Henry Farrel (2004) Web of Influence, Proquest Social Science Journals P.32

[9] Ryan, Maureen (2003)"Blogs' Rise Stymies Old Media" Chicago Tribune

[10] Breakthrough "Research on Online Diary and Youth", http://www.breakthrough.org.hk/ir/researchlog.htm

[11] Gaziano, Cecilie (1986) Measuring the Concept of Credibility, Journalism Quarterly 66, P451-62.

[12] Johnson, Thomas and Kaye, Barbara (2004) Wag the Blog: How Reliance on Traditional Media and the Internet Influence Credibility Perceptions of Weblogs among Blog Uses Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly P622

[13] Richard, Davis (1997), "Understanding Broadcast Political Talk" Political Communication 14 P323-32

[14] Johnson, Thomas and Kaye, Barbara (1998) "A Boost or Bust for Democracy?: How the Web Influenced Political Attitudes and Behaviours in the 1996 and 2000 President Elections," Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics 8 P9-34.

[15] Ryan, "Blogs' Rise Stymies."

[16] Johnson, Thomas and Kaye, Barbara (2004) Wag the Blog: How Reliance on Traditional Media and the Internet Influence Credibility Perceptions of Weblogs among Blog Uses Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly P622

[17] Daniel W Drezner, Henry Farrel (2004) Web of Influence, Proquest Social Science Journals P.32

[18] Weiss, R.S. (1973). Loneliness: The Experience of Emotional and Social Isolation. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

[19] Peplau, L.A. and D. Perlman, eds. 1982. Loneliness: A Sourcebook of Current Theory, Research and Therapy. New York: John Wiley.

[20] Russell, D., Peplau, LA., & Cutrona, C.E. (1980). The revised UCLA Loneliness Scale: Concurrent and discriminant validity evidence. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 39:472-480.

[21] Hoover, S., Skuja, A., & Cosper, J. (1972). Correlates of college students' loneliness. Psychological Reports 22:1116.

[22] Jones, W.H. (1981). Loneliness and social contact. Journal of Social Psychology 113:295-296.

[23] Peplau, L.A. and D. Perlman, eds. 1982. Loneliness: A Sourcebook of Current Theory, Research and Therapy. New York: John Wiley.

[24] Jones, W.H., Freemon, L.A., and Goswick, R.A. (1981). The persistence of loneliness. Journal of

Personality 49:27-48.

[25] Scharlott, B. W., & Christ, W. G. (1995). Overcoming relationship-initiation barriers: The impact of a computer-dating system on sex role, shyness, and appearance inhibitions. Computers in Human Behavior, 11, 191-204.

[26] Stritzke, W. G. K., Nguyen, A., & Durkin, K. (2004). Shyness and computer-mediated communication: A self-presentational theory perspective. Media Psychology, 6, 1-22.

[27] McKenna, K. Y. A., Green, A. S., & Gleason, M. J. (2002). Relationship formation on the Internet: What's the big attraction? Journal of Social Issues, 58(1), 9-31.

[28] Scharlott, B. W., & Christ, W. G. (1995). Overcoming relationship-initiation barriers: The impact of a computer-dating system on sex role, shyness, and appearance inhibitions. Computers in Human Behavior, 11, 191-204.

[29] Chung, Donghun (2003). I Am Not a Lonely Person Any More: Interpersonal Relationships in Computer-Mediated-Communication. Finding Friends and Making Confessions in Cyberspace. ICA

[30] Wheeless & Grotz, (1976) Self-disclosure and interpersonal solidarity: Measurement, validation, and relationships. Human Communication Research, 2, P338-346

[31] Derlega, V.J. (1984). Self-disclosure and intimate relationships. In: V.J. Derlega, ed. Communication, Intimacy and Close Relationships. Orlando, FL: Academic Press, pp. 1-10.

[32] Leung, L. (2002). Loneliness, Self-disclosure, and ICQ Use. CyberPsychology & Behavior, 5(3), 241-251.

[33] Howard I. Finberg and Martha L. Stone, Digital Journalism Credibility Study Washington, DC: Online News Association, 2002

[34] Joinson, A.N., Self-disclosure in CMC: The role of self-awareness and visual anonymity. European Journal of Social Psychology. 31, 177-192 (2001).

[35] Wallace, P. 1999. The Psychology of the Internet. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

[36] Bargh, J.A. & McKenna, K. Y. A. (2004). The Internet and social life. Annual Review Psychology, 55, 573-590.

[37] Kiesler S, Siegal J, McGire TW. 1984. Social Psychological aspects of computer-mediated communication. American Psychologist 39: 1123-1134.

[38] Leung, L. (2002). Loneliness, Self-disclosure, and ICQ Use. CyberPsychology & Behavior, 5(3), 241-251.

[39] Russell, D., Peplau, L.A., & Cutrona, C.E. (1980).   The revised UCLA Loneliness Scale: Concurrent and discriminant validity evidence.   Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 39, 472-480.

[40] Breakthrough "Research on Online Diary and Youth", http://www.breakthrough.org.hk/ir/researchlog.htm

[41] Stritzke, W. G. K., Nguyen, A., & Durkin, K. (2004). Shyness and computer-mediated communication: A self-presentational theory perspective. Media Psychology, 6, 1-22.

[42] McKenna, K. Y. A., Green, A. S., & Gleason, M. J. (2002). Relationship formation on the Internet: What's the big attraction? Journal of Social Issues, 58(1), 9-31.

[43] Scharlott, B. W., & Christ, W. G. (1995). Overcoming relationship-initiation barriers: The impact of a computer-dating system on sex role, shyness, and appearance inhibitions. Computers in Human Behavior, 11, 191-204.

[44] Howard I. Finberg and Martha L. Stone, Digital Journalism Credibility Study Washington, DC: Online News Association, 2002

[45] Daniel W Drezner, Henry Farrel (2004) Web of Influence, Proquest Social Science Journals P.32

[46] Jones, W.H. (1981). Loneliness and social contact. Journal of Social Psychology 113:295-296.

[47] Leung, L. (2002). Loneliness, Self-disclosure, and ICQ Use. CyberPsychology & Behavior, 5(3), 241-251.

[48] Babbie, E (2004) Survey Research Method, The Practice of Social Research, Wadsworth