



Article

# Why blog? (then and now): exploring the motivations for blogging by popular American political bloggers

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## Abstract

Despite the impact that influential American political bloggers have had on public policies and the mainstream media agenda in recent years, very little research is currently available on the most widely read political bloggers. Through a survey of 66 top American political bloggers, the present study examines this elite group by analyzing their initial and current motivations for blogging as well as their online and offline behaviors. The findings demonstrate that nearly all motivations for blogging have increased over time, with the most substantial increases occurring in extrinsic motivations. The results also reveal a significant association between extrinsic motivations and blogger online and offline political participation. This study demonstrates that future research on political blogs needs to look beyond blog readers and blog content and investigate the influential political bloggers themselves.

## Keywords

bloggers, extrinsic and intrinsic motivations, political blogs, political participation

In the past several years, political bloggers have played a significant role in the development of the American mainstream news agenda and Washington politics. For example,

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bloggers were instrumental in the 2002 resignation of Trent Lott as Senate Minority Leader (Drezner and Farrell, 2004; Gill, 2004) and in exposing a forged memo used in a 2004 CBS News report about President George W. Bush's National Guard service (Adamic and Glance, 2005; Barlow, 2007). More recently, the blog Talking Points Memo even won the 2008 George Polk Award for Legal Reporting for driving the news media's coverage of the Justice Department's controversial dismissal of several US attorneys (McFadden, 2008).

By now, many of the country's most influential bloggers have been blogging about political topics and current events for years. Some of them have been concentrating on political issues from the very beginning, such as Markos Moulitsas, who made it clear on his first Daily Kos post, 'I am liberal. I make no apologies' (Moulitsas, 2002), and Ed Morrissey, who blogged about the 2003 California recall vote the day Captain's Quarters went live (Morrissey, 2003). On the other hand, many influential political bloggers emerged from much humbler, and occasionally non-political, roots. For instance, Charles Johnson at Little Green Footballs ran primarily a technology blog prior to 11 September 2001 (Bernhard, 2005), and on the day Eschaton launched, the now-widely read blogger Atrios pondered, 'I wonder how long it will be until literally dozens of people are reading this on an almost monthly basis' (Black, 2002).

Yet despite the intriguing emergence of bloggers into legitimate political circles and their apparent influence on American media and public policies, very little research on the most widely read political bloggers is currently available. While there is a growing body of research focused on political blog content (Adamic and Glance, 2005; Bichard, 2006; Jackson, 2006; Rogers, 2005) and blog readers (Kaye, 2005, 2007; Kaye and Johnson, 2002; Lenhart and Fox, 2006), this study seeks to investigate the most popular political bloggers themselves. This research builds upon previous scholarship concerning blogger motivations (McKenna, 2006; Nardi et al., 2004b) and behaviors (Huang et al., 2007) to understand why political bloggers blog and whether the reasons for blogging change over time. Through a survey of 66 top American political bloggers, our study focuses specifically on intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for blogging. By asking participants to rate their motivations for blogging at the time of the survey and when they initially began blogging, this study seeks to understand if and how these motivations evolve over the course of their blogspan – the period during which a blogger blogs. Emphasizing that blog content is a product of particular blogging agents, this study also examines how motivations for blogging are related to participants' online and offline forms of political participation.

## Political Blogs and Their Bloggers

Although blogs have received a considerable amount of attention recently, there is no clear consensus among scholars, media professionals and blog users about the definition of the word 'blog' (Baumer et al., 2008; boyd, 2006). For the most part, academic literature emphasizes the structural components of blogs, characterizing a blog as a web page consisting of a series of entries, or posts, listed in reverse-chronological order (Drezner and Farrell, 2004; Herring et al., 2004; Nardi et al., 2004a). Yet Baumer et al. (2008)

found that when blog readers describe blogs, they emphasize the interactional attributes rather than any structural features. These authors argue that it is 'more useful and informative to consider blogs not in terms of academic definitions, but rather in the terms of those involved in the activity of blogging' (Baumer et al., 2008: 1116). In her thorough examination of various and contradictory uses of the term 'blog', boyd (2006) adds that early scholarship and media coverage used the metaphor of online diaries or journals to conceptualize blogs. She argues this metaphor limited the public's conceptualization of blogs and dismissed bloggers who understand blogging as a journalistic activity.

The presence and popularity of blogs, which have been around since the early days of the world wide web, grew exponentially after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks as writers sought new outlets to express their feelings about the uncertain times and readers searched for information unavailable in the mainstream media (Blood, 2002; Drezner and Farrell, 2004; Scott, 2004). These same bloggers eventually turned their attention more generally to American domestic and foreign policy issues, and political elites started to adopt bloggers into their political campaigns (Kerbel and Bloom, 2005; Wallsten, 2005). During the 2004 presidential campaign, 39 percent of all US internet users visited blogs and 9 percent read political blogs 'sometimes' or 'frequently' (Lenhart and Fox, 2006; Rainie, 2005). In their study of blog credibility, Johnson and Kaye (2004) report that blog readers perceive blogs as a more credible source of news than any other medium, including online and offline forms of newspaper, television and radio news. Two reasons that help explain blogs' high perceived credibility are that they often cover issues with greater depth than traditional media and they are able to present complex issues in a manner that is relevant and understandable to their audiences (Johnson and Kaye, 2004; Rogers, 2005). In addition, some readers perceive blogs as more authentic than mainstream media. Blog posts are a form of narrative that reflects a blogger's own perspective and judgment on an issue, leaving the interpretation and evaluation to readers (Baumer et al., 2008).

Unlike traditional news, most political bloggers do not subscribe to journalistic norms of objectivity; rather, their writings tend to be grounded in strong ideological assumptions (Hennessy and Martin, 2006). In fact, the increasingly large number of bloggers and the diversity of opinions found online have led to a fractured blogosphere (Adamic and Glance, 2005). Kerbel and Bloom (2005: 22) 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'. Although at least 57 million American adults read blogs (Lenhart and Fox, 2006), their readership patterns are diverse, with most readers searching for blogs that reflect their own opinions. Farrell et al. (2008) found strong evidence for this polarization of readership, as 94 percent of their respondents who read political blogs consume only those from one side of the ideological spectrum. Yet while this limited, fragmented readership might indicate that the influence of political bloggers extends only to a small audience already in agreement with a blog's particular viewpoint, blogger influence reaches the general public through the impact that blogs have on traditional news media (Adamic and Glance, 2005; Gill, 2004). In addition to the previously cited examples of blogs influencing the mainstream news agenda, several journalists and newspaper editors have indicated that they read blogs in the process of gathering information for their stories (Farrell and Drezner, 2008).

## Political Blogger Motivations and Behaviors

The content of a blog depends heavily on the intentions of its author or authors, with some blogs serving as news aggregators, some as more personal diaries and others as political soapboxes. As boyd (2006: 3) points out in arguing that blogs should be reconceptualized as a medium rather than a genre, blogging encapsulates a 'diverse set of practices that result in the production of diverse content'. Therefore, understanding why political bloggers choose to blog is useful for expanding our understanding of the content found on those blogs. Indeed, while laying out a framework for studying mainstream media effects, Scheufele (1999) argues for the importance of analyzing why journalists adopt certain frames rather than limiting our focus to frames themselves. Similarly, 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 through 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' (Carragee and Roefs, 2004: 216). In the present context, one way to address the blogging process is by examining the motivations of political bloggers themselves, keeping in mind that these bloggers are unique agents who create influential blog content.

Cognitive psychologists assert that an individual's behavior is influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Calder and Staw, 1975). Intrinsic motivations are those that cause an individual to engage in an activity because the process of performing that activity is inherently interesting, enjoyable and satisfying. On the other hand, extrinsic motivations lead an individual to engage in an activity because of the pressures or rewards in achieving outcomes that come from outside the individual. The major distinction between the two in influencing behavior is that people who are intrinsically motivated engage in an activity for the sake of the activity itself while those who are extrinsically motivated engage in an activity because of the reinforcement of the value of outcomes and rewards (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations may serve as driving forces for engaging people in the process of political blogging, as bloggers may seek to express their ideas and organize their thoughts as well as influence others' opinions and provide viewpoints that are alternative to those of mainstream media.

Several recent studies have begun to examine the question of why bloggers blog. Nardi et al. (2004b) identify five motivational factors for blogging: documenting one's life; providing commentary and opinions; expressing deeply felt emotions; articulating ideas through writing; and forming and maintaining community forums. In discussing all types of bloggers, the authors claim blogging is driven by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: 'Blogging is an unusually versatile medium, employed for everything from spontaneous release of emotion to archivable support of group collaboration and community' (Nardi et al., 2004b: 46). Similarly, Liu et al. (2007) found that the two greatest motivational factors for bloggers were the intrinsic motivation of expressing feelings and the extrinsic motivation of connecting with other people. Further, the authors found that blogging activities were strongly related to perceived gratifications, as those who believed blogging would fulfill their desire to pour out feelings and connect with others were more willing to update and maintain their blogs. Huang et al. (2007) also found a

connection between blogger motivations and behaviors in their survey of over 300 Taiwanese bloggers. For example, they found the self-expression motivation leads to interaction-oriented behavior and the information-seeking motivation leads to content-gathering-oriented behavior.

While these studies focused on bloggers generally, it is important to distinguish between those who blog about personal, social and cultural topics and those who concentrate on political issues, as their motivations may differ. In his study of non-‘A-list’ political bloggers, Wallsten (2005) found these bloggers were primarily driven by two motivations: (1) a desire for self-expression on political issues (i.e. a form of political expression) and (2) a desire to influence the distribution of social goods and social values (i.e. a form of political participation). According to this categorization, political bloggers are driven by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, the former being intrinsic and the latter extrinsic as bloggers are rewarded by perceiving the influence of their content beyond themselves. Kavanaugh et al. (2006) also report that political bloggers tend to have a higher sense of community collective efficacy, are better informed about local and larger political problems, belong to more formal social networks and are more likely to deliberate with others on these issues. Recent studies have also shown that blogging is a social activity that incorporates blog readers as well as bloggers (Baumer et al., 2008). Bloggers’ awareness of their readers can have an impact on what they chose to blog about and what identity they present to their audience (Nardi et al., 2004a). Also, the expectations of blog readers, concerning frequency of updates, responsiveness and more, may influence a blogger’s posting activities (Baumer et al., 2008).

Therefore, the present study provides an investigation into the motivations for political blogging, whether these motivations change over time and if these motivations impact blogger behavior. Following the work of Nardi et al. (2004b), and McKenna (2006) and Wallsten (2005), our study is guided generally by the following research question: Why do the most widely read American political bloggers blog? Through a cross-sectional survey, our study examines intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that political bloggers had when they first began blogging and why they continue to blog today. By definition, extrinsic motivations will only drive people’s behaviors when they expect to receive rewards contingent on performing a task. Because political blogging is a relatively new phenomenon, we therefore expect that our political bloggers had lower expectations as to the external outcomes they would achieve when they first began blogging. Therefore, we hypothesize that extrinsic motivations will be greater in later stages of a blogger’s blogspan. At the same time, we also want to examine whether there are significant changes in intrinsic motivations over time:

H1: Extrinsic motivations for blogging will increase over the blogspan.

RQ1: Will intrinsic motivations for blogging change over the blogspan?

Extending the work of Huang et al. (2007), our study also seeks to understand the relationship between blogger motivations and behavior. Because political participation is related to external goals, we expect that extrinsic motivations will be positively correlated with bloggers’ online and offline political behavior. Although we agree with McKenna and Pole (2004) that blogging activities constitute a form of political participation,

we separately measure online and offline political participation to determine if blogger motivations equally impact both types of behavior. Further, we also hypothesize that the influence of extrinsic motivations on behavior will be greater than that of intrinsic motivations:

H2: Extrinsic motivations will be positively associated with blogger online and offline forms of political participation.

H3: The association between extrinsic motivations and blogger behavior will be greater than the association between intrinsic motivations and blogger behavior.

## Sampling the Most Widely Read Political Blogs

To determine the top blogs, indexing sites employ a number of different methods (Blogstreet, 2008; Technorati, 2008). 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 from other sites and blogrolled, which places them high on most blog rankings, and the mainstream press repeatedly cites these same blogs as key representatives of the political blogosphere (Perlmutter, 2008). 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 aforementioned rankings 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 to focus on experienced bloggers writing for audiences who were familiar with the blog content and style. In the end, we had narrowed our sample to the top 154 American political bloggers. An invitation to participate in our research was sent to these bloggers in fall 2006, of which 66 completed our online survey (42.9% response rate).

Our sample of bloggers included 46 men and 16 women (4 unknown). In terms of race, 54 of our respondents identified themselves as Caucasian, one as Asian American, one as 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. With regard to income, 42.6 percent reported making more than US\$100,000 a year while 31.5 percent reported making less than US\$40,000. Our sample was split evenly across ideological lines, with 52.6 percent of participants responding that the majority of their posts could best be described as 'liberal' while the remainder indicated that their posts could best be described as 'conservative'. Our most experienced respondent started blogging in January 1998, while the newest blogger started in May 2006. Our survey sample included bloggers who contribute at over 100 different blogs, including sites such as Daily Kos, Hullabaloo, Right Wing News and Pajamas Media.



## Measures

In the survey, we developed 13 possible blogger motivations based on the previous research (Blood, 2002; Nardi et al., 2004b). In order to measure initial and current motivations for blogging, these items were presented to bloggers with the following two questions, '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?' All items were measured on an 11-point scale that ranged from 0 (not at all) to 10 (very much). As mentioned earlier, the study of blogger motivations in Nardi et al. (2004b) focused on all types of bloggers and therefore contained motivational categories (e.g. documenting one's life) we felt were unique to social bloggers. Therefore, we adopted three of the five motivational categories outlined in Nardi et al. (2004b): providing commentary and opinions, articulating ideas through writing and expressing deeply felt emotions. Based on the targets of political commentary and opinions, such as mainstream media, society, political parties and politicians, the motivation of providing commentary and opinions was measured with 10 items: 'to critique mainstream media', 'to influence mainstream media', 'to provide an alternative perspective to the mainstream media', 'to help society', 'to influence public opinion', 'to help your political party or cause', 'to critique political opponents', 'to serve as a political watchdog', 'to inform people about the most relevant information on topics of interest' and 'to inform people about the most recent information on topics of interest'. The result of exploratory factor analysis showed that these 10 items constructed one dimension of blogger motivation regardless of the targets of commentary or opinion (initial:  $M = 5.27$ ,  $SD = 2.43$ ,  $\alpha = .88$ ; current:  $M = 6.42$ ,  $SD = 1.76$ ,  $\alpha = .82$ ). Thus, we combined the 10 items into one variable, which we labeled extrinsic motivations, because they each include a specified external target. To measure the concepts of articulating ideas through writing and expressing deeply felt emotions, we developed three other motivation items: 'to formulate new ideas', 'to keep track of your thoughts' and 'to let off steam'. It is worth mentioning that the number of items measuring intrinsic motivations is considerably smaller than those measuring extrinsic motivations because the target of intrinsic motivation is only the self. Following the result of factor analysis, intrinsic motivations were divided into two dimensions: the motivations of articulating ideas and catharsis. The variable 'articulating ideas' was constructed by combining two items: 'to formulate new ideas' and 'to keep track of your thoughts' (initial:  $M = 6.49$ ,  $SD = 2.69$ , inter-item correlation = .52; current:  $M = 6.95$ ,  $SD = 2.32$ , inter-item correlation = .39), while 'catharsis' was measured with a single item of 'let off steam' (initial:  $M = 7.00$ ,  $SD = 2.90$ ; current:  $M = 6.55$ ,  $SD = 2.84$ ). In exploring the changes in motivations over the blogspan, however, we used each of the 13 motivation items, not the constructs of extrinsic and intrinsic motivations discussed above.

Beyond questions concerning motivations, the survey also measured bloggers' online and offline political behavior. In terms of bloggers' offline political behavior, we adopted political participation items widely used in political communication research (Eveland and Scheufele, 2000; Scheufele et al., 2003; Shah, 1998). Respondents were asked how frequently they participated in a series of political events or activities, such as: signed a

paper petition, contributed money to a political campaign or cause, worked on a political campaign, contacted elected officials, wrote a letter to the editor of a newspaper or magazine, volunteered for a social group or cause and attended a protest or rally ( $M = 4.83$ ,  $SD = 2.40$ ,  $\alpha = .86$ ). Their response was recorded on an 11-point scale that ranged from 0 (not at all) to 10 (very frequently).

Blogger online behaviors are broadly defined by two behavioral orientations of blogging: social interaction and information search (Huang et al., 2007). According to Huang et al. (2007), the information search orientation is closely related to blogger content-gathering behaviors. Thus, in order to determine blogger content-gathering and posting behaviors, it is important to look at what kind of information bloggers usually collect and upload to their blog. In addition, we sought to examine the ideological congruency between bloggers and their blog content to investigate whether individual bloggers participate in the fracturing of the blogosphere (Adamic and Glance, 2005; Farrell et al., 2008). Therefore, we constructed two measures of bloggers' posting behaviors: posting favorable and unfavorable information about a candidate the blogger supports. Respondents were asked, 'How likely would you be to post links to or excerpts from the following things in the week before the elections?' and were presented with four pairs of behaviors concerning posting favorable and unfavorable information about candidates they support: new poll numbers, news stories, editorials and posts from other blogs (favorable:  $M = 4.59$ ,  $SD = 3.23$ ,  $\alpha = .93$ ; unfavorable:  $M = 3.53$ ,  $SD = 2.75$ ,  $\alpha = .92$ ). These questions were rated on an 11-point scale that ranged from 0 (not at all) to 10 (very much).

In addition to these quantitative measures, bloggers were also asked the open-ended question, 'Why did you start a blog?' Responses to this question will appear later to provide further contextual information about this study's findings concerning motivations for blogging. Participants were also asked several other questions about party identification, media use and blog content that are beyond the scope of the current study.

## Results

In response to our survey, participants rated the following three items highest for initial blogger motivations: '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 three lowest initial motivators were 'to influence mainstream media' ( $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = 3.34$ ), 'to help your political party or cause' ( $M = 4.58$ ,  $SD = 3.69$ ) and 'to serve as a political watchdog' ( $M = 4.79$ ,  $SD = 3.40$ ). As for current motivations for blogging, the three items that most strongly resonated with our respondents were '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' ( $M = 7.27$ ,  $SD = 2.69$ ). While none of these statements were considered among the top three initial motivations, the three weakest current motivators were very similar to the three lowest initial motivators: 'to influence mainstream media' ( $M = 5.25$ ,  $SD = 3.06$ ), 'to critique your political opponents' ( $M = 5.64$ ,  $SD = 3.14$ ) and 'to help your political party or cause' ( $M = 5.81$ ,  $SD = 3.24$ ).



To test the differences between initial and current levels of motivations for blogging among respondents, we conducted a paired-sample *t*-test. As shown in Table 1, results of the *t*-test demonstrate that all motivations increased from initial to current levels, except for the motive 'to let off steam'. As we predicted in H1, current extrinsic motivation ( $M = 6.40$ ,  $SD = 1.78$ ) significantly increased as compared to initial levels ( $M = 5.27$ ,  $SD = 2.43$ ) ( $t = 4.27$ ,  $d.f. = 62$ ,  $p < .01$ ). More specifically, of the 10 extrinsic motivations, 'to provide an alternative perspective to the mainstream media' increased the most between initial ( $M = 6.23$ ,  $SD = 3.66$ ) and current levels ( $M = 7.87$ ,  $SD = 2.43$ ) ( $t = 4.29$ ,  $d.f. = 60$ ,  $p < .01$ ). 'To help society' and 'to inform people about the most relevant information on topics of interest' also demonstrated sizeable increases as compared to initial levels. In sum, all extrinsic motivations increased over time, although the increase of 'to critique your political opponents' is not statistically significant.

In terms of intrinsic motivations, thought process motivations also increased over the blogspan (initial:  $M = 6.49$ ,  $SD = 2.69$ ; current:  $M = 7.04$ ,  $SD = 2.29$ ;  $t = 2.02$ ,  $d.f. = 62$ ,  $p < .05$ ), although the increase in 'to keep track of your thoughts' is not statistically significant ( $t = 0.96$ ,  $d.f. = 60$ ,  $p > .10$ ). Finally, the catharsis motivation, 'to let off steam', was the only motivation to decrease from initial to current levels at the .1 significance level. The current mean score of 'to let of steam' was 6.57 ( $SD = 2.76$ ), whereas the initial mean score was 7.00 ( $SD = 2.93$ ) ( $t = -1.79$ ,  $d.f. = 59$ ,  $p < .1$ ).

To assess the relationship between motivations and behaviors, a hierarchical regression analysis was performed. The five demographic and partisanship variables were entered in a first block, followed by a second block consisting of the three types of blogger motivations: extrinsic, articulating ideas and catharsis. The equations of this model were run to make an initial assessment of which kinds of motivations have significant effects on bloggers' political behaviors.

Table 1<sup>1</sup> demonstrates that extrinsic motivations are positively related to blog posting behaviors and offline political participation (posting favorable information about a candidate the blogger supports:  $\beta = .58$ ,  $p < .001$ ; posting unfavorable information about a candidate the blogger supports:  $\beta = .44$ ,  $p < .01$ ; offline political participation:  $\beta = .35$ ,  $p < .01$ ). However, the two intrinsic motivations, articulating ideas and catharsis, are not related to increases in blogger political behavior, either online or offline (articulating ideas: posting favorable information:  $\beta = -.09$ , ns; posting unfavorable information:  $\beta = -.07$ , ns; political participation:  $\beta = .20$ , ns; and catharsis: posting favorable information:  $\beta = .07$ , ns; posting unfavorable information:  $\beta = -.05$ , ns; political participation:  $\beta = .03$ , ns). Therefore H2 and H3 are supported in that extrinsic motivations affected bloggers' engagement in online and offline political activities, whereas intrinsic motivations had no impact on bloggers' political behaviors.

## Discussion

Based on the results of our survey, all motivations for blogging increased over the course of our participants' blogspans except for the motive 'to let off steam'. This finding demonstrates that for the top political bloggers included in our survey the activity of blogging reinforced their motivations for blogging. Overall, these bloggers were more motivated to blog now than when they first started blogging. In particular, the motivation 'to

**Table 1.** Paired sample *t*-tests between initial and current motivations for blogging

Motivations	Initial	Current	<i>t</i>	d.f.
Extrinsic	5.27	6.40	4.27**	62
To provide an alternative perspective to the mainstream media	6.23	7.87	4.29**	60
To help society	5.37	6.79	4.09**	61
To inform people about the most relevant information on topics of interest	6.31	7.61	3.87**	60
To influence public opinion	5.59	7.27	3.27**	61
To help your political party or cause	4.58	5.81	3.16**	61
To influence mainstream media	3.83	5.25	3.10**	62
To serve as a political watchdog	4.79	5.85	2.91**	60
To inform people about the most recent information on topics of interest	4.89	5.82	2.55*	61
To critique mainstream media	5.24	6.13	2.25*	62
To critique your political opponents	5.16	5.64	1.34	60
Intrinsic: articulating ideas	6.49	7.04	2.02*	62
To formulate new ideas	6.44	7.22	2.22*	58
To keep track of your thoughts	6.46	6.74	.96	60
Intrinsic: catharsis	7.00	6.57	-1.79#	59
To let off steam	7.00	6.57	-1.79#	59

Notes: The levels of motivation were measured with an 11-point scale: not at all = 0, very much = 10.

#  $p < .1$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .  $N = 62$ .

provide an alternative perspective to the mainstream media' exhibited the largest increase over time. This demonstrates that 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. 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. Indeed, several of the responses to our open-ended motivation question indicate that many bloggers found blogging to be an effective outlet for providing alternative perspectives on political and social issues:

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. (#33)

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. (#11)

The responses allude to the unique opportunities the activity of blogging provided for these individuals. Once they became bloggers, they came to understand blogging as a way to provide perspectives not found in other political reporting and reach a wide audience without participating in traditional media. And their blogging activities became self-reinforcing as they became even more motivated to blog than when they began.

H1 was supported as our results show that extrinsic motivations increased significantly over the blogspan, while our findings demonstrate mixed results for RQ1. The three intrinsic motivations – ‘to let off steam’, ‘to keep track of your thoughts’ and ‘to formulate new ideas’ – were the three strongest initial motivations for blogging, yet they demonstrated a decrease, an insignificant increase or a small increase, respectively, in our pared-sample *t*-tests. At the same time, all extrinsic motivations besides ‘to critique your political opponent’ demonstrated significant and sizeable increases from initial levels. Based on these findings, we can observe that these political bloggers were largely driven by intrinsic motivations when they decided to begin blogging. These bloggers started to blog because they believed it would provide them with an outlet to keep track of their thoughts on political issues, formulate new ideas and let off steam. As they continued to blog and their blog posts reached wider audiences, they realized they could extend influence out to their audience, the media and political parties. Later in their blogspan, these political bloggers started acquiring external rewards, such as influencing public opinion and mainstream media, helping society and political parties and serving as political watchdogs. These rewards reinforced their extrinsic motivations, some of which then become greater reasons for blogging. Yet their intrinsic motivations for blogging never disappeared and continue to be important motivators for blogging.

Although our dataset cannot fully explain why extrinsic motivations increase at a greater rate than intrinsic motivations, our open-ended responses provide some insight into this transition in motivations. For example, the following respondents all indicated that they were initially driven to blog by intrinsic motivations:

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. (#6)

I started to improve my writing and to try out ideas. (#39)

I started blogging for a number of reasons, but essentially because I recognized that it was a new medium of expression for opinionated and disaffected writers with few other outlets. 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. (#11)

The following participant also indicated a strong catharsis motivation for initially blogging:

I wanted to respond in long form to things that I was reading in the news and on other blogs. . . . Most importantly however, where I live I felt/feel a strong sense of isolation and self-censorship in ordinary day-to-day dialogue about political and religious ideas. I.e., my views are sharply out-of-step with over 80 percent of the people in my (extremely liberal) zip code, not to mention most of my family! I needed an outlet to rant so as to be civil the rest of the time. (#13)

However, as our respondents continued to share their commentaries and opinions online, they came to realize they had the ability to shape and frame issues for their audiences. The following open-ended responses hint at how these political bloggers began to recognize the external rewards that led to an increase in extrinsic motivations:

After 9/11 I had a political awakening. I was pretty a-political before that and considered myself a Democrat. 9/11 got me involved, and I found out that I am really an arch conservative. As I got more involved I started reading blogs, then of course had to get my two cents in as well. I never thought anyone would read, but now I'm getting quoted by journalists. It's been . . . surreal. (#41)

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. (#20)

To practice writing. To learn from others. Curiosity. To a small degree to see if blogging could affect a positive change in the local community. (#24)

These respondents desire to or believe that they do have a direct impact on mainstream media, their blog readers and their communities. Such recognition or aspirations relate to extrinsic motivations and reinforce their significance. Still, it is important to remember that this greater focus on extrinsic motivations does not indicate an end to our bloggers' desires to fulfill intrinsic needs. As demonstrated in Table 2, the three intrinsic motivations ranked as the greatest initial motivations still rank in the top half of bloggers' current motivations. The desire to think, express and vent through blogging remain important motivations even as these bloggers become more influential and extrinsically focused.

Our study also found strong correlations between extrinsic motivations and political bloggers' online and offline behaviors. Specifically, the respondents who highly rated the extrinsic motivations were more likely to post both favorable and unfavorable information about candidates they support. They were also more likely to participate in political activities such as signing petitions, contributing money to campaigns and attending protests or rallies. On the other hand, our study found no relationship between the intrinsic motivations and posting and political behavior. Consistent with Huang et al. (2007), this finding demonstrates that the driving forces that motivate political bloggers impact the type of content they post online, although the behaviors we tested were only impacted by extrinsic motivations.

### *Limitations and opportunities for future study*

One limitation to this study is that our comparison of bloggers' motivations for two different time periods relied on data acquired through a cross-sectional survey. Thus, when respondents were asked about 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 far back as nine years earlier. Second, although our survey asked the open-ended question 'Why did you start a blog?', it did not ask the parallel

**Table 2.** Hierarchical regression equations – posting behaviors and political participation on control and motivations

	Dependent variables					
	Posting favorable information about a candidate the blogger supports		Posting unfavorable information about a candidate the blogger supports		Offline political participation	
	Eq. 1	Eq. 2	Eq. 1	Eq. 2	Eq. 1	Eq. 2
<b>Control</b>						
Age	-.18	-.27*	-.06	-.14	.01	-.03
Gender	-.12	-.01	-.15	-.07	-.06	-.04
Education	-.39**	-.42**	-.29	-.35*	.15	.07
Income	.32*	.29*	.21	.22	.17	.15
Strength of partisanship	.35*	.26*	.10	.05	.41**	.41**
Eq. 1: Total R <sup>2</sup> (%)	23.6*		10.8		24.2*	
<b>Motivations</b>						
Extrinsic		.58***		.44**		.35**
Articulating ideas		-.09		-.07		.20
Catharsis		.07		-.05		.03
Eq. 2: Incr. R <sup>2</sup> (%)		28.7***		16.8*		18.4**
Total R <sup>2</sup> (%)		52.3***		27.7		42.6**

Notes: Coefficients are standardized beta (β). \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001. N = 50.

open-ended question, ‘Why do you continue to blog today?’ Responses to this second question could have provided further opportunities to understand this increasing emphasis on extrinsic motivations over the course of our participants’ blogspans. In addition, as discussed earlier in the Measures section, our two intrinsic motivation variables are much less robust than our single extrinsic motivation variable (‘articulating ideas’ being a two-item construct and ‘catharsis’ measured with a single item). While this imbalance indicates our quantitative findings concerning intrinsic motivations should be interpreted with caution, our open-ended responses provide greater insight into the importance of intrinsic motivations when our participants first began blogging.

It is also worth repeating here that our sample includes some of the most widely read political bloggers, the proverbial winners of the blogosphere. So although our findings demonstrate that the activity of blogging increased the motivations for blogging in our participants, we do not argue blogging is universally empowering. Indeed, many individuals who attempt to blog find it to be a frustrating venture and abandon it out of lack of fulfillment, decline of interest or inability to attain a wider audience. By definition,

our participants have achieved a large and networked audience of blog readers who regularly attend to their material. As a result, our findings here should not be generalized to non-political bloggers or non-‘A-list’ political bloggers. Therefore, we encourage future researchers to apply this framework to analyses of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for non-political and non-‘A-list’ political bloggers. Also, as the number of international bloggers continues to grow, future studies could broaden our analysis into a cross-cultural examination of political bloggers in other countries.

Our findings concerning blogger motivations, the transition in motivations over the blogspan and the connection between motivations and behavior provide a number of opportunities for future research. While our data provide evidence for a larger increase in extrinsic motivations than intrinsic motivations, they do not fully explain the cause and implications of this transition. Because of this, future research should engage in longitudinal studies of political bloggers over the course of their blogging careers. These studies should investigate the causes of this increase in extrinsic motivations and more specifically detail the trajectories of individual motivations. A number of interesting questions should be addressed in future studies, such as whether an increase in readership directly triggers an increased emphasis in extrinsic motivations. Also, because many other studies have analyzed blog content, we 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 and more on influencing the world outside themselves, we need to better understand how this increase in extrinsic motivations impacts the topics they blog about, how they frame issues or how they otherwise construct blog content. Future research should also adopt the interactional approach suggested by Baumer et al. (2008) by critically exploring the interactions between bloggers and blog readers. Because our study sought to focus specifically on political bloggers themselves, our survey did not investigate the interaction between bloggers and blog readers. Yet recent studies – many of which were published after our survey was conducted – have demonstrated clearly that the interactions between bloggers and readers are significant and can impact blogger motivations and behavior (Baumer et al., 2008; Farrell et al., 2008; Nardi et al., 2004a). Although the present study has isolated bloggers as our object of analysis, we recognize that bloggers are intricately intertwined with their blog content and their community of blog readers.

## Conclusions

This study has offered an investigation into the motivations and behaviors of some of America’s most widely read political bloggers. This elite sample provides great insights into the blogs that receive the most attention and, therefore, hold the greatest potential to influence mainstream media, the political realm and the general public. Our findings indicate that these political bloggers are more motivated to blog now than when they first began blogging. Specifically, they see great value in offering a point of view that they believe is otherwise missing in the mainstream media. Further, these bloggers have experienced a transition in motivations over the course of their blogspan. Not



only are nearly all motivations heightened over time, but our results demonstrate that these bloggers were initially driven greatly by intrinsic motivations and later became increasingly influenced by extrinsic motivations. While one might expect top political bloggers to have high extrinsic motivations by the nature of their activities and the evidence of blogger influence in media and political worlds, our findings demonstrate that these bloggers were most significantly motivated by the desire to let off steam, organize their thoughts and express their ideas when they first began blogging. This transition in motivations over the blogspan is also significant because our findings demonstrate that extrinsic motivations impact blogger behaviors – specifically, their online and offline political participation. Finally, all of these findings indicate the importance of future research that examines political bloggers with regard to their blog readers and blog content in order to attain a fuller understanding of the influence and character of blogs.

## Note

1. Because there were no differences in our hypothesis test whether we used pairwise or listwise deletion, we report the results from our hierarchical regression analysis using listwise deletion. Although doing so meant that our *N* decreased by 12, we wanted our results to be more consistent with previous research and have more explanatory power.

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