

From Expression to Influence:

Understanding the Change in Blogger Motivations over the Blogspan

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Abstract

Although recent scholarship concerning political blogs has focused on blog content (Adamic & Glance, 2004; Bichard, 2006; Jackson, 2006; Rogers, 2005), the influence of blogs (Drezner & Farrell, 2004) and blog readers (Johnson & Kaye, 2004; Kaye, 2007), little research has been done on prominent political bloggers themselves. The absence of such research is noteworthy because blog content and frames are not constructed in a vacuum but are a product of the authoring agents and the organizational power structures within which these agents operate (Carragee & Roefs, 2004). This paper seeks to fill this gap in existing research by providing an exploratory examination of why the most popular and influential American political bloggers choose to blog. Through quantitative and qualitative measures, our findings demonstrate that motivations for blogging evolve over the course of a blogger's blogspan – the period during which he or she blogs. Not only are almost all motivators heightened over time – signifying that blogging has an empowering effect – but the motives related to extending influence into their audiences and the general public demonstrate the greatest increases. We assert that these specific changes signify a transition from bloggers regarding blogging as an internal, expressive form of communication to their seeing it as an external process of extending influence.

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In Spring 2007, the U.S. Attorney General, Alberto Gonzales, and several other members of the Justice Department became embroiled in a controversy over the dismissal of eight U.S. attorneys. Critics called for Gonzales to resign, claiming that these attorneys were fired for political reasons and that Gonzales misled the public and Congress when discussing his role in the matter (Lipton & Johnston, 2007b). Although this story received heavy media attention throughout March 2007, few journalists were writing about it months earlier when the attorneys were originally asked to resign (Smith, 2007). Among the few following the story from the beginning were Joshua Micah Marshall, chief blogger at TalkingPointsMemo.com, and his staff of bloggers known as the TPM Muckrakers (Smith, 2007). Talking Points Memo first began reporting on the firing of U.S. attorneys back in December 2006 (McDermott, 2007) and continued with heavy coverage of the story in the months that followed. On March 20th, when the Justice Department released 3,000 pages of internal documents, Paul Kiel (2007), a member of Marshall's staff, called upon the readers of TPMmuckraker.com to help sort through the documents and post their findings in the blog's comments. One week later, readers answering this call to action had posted over 700 comments. In an interview with NPR, Kiel explained this strategy by saying: "Our readers have been following this story for two months...They know the players, they know the details" (Smith, 2007). Their strategy worked – a March 22nd *New York Times* story attributed the discovery of a suspicious 'document gap' to Talking Points Memo, which the *Times* described as "a Web site that has been following the furor with microscopic attention" (Lipton & Johnston, 2007a). Several other news organizations also credited Marshall

and the TPMuckrakers for driving the media coverage of the U.S. attorneys story (McDermott, 2007; O'Brien, 2007; Smith, 2007).

This example is not the first in which bloggers played a significant role in the development of the mainstream news agenda and the American political process. In December 2002, bloggers responded to offensive remarks made by Trent Lott at Strom Thurmond's 100th birthday party with frenzied condemnation (Drezner & Farrell, 2004). In fact, it wasn't until a week after the event that the mainstream press took notice of the conversation in the blogosphere and began devoting coverage to Lott's statements. As a result of the ensuing scandal, Lott eventually stepped down from his position as Senate Majority Leader. Again in 2004, conservative bloggers were the first to question the validity of a CBS News report implying that President Bush received preferential treatment during the Vietnam War (Adamic & Glance, 2005). After bloggers revealed that the story was based on a forged memo, the CBS producers responsible for the story were fired and Dan Rather's reputation as a credible journalist was seriously challenged. All three of these examples illustrate that bloggers are capable of significantly influencing media coverage and impacting real world decisions. Despite bloggers' apparent power, current blog research has mainly focused on analyses of blog content (Adamic & Glance, 2004; Bichard, 2006; Jackson, 2006; Rogers, 2005) or examinations of blog readers (Kaye, 2005; Kaye, 2007; Kaye & Johnson, 2002), yet has failed to investigate bloggers themselves. This paper seeks to fill this gap in existing research by providing an exploratory examination of blogger motivations for starting and maintaining political blogs. This analysis draws from a November 2006 survey of 66 top American political bloggers.

Blogs and Political Bloggers

Drezner and Farrell define a blog, or Web log, as “a web page with minimal or no external editing, providing on-line commentary, periodically updated and presented in reverse chronological order, with hyperlinks to other online sources” (2004, p. 5). Blogs have been around, in one form or another, since the early days of the World Wide Web, but they have become increasingly popular since 2000 (Drezner & Farrell, 2004). Although most bloggers lack traditional journalistic credentials, many mainstream news organizations, such as *Slate*, *The New York Times* and *The Weekly Standard*, host “professional” bloggers on their websites. According to a 2006 study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, 8% of all U.S. Internet users over the age of 18 report that they keep a blog (Lenhart & Fox, 2006).

Beyond authorship, Pew studies have also found that 39% of all U.S. Internet users visit blogs and 9% read political blogs “sometimes” or “frequently” during the 2004 presidential campaign (Lenhart & Fox, 2006; Rainie, 2005). In their study of blog credibility, Johnson and Kaye (2004) found that blog readers perceive blogs to be a more credible source of news than any other medium, including online and offline forms of newspaper, television and radio news. The authors report:

Almost three-quarters of respondents view Weblogs as moderately to very credible and only 3.5% rate them not at all or not very credible. An important reason users say they rely on blogs is because they provide more depth and more thoughtful analysis than is available in other media. (p. 633)

Similarly, Rogers (2005) argues that political bloggers are better than traditional news outlets at covering complex issues in a manner that presents them as relevant and understandable to their audiences.

Unlike traditional journalists, most political bloggers do not strive for objectivity, rather their writings tend to be grounded in strong ideological assumptions. The increasingly large

number of bloggers and the diversity of opinions found online have led to a fractured blogosphere (Adamic & Glance, 2005). Kerbel and Bloom argue, “the blogosphere is a highly fragmented place where people naturally and often aggressively divide into ideological camps in a manner that resembles the narrowcasting of cable television on steroids” (2005, p. 22). So although 57 million American adults admit to reading blogs (Lenhart & Fox, 2006), their readership patterns are diverse, with most readers searching for blogs that reflect their own opinions.

The presence of this limited, fragmented readership would indicate that the influence of political bloggers only extends to a small audience already in agreement with a blog's particular viewpoint. But blogger influence extends to general audiences through the impact that blogs have on traditional news media (Adamic & Glance, 2005). As noted earlier, there have been a number of instances in which blogs have helped dictate the direction of mainstream news stories. In addition, several journalists and newspaper editors have indicated that they read blogs in the process of gathering information for their stories (Drezner & Farrell, 2004). Not only do bloggers provide unique perspectives and concerns, they abide by a different editorial process than traditional online, television and print news. Drezner and Farrell (2004) argue that bloggers engage in an informal editorial process through which bloggers commune, collaborate and critique each other's discussions of issues and events. The interaction and immediacy of blogs “affects political communication in the mainstream media through agenda setting and framing effects” (Drezner & Farrell, 2004, p. 17).

As political blogs continue to gain attention in academic research, many studies have started analyzing how candidates are utilizing blogs in their political campaigns (Brichard, 2006; Connors, 2005; Jackson, 2005; Kerbel & Bloom, 2005). Kerbel and Bloom's (2005) case study

of Howard Dean's 2004 presidential campaign blog is worth noting because the authors expand their focus beyond blog content. They argue that Blog for America was more than a pulpit used for disseminating the campaign's logistical and political information, but rather a gathering place and a rallying spot for a community of supporters on "a mission." Beyond campaign blogs, other scholars have focused on political blogs that have risen to a higher level of prominence in the blogosphere (Adamic & Glance, 2004; Rogers, 2005). Despite the influence these blogs can have on traditional media and the political process (Drezner & Farrell, 2004), Wallsten (2005) argues for the importance of studying non "A-list" political bloggers. While these lesser-known and lesser-viewed blogs lack the influence of more popular blogs, Wallsten argues that the process of blogging on political topics should itself be understood as a form of political expression.

The net's most prominent political blog, Daily Kos, stands as a further example of the rising status of political blogs. According to Nielsen/NetRatings, DailyKos, the go-to blog for liberals and Democrats, received 4.8 million unique visitors in July of 2005 (Perlmutter, 2006). In contrast, the population of Iowa, the first state to hold a presidential caucus every four years, was at that time about 2.9 million and the population of New Hampshire, the first state to hold a presidential primary, was around 1.2 million. Daily Kos is so popular, in fact, that its founder is regularly hired as a political consultant and even sponsors "YearlyKos" conventions. The MoJoBlog on *MotherJones.com* described YearlyKos as "the progressive blogosphere's coming out party; more [for] the fact that such Democratic luminaries as Harry Reid and Nancy Pelosi feel it necessary to make the pilgrimage here to touch the feet of Kos, this event's presiding deity" (Brookes, 2006). The careful attention given to this conference by the political elite stands as testimony to the power of political bloggers and their audiences.

Why Study Political Bloggers?

Still, existing research on political blogs, by and large, has concentrated on blog content rather than the content-creators (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Bichard, 2006; Kerbel & Bloom, 2005; Rogers, 2005), or has analyzed the motivations of blog readers rather than the bloggers themselves (Johnson & Kaye, 2004; Kaye & Johnson, 2002; MacDougal, 2005). Meanwhile, little has been written theoretically or empirically about political bloggers and their motivations for blogging on political issues. McKenna (2005) conducted in-depth interviews with nine “policy” bloggers and found that their motivations are primarily six-fold: filtering information, providing expertise, forming networks, gaining attention, framing arguments and using windows of opportunity. Similarly, through an ethnographic investigation of 23 non-political bloggers, Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht and Swartz (2004) identified five motivational factors for bloggers generally: documenting one’s life, providing commentary and opinions, expressing deeply felt emotions, articulating ideas through writing and forming and maintaining community forums. Although McKenna's sample of “policy” bloggers represent a specific subset of political bloggers, it is clear through a comparison of Nardi et. al. and McKenna's findings that political bloggers are more issue-oriented than social bloggers looking to document their lives. Kavanaugh, Zin, Carol, Schmitz, Perez-Quinoes and Isenhour (2006) support this finding in their research on the use of blogging by one particular community’s “opinion leaders.” These authors found that political bloggers tended to have higher sense of community collective efficacy (the belief that a community can solve collective problems despite obstacles), were better informed about local and larger political problems, belong to more formal social networks and were more likely to have deliberated with others on these issues. However, their sample was composed of

perceived local-level opinion leaders, which are remarkably distinct from the 66 nationally-read political bloggers surveyed in this study.

Identifying blogger motivations is essential in order to gain a better understanding of the medium itself. Indeed, while studying mainstream media effects, scholars have argued for the need to analyze how journalists frame certain issues (Scheufele, 1999). Carragee and Roefs (2004) assert that while a large body of research has looked into media frames, there has been a significant lack of attention to *framing* – the process during which frames are created. They argue that media framing “does not develop in a political vacuum; it is shaped by the frames sponsored by multiple social actors, including politicians, organizations, and social movements” (p. 216). Previous research has found that among other factors, journalistic routines and ideological or political orientation of journalists play an important role in framing processes (Gans, 1979; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Tuchman, 1978). Edelman (1993) also notes that both ideologies and prejudices of journalists are important factors in the news sourcing and framing process. Schuefele (1999) has further raised an important question in asking whether journalists themselves interpret issues based on frames conveyed to them by other news sources. This type of research into frame building and how agents of frame construction impact the framing process is conspicuously absent from current blog research.

With that in mind, it is worth noting that many of the external factors that affect journalistic routines may not be as prevalent in the blogosphere. Several scholars, for instance, have noted that bloggers do not bear the burden of objectivity (Hennessey & Martin, 2006). At the same time, bloggers are also not as constrained by the same structural factors – such as sponsorship, editorial policies and pressure from elite political groups – that mainstream journalists have to consider (Carragee & Roefs, 2004). Although bloggers work within different

institutional power structures than traditional journalists, blog frames are still a product of social and organizational pressures and the agents responsible for constructing the blog content. Yet in spite of new research analyzing issue frames in political blogs (Bichard, 2006; Kerbel & Bloom, 2005), we still know very little about these pressures or the bloggers shaping these frames.

Therefore, this paper provides an exploratory examination into the agents behind blog content and their corresponding frames. By surveying the top political bloggers, we seek to uncover the reasons bloggers began blogging and why they continue to blog still today. These motivations will shed light into the reasons these individuals engage in political discourse and therefore the process through which they choose to cover certain issues and attempt to frame the discussion of these issues. Therefore there are two main research questions that guide this study:

RQ1: What are the current and initial motivations that political bloggers give for blogging? In other words, why do political bloggers blog and what does this tell us about blog content and the blogging process?

RQ2: Do their motivations change over time? If so, how and why? What does this tell us about the blogging process?

Sampling the Top Political Bloggers

The number of existing blogs varies according to different estimates by monitors such as Technorati, Blogstreet and the Perseus Development Corporation but can rank as high as in the hundreds of millions if all foreign language blogs are included. When the popularity and usage of blogs are taken into account, the number becomes less impressive. First, such astronomical blogging numbers are inflated because many blogs are rarely updated or have become inactive. These blogs are posted by people as a lark or as an experiment, typically with free-and-easy programs like Blogger or LiveJournal. But while many blogs are deserted almost immediately after creation, the blog corpse continues to linger in cyberstasis. A 2004 study by the Perseus Group found that 1.09 million blogs were abandoned on the day of creation and within four

months 66% of blogs had been temporarily or permanently left in limbo by their original creators (Henning, 2004). Likewise, a Pew study found only 13% of bloggers update their weblog daily (Lenhart & Fox, 2006). Early counting estimates that included these “dead” blogs among the large blog populations were therefore highly exaggerated.

Blog numbers are also deceptively inflated by fake or spam blogs – a new form of passive spam called “clogs” (Perlmutter, forthcoming). In such cases, spammers create a blog – one that might gather some attention by dedicating it to a celebrity or by using any random letter combination – featuring nothing but hyperlinked ads as blog posts. With each new clog, worldwide blogging statistics increase by one but, in reality, these spammers have created little more than a meaningless collection of alphanumeric bits and bytes designed to churn out cash for each user who clicks through to advertising sites. Since 2005, Technorati has been tracking and accounting for fake and spam blogs but admits this process is an imperfect science (Kallen, 2007). By their count, about 2% to 8% of new blogs are fakes or are created simply to sell commercial products.

In order to determine the top blogs, indexing sites employ a number of different methods. Technorati ranks their inventory of blogs through a measure of incoming links to that blog (“About Us,” 2007). Blogstreet uses a ratings metric called Blog Influence Quotient (BIQ), which is determined by analyzing blogrolls so that a blog’s BIQ score rises if a highly ranked blog includes it in its blogroll (“FAQ,” 2007). An examination of the results of these metrics quickly reveals that all blogs are not equal. Certain blogs such as Daily Kos, RedState, Power Line and MyDD are frequently linked to and blogrolled, which places them high on most blog rankings. These same blogs are repeatedly cited by the mainstream press as key representatives of the political blogosphere.

Therefore, any survey of bloggers must take into account the reality that some bloggers receive much more attention than others. In response, to construct our sample of political bloggers we took the 2006 lists of the top 300 most popular blogs from the above measurers and narrowed them down to “political” blogs, that is those that contain mostly political content. We further refined the sample by eliminating foreign language blogs as they would create problems for survey design and interpretation. We also eliminated any blog that had not been in operation by the same blogger or group of bloggers for at least two years in order to focus on experienced bloggers writing for audiences that were familiar with the blog content and style. Some other blogs were also eliminated because of technical difficulties. In the end, we narrowed our sample to the top 154 American political bloggers. An invitation was sent to these bloggers, of which 66 completed our online survey (42.9% response rate).

Our sample of bloggers included 46 men and 16 women (4 unknown). 54 of our respondents identified themselves as Caucasians, one as an Asian American, one as a Native American and four responded as “Other” (no respondents self-identified as Black/African American, Arab American or Hispanic/Latino). The median age of our respondents was 44.4 years with the oldest respondent at 66 and the youngest at 18. 42.6% of those responding to our question concerning annual income reported making more than \$100,000 a year while 31.5% reported making less than \$40,000. Our sample was split ideologically with 52.6% of participants responding that the majority of their posts could best be described as “liberal” while the remaining indicated that their posts could best be described as “conservative.” The respondent who has been blogging the longest started blogging in January 1998, the newest blogger started in May 2006. Our survey sample included bloggers who contribute at over a hundred different blogs, including Daily Kos, Hullabaloo, Right Wing News and Pajamas Media.

In the survey, bloggers were presented with a list of 14 possible motivations and asked “To what extent are the following motivations reasons for why you started blogging in the first place?” and “To what extent are the following motivations currently reasons for why you blog?” Bloggers were asked to rate each of these 14 statements – such as “to critique mainstream media,” “to help society” and “to blow off steam” – on an 11-point scale from 0 (Not at all) to 10 (Very much). Besides these quantitative measures, bloggers were also asked the open-ended question, “Why did you start a blog?”

Beyond questions concerning motivations, respondents were asked to estimate what percentage of their audience – both readers and those who post on their blogs – agrees with them most of the time, some of the time and rarely. Participants were also asked to rate on an 11-point scale – from 0 (Not at all) to 10 (Very much) – their agreement with a series of statements beginning with the premise “the Internet can be effective in helping” and ending with claims concerning political efficacy. In addition, bloggers were asked several other questions about ideology, media and blog content that are beyond the scope of this paper.

Results

For initial blog motivations, respondents rated the following three statements the highest: “to let off steam” ($M = 7.00$, $SD = 2.93$), “to keep track of your thoughts” ($M = 6.46$, $SD = 3.20$) and “to formulate new ideas” ($M = 6.44$, $SD = 3.09$). The lowest three initial motivators were “to earn money” ($M = .95$, $SD = 2.50$), “to influence mainstream media” ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 3.34$), and “to help your political party or cause” ($M = 4.58$, $SD = 3.69$).

As far as motivations for currently blogging, the three statements that most strongly registered with our respondents were all different from their top three initial motivators: “to provide an alternative perspective to the mainstream media” ($M = 7.87$, $SD = 2.43$), “to inform

people about the most relevant information on topics of interest” ($M = 7.61$, $SD = 2.31$) and “to influence public opinion” ($M = 7.27$, $SD = 2.69$). The three smallest current motivators were very similar to their three lowest initial motivators: “to earn money” ($M = 1.84$, $SD = 3.04$), “to influence mainstream media” ($M = 5.25$, $SD = 3.06$), and “to critique your political opponents” ($M = 5.85$, $SD = 3.15$).

To test the differences between initial and current levels of motivations for blogging among respondents, a paired-sample t-test was conducted (see Table 1). Results of the t-test demonstrate that all motivations increased in relation to their initial levels, except for the motive “to let off steam.”

Among the motivations, “to provide an alternative perspective to the mainstream media” increased the most between initial ($M = 6.23$, $SD = 3.66$) and current levels ($M = 7.87$, $SD = 2.43$) ($t=4.292$, $df=60$, $p<.01$). “To help society,” “to influence public opinion” and “to help your political party or cause” also demonstrated significant increases as compared to initial levels. In terms of making money, although the current motivation is very low ($M = 1.84$, $SD = 3.04$), this value still increased significantly as compared with the initial value ($M = .95$, $SD = 2.50$) ($t=2.371$, $df=61$, $p<.05$).

On the contrary, “to let of steam” is the only motive to decrease from initial to current levels at the .1 significant level. The current mean score of “to let of steam” is 6.57 ($SD = 2.76$), whereas the initial mean score was 7.00 ($SD = 2.93$) ($t=-1.793$, $df=59$, $p<.1$).

Table 2 shows the differences in bloggers’ perceptions of whether their blogs readers and posters agree with them most of the time or rarely. More than half of the respondents ($M = 62.85\%$, $SD = 18.75\%$) believed that their blog readers agree with them most of the time, while only a small fraction of bloggers believed their readers rarely agree with them ($M = 13.08\%$, SD

= 12.13%). Similarly, the respondents believed more than half of readers who actually post on their blog agree with them most of the time ($M = 60.61\%$, $SD = 25.02\%$), while a small number believe posters rarely agree with them ($M = 13.43\%$, $SD = 13.03\%$).

Table 3 shows that our blogger sample reported that the Internet plays an important role in civic life. When asked “to what extent do you believe the Internet can be effective in helping” a series of items, they responded that the Internet helps citizens to understand politics better ($M = 7.79$, $SD = 2.23$) and have more political influence ($M = 7.51$, $SD = 2.22$). In addition, our blogger sample believed that the Internet makes public officials take citizens’ concerns in account ($M = 7.19$, $SD = 2.44$).

All 66 respondents answered the open-ended question inquiring why they started blogging in the first place. Motivations discussed in these responses largely fell into one of two general groups:

- 1) the desire to write or express ideas about social and political issues
- 2) communicate issues or points-of-view to a larger audience that are not otherwise adequately covered by the mainstream media

Portions of these open-ended responses will be included in the discussion section below.

Discussion

Based on the findings of our survey, the current levels of all motivations for blogging among the respondents have heightened when compared with motivations at the time they first started blogging – barring the insignificant decrease in the motive “to let off steam.” These results demonstrate that blogging has an empowering effect. On average, bloggers were more motivated to blog now than they were when they first started blogging. In particular, the motivation “to provide an alternative perspective to the mainstream media” experienced the largest increase over time. This demonstrates that the more these respondents provided their

unique point-of-view on blogs, the more they saw the need to offer their perspective in relation to those put forward by the mainstream media. They become more cognizant of the fact that the blogosphere has provided them with an outlet outside of traditional news media for disseminating information and another method besides day-to-day social interactions for expressing political thoughts. Several of the responses to our open-ended motivation question help illustrate these reasons for blogging. Below are statements made by respondents who found blogging to be primarily an outlet for discussing and expressing opinions about political and social matters:

Basically to make myself write more frequently and put a lot of personal thinking and research on public issues into coherent form.

To express my views.

Primarily as an outlet to vent about political, legal, and religious matters.

I was always interested in history, politics, world affairs, etc. During the 2004 election, I e-mailed friends and families all the time with news items, and after the election, I thought why not start a blog? It seemed a natural thing to do.

Other bloggers emphasized their ability to influence political discourse and demonstrated a strong sense of blog efficacy. Below are some representative statements from these respondents:

I was skeptical of them at first -- mostly saw them as vanity projects. Then I saw that they were capable of moving information around the traditional media bottlenecks and decided that it was something I could contribute to.

To practice writing. To learn from others. Curiosity. To a small degree to see in (sic) blogging could affect a positive change in the local community.

First, I was frustrated out of my wits with the shallowness, and lack of context, background, and even facts, in political reporting. I started blogging so I could research and provide (for SOMEBODY) the information and context I wasn't seeing in establishment media.

To talk about government and politics in our state, and to fact-check the local media. Caught up in the excitement and chaos of the political season, since it was a presidential election year, I naively imagined I might exert political influence. So I started a blog.

The responses from these bloggers illustrate the empowerment our respondents see in the blogging process. They have come to understand blogging as a means for them to impact the local community, provide depth not found in other political reporting and exert political influence in the context of the presidential election.

Related to this sense of empowerment are our findings about these bloggers' perceptions of agreement with their readers (see Table 2) and the effectiveness of the Internet on civic life (see Table 3). Bloggers believe that the majority of their audience – readers and posters – agrees with them most of the time. Whether or not this is true is irrelevant; the perception that bloggers are in regular communication with a supportive audience is an empowering proposition. Also, bloggers believe the Internet can be highly effective in educating citizens, providing more influence to citizens and holding public officials accountable to the concerns of citizens. Their belief in the Internet's high political efficacy likely impacts their understanding of their own ability to meet these ends through online activities, such as blogging.

The paired-sample t-tests (see Table 1) demonstrate that the motives of “to help society,” “to influence public opinion” and “to help your political party or cause” also experienced sizable increases from the time our respondents first started blogging. Although, the general increase in almost all motivators indicates that bloggers experience a heightened overall need to provide alternative information unavailable through traditional media outlets, the motivators demonstrating the greatest increase all correspond with bloggers' beliefs in their ability to be influential. In light of the perspectives offered in our open-ended responses, this finding hits at the complexities of the underlying processes that shape and change bloggers throughout their experiences during their blogging life-span – or blogspan. Specifically, although a demonstrable change is evident in our findings, we know very little about the processes that occur within the

blogosphere that influence bloggers to have these heightened motives as their blogspan increases.

Though our data-set cannot sufficiently provide definitive answers to these complex questions, an examination of the open-ended motivation responses begins to reveal a process whereby bloggers undergo a transformation over the course of their blogspan. We hypothesize that 1) bloggers enter the blogosphere initially with a certain set of primary motivations, which shape the goals of their initial blogging activities, 2) through the experience of blogging (specifically for those who attract a sizable and dedicated audience), bloggers realize their ability to influence and shape political issues, and 3) this realization alters their primary motivations for blogging, thereby also affecting the production of blog content.

Following this hypothetical progression, we believe that most political bloggers' are initially motivated to enter the blogosphere in order to achieve an *internal* goal that generally fulfills an *expressive* need. In other words, when bloggers begin blogging, they largely consider blogging an activity that satisfies their desire to think about and express personal ideas on social and political issues. Blogging provides them with a new opportunity and medium to write and express these internal issues. At this stage in their blogspan, bloggers are not focused on targeting a particular external audience, but rather expect to reach a small number of readers who offer social forms of feedback and support (Miller & Shepherd, 2004; Nardi, Schiano & Gembrecht, 2004). The following open-ended response exemplifies this stage in the blogspan:

I am a writer by nature. I have a lot of things to say because my mind never stops working. Blogging allows me to express myself and prevents me from being trapped under a mountain of half-formed ideas.

However, as political bloggers continue to express their ideas online, especially as their readership increases, they realize that they have the ability to shape and frame issues for their

audiences. This realization coincides with an audience transformation from a handful of visitors providing feedback to a community of readers who are generally in agreement with the bloggers' positions on social and political issues. At this stage in their blogspan, bloggers no longer view blogging as an internal process of expression, but rather an *external* process of *influence*. The following open-ended response hints at this blogspan stage:

I had been engaging in political debate via email for so long, I thought blogging might be a good chance to write at greater length, with more permanence and (maybe, if I was lucky) with a larger audience.

As this stage corresponds with an increased readership, the bloggers' new motivation to be influential furthers their desire to reach even greater audiences. The sense of empowerment and the recognition of their influence increase their desire to communicate their perspectives and opinions with more people. Empowered political bloggers believe that through access to larger audiences they would be better able to address their increasingly strong motivations for providing an alternative perspective to the mainstream media, to influence public opinion and to help society and their political party or cause.

Although the details and causes of this change in motivations cannot be drawn directly from the findings of our dataset, the heightening/reordering of motivations over time and the ideas expressed in the open-ended responses provide clues into this evolutionary process, which we hypothesize as beginning with a blogger's satisfaction of internal needs (expression) and moving towards the fulfillment of more external goals (influence). This theoretical formulation of changes in motivation over the course of a blogspan provides an explanation for why letting off steam (internal) was the only blogger motivation to decrease, while the motivations for extending direction, aid and perspective (external) demonstrated the greatest growth.

Limitations and Future Research

Although the research presented in this paper provides notable findings, there remain two basic limitations inherent in this study. First, while this study offered a comparison of bloggers' motivations for two different time periods, it relied on information acquired through a cross-sectional survey. Thus, when respondents were asked about their initial motivations for blogging, they were dependent upon memories and projections of what they believed to be true of the past – in some cases having to recall as many as nine years earlier. This reliance on long-term memory to provide precise assessments of the past adds a level of uncertainty to the accuracy of our comparisons with their current perspectives.

Secondly, this study examined bloggers' motivations and perceptions on blogging based on self-reporting. One of the problems with self-reporting is it can encourage respondents to answer questions in more socially desirable ways. For example, when participants were asked to rate the motivations "to earn money" or "to help society," they could have rated the former with a lower number and the latter with a higher number than what accurately reflects their true motivations. Such inaccurate self-reporting is not always intentional, the effects of social desirability can be conscious or unconscious.

Finally, our hypotheses concerning the change in motivations over the course of a blogspan provide a number of opportunities for future research. While our findings provide evidence for the evolution from internal to external motivations, we are unable to fully uncover the details and implications of this theoretical formulation. Because of this, we see two general questions that should be addressed in future research in order to expand what is presented here.

Why does this change in motivations occur? Future research should engage in longitudinal studies of political bloggers over the course of their blogspan. These studies should

investigate the causes of this change and more specifically detail the trajectories of various motivations. A number of interesting questions could be addressed in this type of study, such as: does an increased readership initiate this change or does the change initiate an increase in readership?

What impact does this change have in blog content? Because many other studies have analyzed blog content, this paper has focused specifically on political bloggers as frame builders and content creators. Future studies could combine investigations of bloggers with analyses of their corresponding blog content. As political bloggers begin to focus more on influencing their audience than expressing ideas, how does this change in motivation impact what topics they write about on blogs, how they frame these topics and any other ways in which they construct blog content? Are political bloggers conscious of their change in motivation? Are they aware that they wield more influence over their readers, traditional media and/or the general public?

This paper has offered an exploratory examination of a sample of the nation's top political bloggers. This sample has not been addressed in previous studies, yet it provides great insights into the creators of influential blog content and the agents behind the process of constructing frames. Our findings demonstrate that these political bloggers experienced a change in motivations from when they first began blogging to why they continue to blog today. Not only are virtually all motivators heightened over time, but we suggest that this change signifies a transition from bloggers understanding blogging as an internal, expressive form of communication to seeing it as an external process of extending influence. We encourage future research to investigate this formulation further as well as extend the body of research that looks beyond political blog content and at the bloggers themselves.

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Table 1. Paired sample T-Tests between Initial and Current Motivation of Blogging

Motivations	Type	Initial	Current	T	df
To provide an alternative perspective to the mainstream media	Unclear	6.23	7.87	4.292***	61
To help society	Influence	5.37	6.79	4.092***	62
To inform people about the most <i>relevant</i> information on topics of interest	Influence	6.31	7.61	3.866***	61
To influence public opinion	Influence	5.59	7.27	3.268***	62
To help your political party or cause	Influence	4.58	5.81	3.161***	62
To influence mainstream media	Influence	3.83	5.25	3.1***	63
To serve as a political watchdog	Unclear	4.79	5.85	2.907***	61
To inform people about the most <i>recent</i> information on topics of interest	Expression	4.89	5.82	2.553**	62
To earn money	Neither	.95	1.84	2.371**	61
To critique mainstream media	Expression	5.24	6.13	2.253**	63
To formulate new ideas	Expression	6.44	7.22	2.215**	59
To critique your political opponents	Expression	5.16	5.64	1.342	61
To keep track of your thoughts	Expression	6.46	6.74	.963	61
To let off steam	Expression	7.00	6.57	-1.793*	60

Note: The levels of motivation were measured with an eleven-point scale: Not at all = 0, Very much = 10 (p<.1*, p<05**, p<.01***)

Table 2. Bloggers' perceptions about their blog readers and posters

Bloggers' perceptions	N	Agree with me most of the time	Rarely agree with me
About readers	62	62.85 (18.75)	13.08 (12.13)
About posters	56	60.61 (25.02)	13.43 (13.03)

Note: Bloggers' perceptions were measured as a percentage with standard deviation in parenthesis.

Table 3. Blogger's perceptions about the effect of the Internet on civic life.

“The Internet can be effective in helping...”	N	Mean (SD)
...citizens to better understand politics	63	7.79 (2.23)
...citizens to have more political influence	63	7.51 (2.22)
...make public officials take citizen's concerns into account	63	7.19 (2.44)

Note: Responses were measured using an eleven-point scale: Not at all = 0, Very much = 10