Study: Bloggers' reasons for writing change over time

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(PhysOrg.com) -- While political bloggers were initially inspired to post their thoughts online as a way to help them blow off steam or articulate new ideas, over time they're driven to blog by a desire to influence mainstream media or public opinion, according to research from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Researchers Brian Ekdale, Kang Namkoong and Timothy K.F. Fung, graduate students from UW-Madison's School of Journalism and Mass Communication, and David D. Perlmutter of the University of Iowa, surveyed 66 of the top U.S. political bloggers, asking about their intrinsic and extrinsic reasons for blogging.

Despite the influence bloggers have had on American politics in recent years, little research has been done on the people who sit at the keyboards of the top political blogs, the research says. The bloggers were surveyed before the 2006 midterm elections.

"We asked these bloggers if they felt more motivated to blog now than when they first started, and we found blogging was a motivating activity for them," Ekdale says.

But even as bloggers become more responsive of external reasons for blogging, the internal motivations continue to influence their blogging activities, the study says.

"Relative to when these bloggers first decided to provide their unique

point of view online, they now saw an increased need to offer their perspective," says the study, which was published in the journal *New Media & Society*. "They became more cognizant of the fact that, outside of traditional news media and day-to-day interactions, the blogosphere provided them with an outlet for disseminating information and expressing political opinions."

The bloggers surveyed indicated that such factors as wanting to let off steam influenced them to start blogging, but the longer they blogged, the more they said external reasons also drove them to blog. That indicates they must have been seeing some effect because of their work, Ekdale says.

"They're still motivated for those intrinsic reasons, but those reasons that allow them to see some sort of impact out in the world — whether that's in the media, the community or a political party — all of those motivations were increasing over time," Ekdale says.

When asked "Why did you start a blog?" the bloggers indicated they were motivated by internal factors such as wanting to improve their writing and thinking on issues, as well as to see if they could effect change in policy or in mainstream media.

"I recognized that it was a new medium of expression for opinionated and disaffected writers with few other outlets," wrote one blogger. "I was dissatisfied with the current political milieu and experienced enough with the online world to realize that it would be a fun way to write and be read."

Another wrote of blogs, "I was skeptical of them at first... 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."

The study is part of a larger project by the Social Media and Democracy research group, developed by a group of graduate students in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication. Dhavan Shah, Maier-Bascom Professor in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, who taught the students in a seminar on the Internet and democracy, says he's becoming convinced that the shift in the way information is consumed is both powerful and revolutionary.

"It's a change not only in the way we're getting our news information, but how we're fundamentally interacting with each other about issues of importance," making research like that from Ekdale and his other graduate students increasingly important, he says.

Further research from the study, such as reasons readers seek information from blogs, is expected to be published in the coming months, Shah says.

Provided by University of Wisconsin-Madison

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