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## Patterns of self-expression and impression management in blogs

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PATTERNS OF SELF-EXPRESSION  
AND IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT  
IN BLOGS

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
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in partial fulfillment of the  
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in

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by  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The constant process of technology development offers Internet users new tools, allowing them to enjoy their right of free expression. One of the latest popular tools introduced for use by mass audience on the Internet is a weblog (or blog). There are more than 4.12 million blogs on the Internet maintained by different people with different purposes. Some of the bloggers manage to create an image that makes them “celebrities” among the community of bloggers. These are the people whose blogs are among the most well-known and also regularly linked by other bloggers. Besides, media’s view of blogging comes directly from this select “A-list” of bloggers. This research intends to contribute to understanding of the characteristics of these popular bloggers.

The purpose of this study is threefold. First, it adds to the knowledge of verbal and visual characteristics, as well as demographics of popular blogs. Second, this research investigates impression management tactics and strategies used by the popular blog authors. Finally, it provides data regarding the common elements of popular blogs – topics, style, visual communication elements, etc. – that create ground for future research on impression management, employing the research of blog authors and their motivations and reasoning for using particular blog elements, as well as for future investigation of popular blog readers, and their impressions and reasoning for reading the blogs.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

The constant process of technology development offers Internet users new tools allowing them to enjoy their right of free expression. As Dominick (1999) points out, “prior to personal Web pages, only the privileged – celebrities, politicians, media magnates, advertisers – had access to the mass audience. Now anybody in the audience with the right hardware and minimal computer skills can become a mass communicator” (p. 647).

One of the latest popular tools introduced for use by mass audiences on the Internet is a weblog (or blog). Referring to a blog, the literature says it is “coffeehouse conversation in text, with references as required” (Blood, 2002, p. 1). Researchers define it today by its format, and this definition is in tune with an encyclopedic definition of a blog: It is a frequently updated Web site consisting of dated entries arranged in reverse chronological order so the most recent post appears first - typically published by individuals and having personal and informal style (Walker, 2005, forthcoming). The social definition of blogs says they are maintained by opinionated people, bloggers, who use the outlet to communicate their thoughts, ideas, reflections, and politics (Blood, 2002). Blog genres range from personal, diary-like pages to in-depth public affairs analysis (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2004).

The first popular blog has generally been ascribed to Dave Winer in 1997 (Blood, 2002). Popularity of blogs started increasing after a few years with the launch of sites like Blogger (<http://www.blogger.com>), Weblogger (<http://www.weblogger.com>), or LiveJournal (<http://www.livejournal.com>), which offered masses user-friendly software that allowed push-button publishing. Perseus (2003) estimates there are more than 4.12 million blogs, mostly (92.4%) maintained by people under 30 and slightly dominated by female authors. More resent

study by Viegas (2004) indicates that blogs are mainly maintained by males. A recent Pew Internet and American Life Project (2004) found 17% of 128 million Internet users read blogs of other people and 5% run their own blog. Moreover, among the 68 million people who go online every day, 1% update or create a blog and 3% read others' blogs.

Blogs bear different purposes: some provide description of subjectively selected links, others tell about details of a writer's day, some are personal opinions and commentaries on the news of a day, and others are just fan-blogs of some celebrities.

Three major types of blogs are identified in the literature: filters, personal journals, and notebooks (Blood, 2002; Herring et al., 2004). The type of blog through which the author surfs the Web and directs readers to selected content by hyperlinking to them is known as filter. For example, posts in Rebecca Blood's blog, Rebecca's Pocket, provide comments about other bloggers' posts, general news or just topics of interest of the author. Posts usually have excerpts from other publications or link to them.

While the filter-type blog content is obtained from external sources by the blogger, content of the personal journal is internal. It expresses the blogger's thoughts, daily activities, and internal workings. For example, writer and freelance Web developer Michael Barrish posts about his personal feelings or narrates some longer stories from the blogger's experience.

Notebooks may contain either external or internal content and are distinguished by longer, focused essays. For example, Ross Mayfield's blog contains posts about the blogger's observations on technology, market and some other fields, such as social software, online communication, and others related to his professional interests.

Whatever the type, purpose, or content of a blog, it still is a virtual environment completely controlled by the author, where, unlike face-to-face communication, a person is only



what is expressed. In online communication, a person has to connect and communicate deliberately (Blood, 2002). The time and activity it takes to type or send an electronic message makes such communication deliberate (Papacharissi, 2002a). Some authors manage to create the image that makes them “celebrities” among the community of bloggers. These are the people whose blogs are among the most well-known and also regularly linked by other bloggers. Besides, media’s view of blogging comes directly from this select “A-list” of bloggers; therefore, it is important to understand the characteristics of these popular bloggers.

Popular bloggers are often quoted by media and in some cases they influence media. A very recent example of this proposition would be so-called Rathergate – the case in which CBS’s “60 Minutes” used faked documents to advance the claim that President George W. Bush disobeyed orders while in the Texas Air National Guard and had excessive influence exerted on his behalf to improve his record. A discussion began on Free Republic, a right-wing Internet forum, and quickly spread to various weblogs that the copies of these memos from the CBS News Web site displayed characteristics inconsistent with being produced by 1972 typewriter technology. These claims quickly found their way into the mainstream press, and the following night CBS News gave a firm rebuttal. However, finally CBS News admitted it could not prove the authenticity of documents and apologized.

As this case demonstrates, bloggers sometimes act and serve as independent experts; comments appearing in their blogs find the way in mainstream media and, eventually, influence the outcomes. This case demonstrates the significance of this research, since it is very important to understand who these people are – bloggers, who sometimes play the role of watch-dog; what are the characteristics that make a blogger popular; how people behind daily opinionated musings manage to create impression of expert; and whose opinion can attract mass media.

Previous studies have described average blogs to be primarily low-tech diaries with a self-serving focus of personal information disclosure and featuring spontaneous forms of expression exposing the type of information individuals seek to conceal in diaries (Papacharissi, 2004). Some diaries receive thousands of visits, and many diarists have become famous among the cyber-community. In their immediacy and accessibility, in their seemingly unmediated state, Web diaries blur the distinction between online and offline lives, “virtual reality” and “real life,” “public” and “private” (McNeill, 2003). The diary, this centuries-old practice associated with the spiritual, the therapeutic, and the strictly private, has become one of the genres of choice for Internet life-writers, often reinforcing the stereotype of the diary as a genre for unbridled narcissism. Indeed, since all these diarists write for a public readership, they “super-size” the narcissism factor (McNeill, 2003).

Questions remain regarding these popular, so-called “A-list” blogs. What makes A-list bloggers interesting enough to make the reader regularly visit their blogs? What impressions are these authors “giving off” and how do they represent themselves? What social image brings popularity to a blog author? How much do they present themselves and in what ways? How hi-tech are popular blog authors? Does tech expertise make them popular?

This paper intends to discuss what characteristics of social images the authors create through their blogs. A number of studies explored self-representation on Web sites (Dominick, 1999; Papacharissi, 2002a), but the world of blogs growing in its popularity deserves more attention and research from the self-representation point of view, since that is what the blogs are aimed at – regular self-expression of their authors.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is threefold. First, it intends to add to the knowledge of verbal and visual characteristics, as well as demographics, of popular blogs. Second, the

research investigates impression management tactics and strategies used by popular blog authors. Finally, it will provide significant data regarding the common elements of the popular blogs – topics, attitudes, style, visual communication elements, etc., that will create ground for future research on impression management employing the research of blog authors and their motivations and reasoning for using particular blog elements, as well as for future investigation of popular blog readers and their impressions and reasons for reading the blogs.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter provides the theoretical background of this research by reviewing the literature on self-presentation and impression management theories as well as their application in the studies of online content.

#### **2.1. THE PRESENTATION OF SELF AND IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT**

Erving Goffman (1959) is most noted for his work on the phenomenon of interpersonal self-presentation and impression management. He inspired research in psychology and sociology by stating that when individuals enter the presence of others, the others commonly seek to acquire information about them. Expectation of others and the impression individuals have to make forces them intentionally or unintentionally to express themselves. Goffman distinguishes the expression the individual gives and the expression the individual gives off. The first involves relatively easily controlled expression that an individual conveys in the way of traditional verbal communication. The expression that a person shows off involves a wide range of action that others can treat as symptomatic of the person, assuming that the action was performed for certain reasons.

Bringing the theatrical metaphor, Goffman (1959) analyzed the role-governed nature of self-presentation. He suggested that although roles require people to maintain certain images before their targets, these performances are still contradicted when the individuals return to a “back region.” When the target is absent, individuals can relax, drop their front, forgo speaking their lines, and step out of character. Blogs represent deliberate expression of the personality of their authors, mostly through verbal communication, through which the actor has complete control over the conveyed information. However, the remaining elements of blogs, such as

amount of information, style of writing, hyperlinks, and visual elements can bring the author out from his or her “back stage” and reveal much more than authors tell in their posts. Indeed, this “back stage” view is actually managed by the blogger and technically deliberate “front stage” communication. As Goffman mentioned, individuals are actors on the front stage where they perform certain roles, which allow persons to keep their real selves on the “back stage” from the public eye.

Goffman (1959) assumes that when individuals appear before others they will have many motives for trying to control the impression others receive of the situation, and there usually will be some reason for individuals to mobilize their activities so that they will convey an impression to others which is in individuals’ interests to convey. Goffman also mentions that sometimes individuals will calculate their activity but be relatively unaware that this is the case and sometimes consciously will express themselves in a particular way asking the audience to believe that “the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess” (Goffman, 1959, p. 17). Goffman emphasizes that while individuals usually are what they appear to be, such appearances could still have been managed.

The nature of blogs – mostly the personal journals (Blood, 2002; Trammell, Tarkowski, & Hofmohl, 2004) – allows readers to see the author’s “back stage” to some extent. Trammell (2004) in a study on celebrity blogs, discusses blogs as a peek into back stage, even though it is officially front stage. This study will extend that notion and try to find out how much of this controlled back stage of the authors the readers are allowed to see.

Most of the researchers have used the terms *self-presentation* and *impression management* interchangeably. However, Schlenker (1980) distinguishes between them. He views *impression management* as the “conscious or unconscious attempt to control images that are

projected in real or imagined social interactions” (p. 6) and uses the term *self-presentation* for occasions through which these images are self-relevant. Images are evoked of one’s appearance, health, possessions, tastes, goals, reputation, habits, bonds to others – all one’s attributes and relations with the world. “There is a sense of continuity in all this. Each person has a beginning and an end, and one’s adventure in between seems generated by some personal and unified force or whole – the self” (Schlenker, 1980, p. 46). Schlenker sees an individual’s self-concept to be a very personal one, while his or her social identity – the way person is known and regarded by others and the impression management – are both social concepts and exist in interpersonal relationships.

Some researchers have suggested that self-presentation involves not only attempts to manage impressions on others, but also efforts to control impressions of themselves (Schlenker, 1985). However, for the sake of this research, we will conceptualize self-presentation in accordance with scholars who have defined impression management and self-presentation only in terms of fostering impression in others’ eyes (Baumeister, 1982; Goffman, 1959; Schlenker, 1980).

Review of existing literature on impression management reveals two components of impression management – impression motivation and impression construction. The first is associated with the desire to create particular impression in others’ minds, “but may or may not manifest itself in overt impression-relevant actions” (Leary & Kowalski, 1990, p. 35). The second component, impression construction, involves “not only choosing the kind of impression to create, but deciding how they will go about it” (Leary & Kowalski, 1990, p. 36). The current research investigates their choices regarding the impression they decided to create through different elements in the blog.

The impression construction process is affected by five factors: the individuals' self-concept, their desired (and undesired) identities, the constraints of the role in which they find themselves, the target's values, and the individuals' perceptions of how they are regarded currently (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Understanding of these factors enables researchers to determine variables easily. According to Leary and Kowalski's definitions, primary determinant of the impression people try to project is self-concept of an individual. Most people value certain aspects of themselves, which they proudly display to others at appropriate times. Authors of the popular blogs can be good example of Leary and Kowalski's argument.

However, the method of content analysis of the blogs employed by this research will not reveal whether the claimed images of the authors "mirror people's self-concepts" (Leary & Kowalski, 1990, p. 40). It will require future researchers to follow up on an individual's *public* and *private selves* (Goffman, 1959; Schlenker, 1980). Even so, this research can identify the amount of personal information and type of information revealed by popular bloggers.

Another factor that Leary and Kowalski (1990) describe as one that affects impression management are desired and undesired identity images, referring to the fact that people tend to publicly claim attributes that are consistent with their desired identity image and create impression so as not to be consistent with undesired image. This research intends to study what common attributes do the popular bloggers share.

To summarize, impression construction involves both the process of determining the kind of impression one will try to make and choosing how one will go about it. The descriptions provided by Leary and Kowalsky (1990) review the first stage. Jones (1990) presented the way individuals approach strategies of self-presentation. Referring to the positive connotation of the power as to a way of talking about the distribution of potential outcomes in a relationship, he

discusses two major strategies of impression management used for attainment of power – ingratiation and self-promotion. Among some other strategies (intimidation, exemplification and supplication) Jones mentions and the rest he does not cover, these two are the most known and studied.

Ingratiation is a strategy used by a person who intends to be liked by others and does not typically involve conscious awareness of deliberate planning (Jones, 1990). Some common characteristics of ingratiation are opinion agreement, compliments, favors, warmth, understanding, or compassion. This strategy also involves modesty, self-deprecation, or humorous forms of self-mockery. Jones also suggests that the greater the asymmetry of power in relationship the higher the value of a “likable” attribution for the person who is lower in power.

Because of the nature of blogs that allow individuals to publish their opinions and have comments on them from their readers, the communication is asymmetrical (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2004) since it grants more power to the author, rather than to the reader (Trammell, 2004). However, there is a theoretical possibility that the blog authors are using the ingratiation strategy and demonstrate their low-power and, hence, attract readers with their attempt to be likable. That is bloggers can hyperlink to other blogs or refer to another person’s Web site, which is a sign of ingratiation.

Competence or self-promotion strategy is used by an individual who tries to be perceived as skilled and qualified. Common characteristics include claims about abilities, accomplishments, performances, or qualifications. However, Jones (1990) also mentions that to the extent that competence-relevant performances are known, verbal claims of competence become unnecessary. Self-promotion strategies go beyond claims of competence and require framing of performances – ways to have individual’s responses seen in the most impressive way



– devise strategies to link his or her success to native talent and to natural abilities that contain the potential for even greater performances in the future.

Framing of performances is particularly interesting for impression management research in blogs, where the verbal communication is the main mean of communication; however, elements of visual communication will help to reveal the framing of impression management strategies used by the authors of popular blogs. One of the examples of framing of performance in blogs is use of graphics and multimedia with the purpose of going beyond verbal communication and, therefore, demonstrating competence and trying to be impressive.

To summarize, the self-presentation concept, also referred to as impression management, implies that every individual is performing a certain role while appearing in public. Goffman (1959) has explained it in his early study. Leary and Kowalski (1990) proposed the new concept of impression construction that involves both the process of determining the kind of impression one will try to make and choosing how one will go about it. Jones (1990) described ingratiation and competence as two most common strategies of self-presentation used by people “to achieve the basic interaction goal of power maintenance and augmentation” (p. 172). Jones (1990) also pointed out that the strategy of ingratiation is mostly used by the low-power individuals. The reason for that is that ingratiation allows these individuals to make people of higher power to like them and, therefore, actions of an ingratiator that are under control of the higher-power person will become more predictably positive. Discussing another strategy of impression management, competence, Jones (1990) mentions that people not only want to be seen as competent in their culture, but they are interested in having their achievements attributed to native or natural ability and framing of an individual’s performance is an important part of overall framing of the competence.

## **2.2. IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT ONLINE**

Impression management has been studied extensively by psychologists and sociologists. For example, Silvester, Anderson-Gough, Anderson and Mohamed (2002) studied the ways candidates create positive impression during job interviews; Sigelman (2001) studied strategic use of presidential rhetoric, drawing on sociological and social-psychological treatments of self-presentation and impression management; self-presentational concerns of older adults stemmed from age- and health-related changes and associated with concerns about one's physical appearance were the focus of Martin, Leary, and Rejeski's (2000) study.

Scholars also have explored self-presentation on the Internet. Smith (1998) explored the strategies used by Web page authors to present themselves and attract audience. He particularly used a case of personal home pages of fuller figured people. Smith explained the online tools used for establishing connections with the audience. He created a taxonomy of Web-based invitational strategies identifying feedback mechanisms (e.g., e-mail, guestbook), personal expertise, external validation (awards won by the site), vertical hierarchies (position of items from top to bottom), direct address, and personality.

Dominick (1999) content analyzed personal home pages and identified their most popular features. He looked at Web pages as new channels of self-presentation. The results indicated that most personal Web pages did not contain much personal information.

However, some elements, such as link choice – who or what he or she is associated with and extensive use of feedback forms – draw the researcher to a conclusion. Dominick pointed out that personal pages appear to be attempts by their authors to identify themselves by providing bits of personal information, noting their likes and dislikes and nominating other sites they think are of value. Data showed that authors of these Web sites seemed to be looking for approval

from others and mostly use their Web pages to foster and maintain supportive relationships with other people.

Walker (2002) conducted qualitative analysis of personal Web pages to study self-presentation online and found that authors used their pages to support online activities. Home pages functioned as a “back-up for online interaction, as a home or an identity” (p. 117). Walker also concluded that a system of hyperlinks allowed expression of connectedness and improved ability to express some aspects of identity. Because of constraints of technology used, all home pages bore a resemblance in structure and made the purpose of different pages unclear.

Papacharissi (2002a, 2002b) contributed to the investigation of personality online with several recent studies. Using mixed methods, Papacharissi combined content analysis and survey to study the utility of personal home pages for their creators. Data analysis showed that most Web authors hosted a page for information and entertainment purposes. However, some of them utilized Web pages for self-expression and for communicating with friends and families, and fewer for professional advancement or to pass time (Papacharissi, 2002a). Home page creativity was primarily influenced by medium-use factors – tools and templates supplied by the home page providers, expertise with computers and the Internet and Web author motivation. The study also revealed that those authors who viewed their personal home pages as a self-expression tool posted more personal information online and those who used their pages as a tool for professional advancement avoided posting personal information online. It also was found that more expressive pages were authored by individuals less satisfied with their lives.

More extensive content analysis of personal home page characteristics (Papacharissi, 2002b) focused on how individuals used home pages to present themselves online. The results revealed popular tools for self-presentation, desire of authors to affiliate with the community of

personal Web page creators, and significant relationship among home page characteristics. The analysis proved that creative potential of personal home page authors was heavily influenced by home page providers, who offered templates and design tools to inexperienced users.

Research on blogs has just begun. Several researchers have explored different aspects of it: online community building (Razali, 2003); large-scale public conversation on the World Wide Web (Halavais, 2001); presidential campaigning and fundraising (Williams, Kaid, Trammell, Landerville, Postelnicu, & Martin, 2004), and political messages in celebrity blogs (Trammell, 2004).

Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, and Wright (2004) content analyzed 203 randomly selected blogs with the purpose of comparing the empirically observable features of the blogs with popular claims about the nature of blogs. They found that journalists and scholars exaggerate the extent to which blogs are interlinked, interactive, and oriented toward external events, and underestimate the importance of blogs as individualistic, intimate forms of self-expression. The researchers also found that blog authors tend to be adult males residing in the United States, and they provide considerable information about their real-life identities, although some are more self-revealing than others. The blogs share a common purpose: to express the author's subjective, often intimate perspective on matters of interest to him or her (in the case of most blogs, the matters of interest concern the authors and their daily lives) (Herring et al., 2004). Most of the blogs the researchers studied were updated daily. However, they were relatively image-poor and less likely to have guestbooks, advertising, and a search function. Unlike Web pages, most of the blogs had archives (links in the sidebar to older entries) and badges (small icons in the sidebar, header, or footer advertising a product or group affiliation). Authors also found that only half of the blogs linked to other blogs and some of the analyzed blogs did not have any external link.

The evidence of comments to entry was found to be less than previous claims about blog interactivity and community had led them to expect.

Papacharissi (2004) content analyzed random sample of blogs to reveal their personal and social utility, descriptive dimensions and speculated uses and gratifications obtained from blogs. Like Herring, et al. (2004), Papacharissi looked for characteristics of an average blog and its distinctive nature compared to personal home pages. The results revealed that blogs, on average, “feature personalized accounts of information that resemble the diary format” (p. 20). An average blog is a self-reflective account that serves the purpose of personal expression and provides the perceived gratification of self-fulfillment. The study also showed that an average blog is primarily not creative and is a low-tech affair of a self-referential nature. The study revealed some important results regarding differences between the personal home pages and blogs, especially with regard of self-expression online. The author argues that “personal home pages present a medium for self presentation, whereas blogs, on average, present a medium for self disclosure” (p. 22). Papacharissi also argues that unlike personal home pages that allow individuals to attempt self-presentation as a controlled performance, employing Web tools to project a pre-determined identity, “blogs feature a less controlled and spontaneous form of expression, which frequently exposes on the type of information individuals seek to conceal in diaries” (p. 23).

Common visual elements of blogs were studied by Scheidt and Wright (2004) through analysis of 154 randomly selected blogs. They observed three dominant emerging patterns: that individual bloggers do not tend to make substantive structural changes to the layout of their sites, design schemes used by consumers of popular blog software are frequently minimally modified versions of templates provided by software (particularly Blogger, but also Movable Type and

Radio Userland, among others) selected by the end user, and the overwhelming proportion of the customizations were made within the boundaries of some sort of sidebar – an area running vertically down the Web page but with less visual prominence than the main content area (where most blog posts occur).

Thompson (2004) studied visual factors in constructing authenticity in “A-list” filter blogs (blogs organized squarely around hyperlinks). Results indicate that visual presentation counts when people judge a Web site for credibility. Thompson argues that the blog writer’s authenticity is established not only through verbal communication means, but also by design factors (e.g., preference for smaller, sans-serif type fonts, large screen sizes).

Authors of a study about discursive constructions of blogs (Herring, Kouper, Scheidt, & Wright, 2004) were concerned about the apparent paradox that despite the fact that there are many female and teen bloggers, public discourse about blogs focuses predominantly on adult males. The observation that men are more likely than women and teens to create filter blogs provide a key: it is filter blogs that are privileged, consistent with the notion that the activities of educated adult males are viewed by society as more interesting and important than those of other demographic groups.

The current study will add to the knowledge of verbal and visual characteristics, as well as demographics of blogs that have gained certain popularity and the audience of regular readers. It also explores impression management tactics and strategies used by popular bloggers. This study will provide data regarding the common elements of the popular blogs, such as topics, style, visual communication elements, etc., that will create a baseline for future research on impression management employing research of blog authors, as well as for investigation of popular blog readers and their impressions and reasons for reading the blogs.

## CHAPTER 3

### HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The previous chapter provided theoretical background on self-presentation and impression management based on which this chapter presents hypotheses and research question posited by this researcher.

**RQ1:** What are the visual and verbal characteristics of blogs?

Based on the previous studies (Herring et. al., 2004; Papacharissi, 2004) this study intends to study the visual and verbal characteristics of A-list blogs by looking at the use of graphic elements, multimedia and verbal expressions in the blogs.

**RQ2:** What is the typology of A-list blogs?

This study developed typology of blogs categorizing them according to the main topic of the blog, stated in the mission statement or addressed by most of the posts. This research also studied other topics discussed in A-list blog posts.

**RQ3:** What topics do the A-list blog posts discuss?

The theoretical background of this research is based on self-expression and impression management, as well as on the strategies of impression management. It intends to reveal the attributes blog authors appear to possess, impression management strategies they use, and the self-concept they are “showing off” (Goffman, 1959).

**RQ4:** To what extent do the A-list bloggers reveal themselves?

To study the level of self-revelation by the A-list bloggers, this study used Goffman’s (1959) theory of self-presentation.

To test the impression management strategy of blog authors, this research uses Jones’s (1990) study that identifies ingratiation and competence strategies, and also proposes that a

likable competent person will be seen as more competent than a less likable person of equal competence. Based on Jones (1990) study this research investigated:

**RQ5:** What impression management strategies do the A-list bloggers use?

Based on the Herring et. al. (2004) assumption that filter blogs maintained by adult males are viewed by society as interesting and important, the researcher hypothesized:

**H1:** A-list blogs will be more likely to be maintained by males.

**H2:** A-list blogs will most likely be filter blogs.

Scheidt and Wrigh (2004) found that bloggers use minimally modified versions of templates provided by the software selected by the end user, and they do not tend to make substantive structural changes to the layout of their sites. Based on their study, this researcher hypothesized:

**H3:** A-list bloggers will maintain common structure of blog.

Smith (1998) measured the personal expertise of Web site authors by two criteria: currency (frequency of the Web site update) and breadth (number and variety of hyperlinks that demonstrate author's awareness about the topic). Walker (2002) concluded that system of hyperlinks allowed expression of connectedness and improved ability to express some aspects of identity. This research will explore:

**RQ6:** How do A-list bloggers use hyperlinks?

Besides expertise, use of hyperlinks by the A-list bloggers will reveal the fields or interests they try to be affiliated with.



## CHAPTER 4

### METHOD

This chapter describes the research method employed by the researcher to test the hypotheses and answer the research questions presented in the previous chapter.

The purpose of this study is to find out strategies of impression management used and extent of self-presentation by A-list bloggers, as well as, find the common characteristics that possibly gain the A-list bloggers popularity. In doing so, this study employs content analysis method – a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of manifest content of communication (Berelson, 1952). In proposing a framework for analyzing blogs, Trammell and Gasser (2004) suggest content analysis as a primary means for understanding blogs.

Blogs are operationally defined according to the earlier described Walker (2005, forthcoming) definition. Blog, as such, is a Web page on which the entries are arranged in reverse chronological order is considered a blog. For the purposes of this research blogs need to be maintained by one person, updated regularly and linked back by at least one hundred other blogs.

“A-list blog” is operationally defined as a blog maintained by one person that has a high readership which results in numerous links back to their site. Thus, these A-list bloggers become well-known because many other bloggers are linking to them, which increases A-list blog readership. A-list blogs are obtained through Popdex’s All-time Top list. Popdex uses an algorithm to create a PopScore – which is a score, computed hourly showing the rankings of Web sites linked to by other Web sites. Rankings place higher the sites that are linked to by sites with high numbers of inbound links.

This research also looks at visual communication elements used in the popular blogs. Content analysis method provides a quantified dimensional description of fields of representation and the imagery can be interpreted in qualitative ways (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001).

Kaid and Wadsworth (1989) suggest seven steps for implementing content analysis:

1. Formulate the hypotheses or research question to be answered;
2. Select the sample to be analyzed;
3. Define the categories to be applied;
4. Outline the coding process and train the coders;
5. Implement the coding process
6. Determine reliability and validity; and
7. Analyze the results from the coding process.

The research questions for this study were outlined in the previous chapter, and this chapter will focus on the sample, categories, coding training and process, methods for determining coding reliability and validity, and analysis of the results.

#### **4.1. SAMPLING**

A complete directory of blogs does not exist. There is no officially sanctioned single directory of the most popular blogs as such, rather several informal lists rank blogs by using different methods. For the sake of this research a non-probability sample of 209 blogs (Appendix A) was obtained through Popdex's All-Time Top list, which is a list entirely operated by mathematical algorithm, without human interference. The sample was collected on October 2, 2004, from the list of top 1,239 Web sites listed by Popdex with the minimum of 100 links to the listed Web site. The sample represents all blogs listed by Popdex with at least 100 links to them, maintained by one person and updated at least once within the previous three-month period.

The sample was collected by locating the Web address provided by Popdex. Front pages of the blogs were downloaded between October 9 and October 11, 2004. The files were saved in

a manner that the images or audio files presented on the front page remained linked and stored together with the file.

The front page of a blog was a unit of analysis as used by Trammell et. al. (2004), Papacharissi (2004).

## **4.2. CATEGORIES**

The codebook (Appendix B) and codesheet (Appendix C), based on the work of Papacharissi (2002b; 2004) and Trammell et. al. (2004) content analyses were used as instruments to investigate the impression management of popular bloggers, self-presentation, usage of ingratiation or competence strategies, and characteristics of popular blogs, as well as common characteristics of A-list bloggers. The majority of items in the codebook comes from the mentioned research; however some items were modified to fit with the purposes of this study, and a few items were added to measure impression management tactics used by the A-list bloggers. These items are drawn from literature on impression management proposed by Jones (1990) and aim at explaining the strategies used by the A-list bloggers.

Demography of each blog was collected – name of an author, gender, type of blog, title of blog.

One of the purposes of this study was to investigate visual and verbal characteristics of A-list blogs. Constraint variable, visual and verbal characteristics, were measured by item word count, number of posts, number of graphics and multimedia use.

Typology of blogs is operationally defined as general topic of the blog, drawn mainly from the blog's mission statement or from the overall review of posts in the item. The variable was measured by 12 blog categories:

1. Personal in nature: diary-type blog, where posts discuss feelings, thoughts, daily activities of blogger.

2. Technology: blogs discuss technology tools, products, software, hardware, other technology-related issues.
3. Political: blog represents blogger's opinions and comments regarding politics, politicians, and political events.
4. Media-related: blogs are maintained either by journalists, or just comment on media fairness, balance, accuracy, news.
5. Professional in nature: discuss blogger's work or studies.
6. Public affairs analysis: blogs provide analysis of economical, historical, globalization issues.
7. Interests/hobbies: blogs are dedicated to interest and hobbies of the blogger.
8. Bloggers/blogging: mainly filter-type blogs that talk solely about bloggers and blogging.
9. Social issues: blogs comment on social issues, for example, local government policies.
10. Culture/lifestyle: blogs discuss arts, lifestyle, fashion, movies, music.
11. Legal issues: blogs dedicated to legislation analysis and legal issues analysis.
12. Foreign countries: blogger either resides outside the United States and discusses local issues, or related the experience of foreign country to the topic discussed.

Topics discussed in the blog were operationalized as topics covered at least once in any post in the item. The topics were measured by the presence or absence of the following:

1. Record of the day: refers to the particular day of posting, daily activity, or notion of a day as a "special day".
2. General news announcement: general news or announcement of something that just occurred.
3. Interests/hobbies.
4. Family/friends.
5. Colleagues/authorities in the field.
6. Feelings, thoughts.
7. Field of education.
8. Field of work.
9. Politics/politicians.
10. Law/legal issues.
11. Bloggers/blogging.
12. Technology.
13. Arts/culture.
14. Humor.
15. Celebrities.

In regard to self-presentation, the extent of self-revelation was operationalized as amount of information presented by a blogger about oneself – name, gender, biography, contact information, discussion of hobbies and interests, family or friends, feelings and thoughts,

political slant, photo of oneself, photos of family and friends, and photos of places blogger visited.

The impression management strategies were indicated by overall demonstration of praising, competence or criticism in the item, whether the author addressed the audience directly, used experts and authorities in the discussed field to shore up own argument, as well as whether the blogger thanks readers for support, or comments. Some other items, such as use of hyperlinks and topics discussed in the blog were employed to measure ingratiation and competence tactics.

Based on the previous studies (Herring et al., 2004), this research intends to find out whether A-list blogs are mostly filter blogs. Filter blogs are operationally defined as relatively short posts with the content external to the blogger – mainly commenting on the hyperlink provided in the post. Diary/journal type blogs are operationally defined as blogs describing the blogger's personal thoughts and feelings, rarely containing information about work, and giving off the sense of someone's journal. Notebook type blogs are operationally defined as blogs that contain longer posts, can be written for professional advancement reasons, contain primarily professional type posts that center around work, and can be commenting on some issue of the author's interest. Mixed type blogs are operationally defined as blogs that contain elements of three other types of blogs, and have posts that are more personal, some that are short and comment on other blogs, and some that discuss work project or author's subject of interest.

One of the purposes of this research is to look at the level of maintenance of common structure of blogs by A-list bloggers. Common structure of blogs is based on and refers to the common elements of blog identified by Trammell (2004) and refers to the presence of the following: blog topic statement, blogroll (a list of links to other blogs), calendar, archive, comments, trackback (link associated with every post that links to other people who are linking

back to that particular post), syndication (link that allows readers to subscribe to the content), and hyperlinks within posts.

This research also explores the use of hyperlinks by the A-list bloggers. This category is operationally defined as the hyperlinks within the blog posts leading to different sources: within the same blog, external blog, external Web site, media, product, government, political party Web site, multimedia files, special interest group Web site, and references or content that provides background information on the hyperlinked segment.

This research also collected data regarding political slants of bloggers through which they made political statements or discussed politics. Variable was measured by four categories – liberal, conservative, moderate, coder unable to determine.

In cases of presence of political statements, this research collected data on call for political action. Call for action is operationally defined as call to do something after reading the blog.

#### **4.3. CODING PROCESS**

Three trained graduate coders (including the author) content analyzed the items from October 10 through October 30, 2004.

All coders were familiar with blog content, content analysis, and mass communication.

Intercoder reliability was established throughout the coder training process based on over 10% ( $n = 21$ ) of randomly selected items from the sample. Intercoder reliability was tested using Holsti's formula for following variables: typology of blogs (.99), extent of self-presentation (.99), impression management strategies (.97), topics discussed (.99), type of blog (.98), structure of blog (1.0), use of hyperlinks (.99) (for greater details see Appendix B); Spearman's rho was used to test reliability for verbal and visual characteristics ( $r = 0.99$   $p < 0.01$ ).

Coders were instructed to code entire blog front page in one sitting. Coders were given units of analysis on a CD with a list of items to analyze. A Web-based code sheet was used for the content analysis.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS

The previous chapter explained the method employed by this research and presented categories used in data collection. This chapter introduces the actual results of the data analysis.

This research employed content analysis method to study a sample of A-list bloggers ( $n = 209$ ). Hypothesis and research questions aimed at investigation of extent of self-revelation by the bloggers, impression management strategies used by them, and common features of popular blogs. Besides, one of the goals of this research was to add to the knowledge of visual and verbal characteristics of A-list blogs and find the most popular topics discussed in the A-list blogs.

#### 5.1. A-LIST BLOG DEMOGRAPHICS

The data analysis showed that coders were able to identify gender of 201 blogger (96.17%), most of which are male (70.8%) and only 25.4% are female bloggers. Descriptive statistics of data showed that A-list bloggers demonstrate substantial difference in extensiveness of writing in blogs: on average, bloggers have 17.8 posts ( $SD = 15.09$ ), with minimum 1 and maximum 75 posts on the front page of the blog. Difference is shown as well through analysis of word count per blog ( $M = 4230.6$ ;  $SD = 4075.3$ ), where the minimum number of words in a blog was 4 and maximum equaled 19,870.

#### 5.2. VERBAL AND VISUAL CHARACTERISTICS

The first research question asked what verbal and visual characteristics do A-list blogs have. The data analysis demonstrates that most of the blogs are text-oriented and contain few visual elements. For example, while the mean for word count is 4,230.6, mean for number of graphics per page is 3.15 ( $SD = 5.51$ ) with minimum of zero and maximum of 33 graphics per blog front page. This research also looked at presence of multimedia elements in the blogs, and



the results demonstrate that only 5.7% ( $n = 12$ ) blogs contain some kind of multimedia. The most popular among multimedia is video element (84%;  $n = 7$ ), followed by animation (30%;  $n = 4$ ). This study also analyzed the frequency of posting by A-list bloggers and found that most of the bloggers post several times a day (40.7%;  $n = 85$ ), once a day (25.8%), or several times a week (22.0%). Only a few A-list bloggers post approximately once a month (0.5%). The results showed that popular blogs, even though updated frequently, are mostly text-oriented and lack use of graphics and multimedia.

### 5.3. TYPOLOGY OF BLOGS

The second research question aimed at investigating typology of blogs. For this variable the coders were instructed to identify an overall topic often taken from a mission statement; these were grouped into typological areas (Table 1). The results demonstrated that the largest number of A-list bloggers discuss technology-related issues (28.2%;  $n = 59$ ), many of them are political bloggers (19.1%;  $n = 40$ ) and many maintain blog as their personal diaries (18.2%;  $n = 38$ ). Media-related issues are central topic for only 6.2% ( $n = 13$ ) of A-list blogs; so is public affairs analysis (6.2%).

Table 1. Typology of A-list blogs

Category	All Items ( $n = 209$ )
Technology	28.2%
Political issues	19.1
Personal in nature	18.2
Media-related issues	6.2
Public affairs analysis	6.2
Professional in nature	4.8
Social issues	3.8
Culture/lifestyle	3.8
Interests/hobbies	3.3
Foreign Countries	2.9
Bloggers/blogging	1.9
Legal issues	1.4

#### 5.4. TOPICS DISCUSSED IN BLOGS

Third research question asked what topics discussed by the popular bloggers. All the topics discussed in any of the posts within the unit were marked as present. The results demonstrate that the most common of the topics discussed in the A-list blogs was a record of the day, which refers to the blogger describing a regular day, reporting on the event of the current day, or noting a “special day” (80.4%). Feelings and thoughts of bloggers were the second widely addressed topics in the posts (79.4%). Bloggers tend to discuss blogging and other bloggers frequently (68.4%). They also extensively talk about technology (54.5%) and their colleagues and authorities in certain fields (54.1%). A-list bloggers discuss their own field of work more (49.3%) than politics (48.8%) or news (46.6%). Families and friends are discussed in less than half of the analyzed blogs (41.6%) as well as the bloggers’ interests and hobbies (37.3%). Even less attention is paid to foreign countries (26.3%), arts and culture (14.4%), celebrities (13.9%), humor and jokes (12.9%) and law and legal issues (6.2%).

Table 2. Topics of A-list blogs

Topic	All Items ( <u>n</u> = 209)
Record of the day	80.4%
Feelings/thoughts	79.4
Bloggers/blogging	68.4
Technology	54.5
Colleagues/authorities in the field	54.1
Field of work	49.3
Politics/politicians	48.8
General news/announcement	46.4
Family/friends	41.6
Interest/hobbies	37.3
Foreign countries	26.3
Arts/culture	14.4
Celebrities	13.9
Humor	12.9
Law/legal issues	6.2
Field of education	3.3

## 5.5. SELF-REVELATION

The fourth research question asked to what extent the A-list bloggers reveal themselves. Each item was analyzed through presence or absence of information about blogger (name, biography, photo, contact information, personal feelings and thoughts, interests and hobbies, political slant, discussion of families and friends, their photos, photos of places blogger has seen) presented in the unit (Table 3).

Table 3. Personal information revealed by the A-list bloggers

Information revealed by a blogger	All Items ( <u>n</u> = 209)
Blogger name	
Full name	83.26%
First name only	8.6
Nickname only	8.13
Biography	68.4
Photo	34.4
Contact information	89.0
E-mail	99.5
Instant Messenger	13.4
Phone	5.9
Address	5.4
Webcam	3.2
Posts tell about blogger's life and personality	
Record of the day	80.4
Feelings/thoughts	79.4
Political slant	45.4
Friends/family	41.6
Interest/hobbies	37.3
Graphics within posts show	
Places blogger has been or blogger has seen	14.8
Blogger	9.6
Friends/family	9.6

The A-list bloggers tend to reveal their full names (83.26%); however, almost equal number of bloggers told the reader their first name (8.6%) or only nickname (8.13%). A majority of bloggers share some kind of contact information (89%; n = 186). Among those who share the contact information, the most frequent is e-mail address (99.5%; n = 185). Many of the bloggers

invite the readers to instant messaging (13.4%;  $n = 25$ ) rather than sharing with them mailing address (5.4%;  $n = 10$ ) or phone number (5.9%;  $n = 11$ ). Another common element found among the A-list bloggers was that the majority of them tend to tell the readers some facts from either their biography, or their occupation, or their social status (68.4%). However, few have their photographs displayed on the front page of the blog (34.4%). A-list bloggers tell their readers their news for the day (80.4%), talk about their feelings and thoughts (79.4%), share their political slant (45.4%), and talk about their friends and families (41.6%). They also tell about their interests and hobbies (37.3%) and rather show the pictures of what they have seen (14.8%) than ones of themselves or of their families (9.6%).

The results show that bloggers tend to present considerable information about themselves; the relatively low number of photos could be explained by overall trend in blogs to be text-oriented and have few graphics.

## **5.6. IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES**

The fifth research question referred to impression management strategies used by A-list bloggers. Blogs were analyzed to identify whether posts seemed to demonstrate praising, competence, criticism, or it was not possible to identify any of them (coder unable to identify). The results show that most of the bloggers demonstrate competence presenting their intellectual abilities, or some other personal aspects (78.9%;  $n = 165$ ). Bloggers seem to be more friendly and praise somebody or something (25.4%;  $n = 53$ ) rather than criticize or blame (18.2%;  $n = 38$ ). In 9.1% ( $n = 19$ ) of the cases, coders were unable to identify what the posts were demonstrating. Table 4 shows the prevalence of praising over criticism among those bloggers who demonstrated competence, which implies that bloggers tend to seem competent and likable by using ingratiation strategy. Another variable was employed to measure ingratiation strategy

use: whether the blogger thanked readers for support, for feedback, etc. However, the results were not great, only 7.7% ( $n = 16$ ) of bloggers thanked their readers.

Table 4. Use of impression management strategies by A-list bloggers

In posts blogger mainly is	All items ( $n = 209$ )
Demonstrating competence	78.9%
Praising	25.4
Blaming/criticizing	18.2
Coder unable to identify	9.1
Along with competence demonstrate:	
Praising	21.2%
Blaming/criticizing	18.2

## 5.7. PREVALENCE OF MALE BLOGGERS

Previous research (Herring, et. al., 2004) showed that the popular blogs are maintained by male adults. This research hypothesized that the A-list blogs will more likely to be maintained by men rather than women. A non-parametric chi-square test showed that the observed frequencies are significantly different ( $\chi^2(1) = 44.9, p < .001$ ) from the expected ones. The results proved the hypotheses true while demonstrating significance prevalence of male (70.8%) over female (25.4%) bloggers among A-list bloggers (coders were unable to identify gender of 3.8%). Men are also more likely than women to maintain filter blogs, while women are more likely to maintain diary/journal rather than any other type of blog ( $\chi^2(3) = 22.97, p < .001$ ).

## 5.8. TYPES OF BLOGS

Based on the previous research (Herring, et. al., 2004), the second hypothesis posited that the A-list blogs most likely would be filter blogs. Each item was analyzed for the type of blog (diary/journal, notebook, filter, or mixed). The non-parametric chi-square test showed that observed frequencies were significantly different ( $\chi^2(3) = 43.11, p < .0005$ ) from the expected ones. The results proved the hypothesis not to be true. Filter blogs were the least used blog type

(6.7%), while mixed type blogs were the most frequently used (37.8%), and followed by diary/journal type (28.7%) and Notebook (26.8%).

### 5.9. STRUCTURE OF BLOGS

The third hypothesis posited that the A-list bloggers would maintain the common structure of blogs. The structure of the blog was tested through presence and absence of common features of blogs (topic statement, blogroll, calendar, archive, comments, trackback, syndication, and hyperlinks within posts). The analysis showed that, on average, each blog has nearly five of these eight common features ( $M = 4.95$ ;  $SD = 1.50$ ). The most frequently observed feature was hyperlinks within posts (91.4%) followed by archive (89.5%) and syndication (85.6%). The bloggers were less likely to have blog topic statement (22%) and calendar (23.4%) on the front page of the blog.

Table 5. Structure of blogs

Features found on the blog	All Items ( $n = 209$ )
Hyperlinks within posts	91.4%
Archive	89.5
Syndication	85.6
Comments	73.2
Blogroll	62.2
Trackback	48.3
Calendar	23.4
Topic statement	22.0

### 5.10. HYPERLINKING

The sixth research question inquires into the use of hyperlinks by A-list bloggers. Ten hyperlink categories were identified according to the hyperlink destination. The findings show that the A-list bloggers tend to link to external Web sites (89%) and external blog posts (87.1%). That is, bloggers send readers to content outside of their own site and control. Bloggers extensively link to media as well (68.4%). When linking to own content, they link to older

archived blog posts (65.1%). Many of the bloggers link to special interest group Web sites (e.g. women rights, civil rights, gay, political movement) (40.7%), thus demonstrating their integration into the diverse society and interest in social movements. More than half of A-list bloggers demonstrate competence providing background information on the linked word or phrase (54.5%). Table 6 shows further breakdown of hyperlink use by A-list bloggers.

Table 6. Hyperlink use by A-list bloggers

Hyperlinks	All Items ( <u>n</u> = 209)
External Web sites	89.0%
External blog posts	87.1
Media	68.4
Within posts	65.1
Provide background information	54.5
Product	51.2
Special interest groups	40.7
Multimedia files	14.4
Government	12.9
Political party Web site	5.7

### 5.11. POLITICAL SLANT

The research also studied political slant of the bloggers who made political statements in their blogs (n = 95). Among these bloggers, liberal messages (57.9%; n = 55) prevailed over conservative messages (18.9%; n = 18) or moderate ones (11.6%; n = 11). Coders were unable to determine the political slant of the blogger in only a fraction of the sample (n = 11; 11.6%). Among those who not only made political statements, but also called the readers for some political action, liberals counted for 72% (n = 18) and conservatives for only 20% (n = 5); only 4% (n = 1) of moderates called for action in that they asked readers to take some action after reading the post.

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The previous chapter presented results on self-presentation, impression management and characteristics of A-list blogs. In this chapter, the researcher provides interpretation and discussion of findings and revisits the significance of this study.

The hypotheses and research questions posed in this study centered around three main purposes of this research. This study aimed at adding to the knowledge of verbal and visual characteristics, and demographics of A-list blogs. In doing so, this study looked at amount of text and graphics, the presence of multimedia elements in the blogs, and collected data on demographics. Such research adds to the knowledge of general characteristics of A-list bloggers, and provides baseline for future studies comparing the A-list to average bloggers.

Another purpose of this research was to investigate the impression management strategies use by the A-list bloggers. By looking at the whole content of the blogs the research identified whether the bloggers tend to promote themselves, are praising others, or mainly run their blogs with the purpose of criticizing and blaming somebody, and thus demonstrating their competence. The research also looked at the extent of self-presentation by the bloggers and the amount of information they reveal about themselves. These findings provide the foundation for future researchers to study the motivations and purposes of bloggers and extend on impression management strategy use through survey of A-list bloggers.

Finally, this research intended to provide data regarding the common elements of the A-list bloggers – topics they discuss, attitudes they reveal, habit of frequent communication with their audience through the blogs, and the type of blogs they prefer. Such data create foundation for future research of A-list bloggers and their reasoning for using particular impression



management tactics, their perceptions of their own roles in the broader society and among their audience.

## **6.1. DEMOGRAPHICS**

This study found that the A-list blogs are mainly maintained by males. The results of this study are different from a Perseus study (2003) estimating that blogs are mainly maintained by females. Some scholars (Herring et. al., 2004) also found that the blogs are run by females and teenagers, but, paradoxically, public discourses about blogs focus predominantly on adult males. Popularity is attained by those bloggers whose names, opinions, and faces appear in mainstream media and, therefore, facilitate public discourse among the bloggers, among the blog readers and among the media audience. The results of this study prove that, indeed, male bloggers are the ones that have gained popularity and ones who arouse public discourse.

## **6.2. VERBAL AND VISUAL CHARACTERISTICS**

This research also looked at the verbal and visual characteristics of the A-list blogs. As the previous researchers (Herring et al., 2004; Papacharissi, 2004) suggested, average blogs tend to be low-tech and self-referential in nature. As such, this study compares those findings with A-list blogs investigating their visual and verbal presentation. The findings of this research suggest that most of the blogs are mainly text-oriented; however, 60.3% of them feature some graphic elements in their posts. Compared to graphics, use of multimedia is more rare among A-list bloggers (5.7%). The studies of personal Web pages have proved (Thompson, 2003) that visual presentation counts when people judge the Web site for its credibility. Results of this study showed that compared to average blogs popular bloggers use more visual elements in their posts. In certain cases, as mentioned in the introduction of this research, the media, as well as society, rely on the opinion of these A-list bloggers and consider them as credible sources. Therefore, it

leaves room for future researchers to study the motivations of bloggers and their attempts to create impression of credible source through visual expression.

### **6.3. TYPOLOGY OF BLOGS**

This research developed typology of blogs categorizing them according to their main topic, drawing mainly from the mission statement or what most of the posts discussed.

- **Technology-related**

The findings revealed that most of the A-list blogs discuss technology-related issues including different software, hardware, products, tools, events, news, blogging-related innovations, and observations. For example, a post in Paolo's Weblog from September 24, 2004, presents the author's field of expertise, tells about his work, and reveals self-mockery, which is one of the characteristics of ingratiation strategy. Besides, it shows off the understanding of presence of audience, which is another common element found among the A-list bloggers, 74.2% of which directly addressed audience:

Guess what we have been doing for the last week? Implementing a WYSIWYG editor for our product. [...] Guess what I was using to write yesterday's rant about google and browser? Yup, a browser.

In this post author tells about his technology-related work project, noting the terms that not everyone would understand. These types of blog posts are addressed to targeted audience – geeks, technology-related people, those who are interested or involved in some kind of technology development processes. These blogs may not have same audience as those that discuss other topics.

- **Personal in Nature**

Another category that includes many of the analyzed blogs refers to those that are personal in nature. These blogs mostly bear intimate accounts of the bloggers' day-to-day activities, relationships, attitudes, feelings, and discussion of families and friends.

For example, a September 8, 2004, post on Aged and Confused is one of the characteristic quotes for diary-type blogs. It shows off the presence of the audience, while revealing intimate details from blogger's life. The post tells about family, children, attitude to lifestyle, at the same time reveals the attempt of demonstrating own abilities along with self-mockery:

I was ALWAYS in talent shows because I was the biggest ham you'll ever meet. Hard to believe, I KNOW! I thought my kids would take after me and continue the tradition of their mom and voluntarily make fools of themselves in the name of "entertainment."

Some of the personal blogs are even too intimate, but the intimacy does not hold the authors from addressing their audiences directly. As it is in the case of September 4, 2004, post on Little, Yellow, Different:

"It's true! Hell, I'm doing lines of *coke right now!* (Note to employers: I'm exaggerating)"

This example also shows multiple audience factor in the blogosphere. It shows that the blogger depends on the audience, enters presence of "others" (Goffman, 1959) and starts acting and using impression management strategies. This post is very intimate in nature, and contains information that would not support the likable image of the blogger among his employers. However, the blogger manages to present adversary image and at the same time addresses employers directly to neutralize the strength of impression they might have gotten; therefore, the blogger intends to seem likable to his employers.

#### ▪ **Political Issues**

Blogs became popular and gained attention from the mass media mainly because of their political content. Results of this study reveal that 19.1% of A-list blogs are centered around the author's comments on political issues. As one of many examples of blogs under this category, Ipse Dixit post from October 8, 2004, demonstrates not only opinionated observation of the current political events, but also gives away bias - another characteristic of political bloggers:

While the lefties all run off to pad the online polls for their guy, I have a few observations about the just concluded debate. Bush won. Hands down. Yes, yes, I know. I'm a Bush supporter, so of course I say that. Nevertheless, he won.

On the other side, there is an example on October 11, 2004, post on Ross Mayfield's blog:

"What I really have to say is that I'm sorry to the Iraqi people. Not just for going to war against you, but for letting a corrupt Administration extend its incompetence and greed. All I can say is I'm sorry and I am voting for change next month."

This post, besides showing political slant of the blogger and expression of feelings and thoughts, demonstrates the blogger's understanding of his responsibility posed on him as on a citizen of this country. Could this be a reason for popularity of bloggers?

The blogs that are personal in nature do not emphasize their role in broader public as much as in the example above; therefore, the popularity of authors of personal blogs often do not pass the small audience of bloggers and friends. Political bloggers, on the contrary, are often cited by the media and strive to demonstrate competence and try to seem to be likable, responsible citizens of the country. Although discussion of technology-related issues is more common in A-list blogs, the media's attention is drawn to the political bloggers. Technology experts seem to be popular among the bloggers rather than the broader public or media, while some of the political bloggers do not seem as likable to bloggers as to the media. This may indicate that the purpose of blogging is neither popularity, nor influence on media, which, on the other hand, is the reason for interest of scholars into the blogs. This study created baseline for future study of bloggers and media relationships that could reveal more information on mutual influences of these two different public opinion creators.

#### **6.4. SELF-PRESENTATION**

Herring et. al. (2004) found that blog authors tend to be adult males residing in the United States, who provide considerable information about their real-life identities, although some are more self-revealing than others.

This study aimed at understanding how much and what the A-list bloggers tell the public about themselves. This included study of the demographics of A-list bloggers as well as the extent to which they reveal themselves. The finding showed that most of the bloggers prefer to reveal their full names (83.26%), tell something about themselves – what they have done or what their occupation or social status is (68.4%) – and they are likely to present their records of day (80.4%).

Previous research (Herring et. al., 2004) showed that blogs tend to share a common purpose: express the authors' subjective, often intimate perspectives on matters of interest to them. This research found that the majority of A-list bloggers (79.4%) share their feelings and thoughts. For example, Real Live Preacher tells about his feelings about blogging in his September 28, 2004, post:

I think of Real Live Preacher as a place. I know that's a little strange. The blog software comes on the screen and I feel like I've left my life behind. I feel like I'm the one that matters here. My feelings matter. What I need matters.

This post reveals the personal feeling of the blogger and attitude toward blogging. Real Live Preacher treats his blog as a place where he can detach from the outer world and stay all by himself; a place where he can be the only one that matters. Would there be any other place for him similar to a blog? He does not tell about it, but he clearly indicates what blogging means to him. This type of post mostly appears in journal-type blogs, which serve their authors as personal diaries where they can write the most intimate thoughts and feelings; however, bloggers have their diaries published online, which in a way alters the nature of a diary – a private, intimate journal not intended to be seen by others. What makes the bloggers bring their “back stage” to the front of the broad audience is a question that remains to be answered by future studies.

Most bloggers share some or all kinds of contact information (89.0%) – e-mail address, phone number, mailing address, instant messenger, or even Web camera. Some of the bloggers

only tell their readers their nicknames (8.13%), which may also be understood as an attempt to create certain impression on the audience while maintaining anonymity.

This research did not look for the motivations of the bloggers as such and leaves room for future research in this direction – to study the reason for anonymous communication through blogs. In general, A-list bloggers tell more about their political beliefs (45.4%), rather than their interests and hobbies (37.3%) or their families (41.6%). In these terms they may not be associated with personal diary-type publication and might have gone further toward communicating with the larger audience.

It needs to be mentioned, that this study of 209 blogs revealed that blogs and bloggers are very different from each other. However, the numbers show the prevalence of willingness among A-list bloggers to tell the audience who they are and what they think or feel. Attaching the name and face and contact information to the thoughts, personal feelings and experiences was not common in online interpersonal relationships before blogging. This factor also emphasizes the importance of this research as well as importance of continued study of blogs in the future as new means of communication.

## **6.5. IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES**

One of the purposes of this study was to investigate what impression management tactics the bloggers are using and what common personal qualities they are “showing off.” Based on Jones’s (1990) propositions, the research categorized the blogs and found that the popular bloggers tend to demonstrate competence and to use ingratiation strategy rather than boast about their own abilities while criticizing somebody. Jones’s suggestion that a likable competent person will be seen as more competent than a less likable person of equal competence seems to apply to the A-list bloggers. A majority of those who demonstrated competence and promotion

of their own abilities were also praising others (21.2%). A-list bloggers also tend to use experts to shore up their own arguments (53.6%), they address the audience directly (74.2%), although not many of them (but still 7.7%), A-list bloggers thank the audience for their support. These tactics suggest that A-list bloggers put effort into appearing competent and likable. Such results also may lead us to the conclusion that A-list bloggers see the difficulty of voicing their opinions and ideas in this era of information and try to “show off” the personal qualities that allow them to control the impression the audience gets about them. A-list bloggers are using tactics that would please readers, authorities in the field, and other bloggers, and, therefore, gain readership.

A-list bloggers also tend to post several times a day (40.7%). They communicate with their readers frequently, considering them as the first audience with whom they share opinions and thoughts in the first place and also expect some feedback. For example, post from September 29, 2004, on Neurotic Fishbowl tells about the author’s visit to eye doctor:

I found two frames that I like, but I wanted to get some opinions on them. Since I had my ever-present cameraphone on me, I snapped a couple of pictures. Granted, it’s easier to see the glasses better in one picture than the other, but what do you think?

This post is interesting for several reasons: first, it reveals daily activities of the blogger; second, it tells some details (“ever-present cameraphone,”) that indicate blogger’s interest and expertise in technologies; and finally, it demonstrates the blogger’s dependence on the audience. She wants opinion; she calls for two-sided communication; she puts effort to taking and displaying the photos on her blog; she deliberately creates impression of someone the audience will most probably like and thus will respond.

Previous research (Papacharissi, 2004) found that compared to personal Web sites, blogs feature less controlled and spontaneous form of expression. This study shows that A-list bloggers let their competence “speak of itself.” At the same time, A-list bloggers strive to be more likable,

rather than make boastful and exaggerated claims, which, according to Jones (1990), are unattractive and may jeopardize the image an individual is trying to convey.

## 6.6. TOPICS DISCUSSED IN BLOGS

One of the purposes of this study was to find the common characteristics of A-list blogs. In doing so, this research collected data on discussed topics in blog posts.

### ▪ **Record of the Day**

The results showed that most of the times the bloggers post the record of the day (80.4%) referring to it in some cases as an ordinary day, sometimes as an exceptional day, or telling about some event of the day that captured their attention. For example, in an October 9, 2004, post on Scripting News, the blogger posts the observation of the day on the media:

I've been watching Fox News today, and guess what, they're critical of Bush, and speaking favorably of Kerry. Could they smell a change, and now will start serving a new boss?

Not only does this post reveal the author's opinionated comment on Fox News, but also shows the competence and knowledge of the field, however delivered with irony rather than harsh criticism.

Vodkapundit provides another example of the record of the day, which is also exceptional in a certain way, especially for a blogger. The post from October 7, 2004, reads:

Didn't want to spend a day like today thinking about the election, trying to be clever, counting pageviews, checking trackbacks, or any of that BS. Just enjoy the crisp, clean, dry air and enjoy the scenery.

This post is important for several reasons. It shows the daily life of A-list blogger, reveals information that otherwise would be hidden in the "back stage," away from the audience's sight. It also notes that posting on the blog gives the blogger's feeling of being clever, which, again, implies that blogging is deliberate process during which persons demonstrate their own competence, show the audience knowledge and try to seem clever. However, the pressure from



the audience and expectation of certain images of the blogger sometimes makes the A-list blog authors uncomfortable and unwilling to show off “real self.”

- **Feelings and Thoughts**

Discussion of personal feelings and thoughts is almost as popular (79.4%) among the A-list bloggers as reporting about their daily encounters. These are the blogs that may discuss any kind of feelings and thoughts regarding any topic. The high number in the results implies that the blogs serve for the bloggers as the place to convey their thoughts on daily basis. For example, an October 9, 2004, post on Marc’s Voice reads:

I’m starting to really like getting away from my computer. By taking even a couple days off – I can return to my keyboard, with pent up ideas and momentum. But getting things out of your focus also means that you can focus on other things – or other places.

This quote reveals the reason for blogging for this particular author and, even though, it cannot be generalized, seems to indicate that what bloggers post frequently may be explained by the need to get rid of thoughts they have about daily events. Does it mean that the bloggers depend on their blogs that much? Or does it mean that bloggers depend on their audiences to whom they are conveying only thoughts that distract the bloggers from their main activities? These questions leave wide range of opportunities for future scholars to survey the A-list bloggers, to study their motivations and attitudes.

- **Bloggers and Blogging**

Another widely discussed topic according to the results of this study included bloggers and blogging-related issues. Through collected memorable quotes from all the blogs this research found that bloggers possess diverse opinions regarding their own roles as bloggers. The certainty of these findings lacks empirical evidence, since the study did not aim at studying attitudes of bloggers toward blogging, but still the data collected deserves attention in terms of future research.

Some of the bloggers see themselves as opinion leaders and consider blogging and creating certain opinions as their obligation. For example, an October 2, 2004, post by Russell Beattie commenting on the presidential elections reads:

If you have a weblog, you have a moral obligation to take a stand on the issues and put that stand out there for everyone to see. I don't care if you have a 'tech blog' or a 'art blog' or whatever, you need to start making your voice heard. Why do I think that? Because the strength of your voice will support others who's voice may not be as strong. The strength of your convictions will shake people awake to the seriousness of this election. The fact that you show no fear in supporting John Kerry will show others that they should have no fear as well.

These kinds of posts gain the authors popularity among the political bloggers, and among mass media. However, it is hard to conclude that they speak of the main purpose of blogs. Are these bloggers new opinion leaders, or they are just frequently read, referred and linked by small audience? If so, why are they quoted and interviewed by the mass media and studied by the scholars? These are the questions that open a new field for researchers in terms of investigating the effect of bloggers on larger audience and whether blogging can become a channel of communication that may make difference.

Some other A-list bloggers express concern regarding the commercialization of blogs. An October 7, 2004, post on The Poor Man comments on blogging:

weblogging used to be real. It used to mean something. It used to be all about the kids. Now it's all corporate. No one cares about anything anymore, except popularity. Maybe some of you can stand the hypocrisy. Not me. That scene's dead, and it reeks of rot and corruption.

This is one of other bloggers who expressed unhappiness regarding the commercialization and popularity concerns among bloggers, about how they treat media – covering the news of the day and commenting on them – and the way media treat the bloggers. Jeff Jarvis, commenting about the criticism by the news media of some bloggers, notes about the diverse community of bloggers in his blog post on October 9, 2004:

There are bad bloggers as there are good bloggers, bad readers as there are good readers, bad journalists as there are good journalists. If we don't buy the broad conspirational strokes regarding journalists at The Times, then we shouldn't spread them regarding these new critics, bloggers.

Dissatisfaction with the current idea and purpose of blogging seems to be common among the bloggers. A Small Victory October 4, 2004, post reads:

Everyone wants to break a story, everyone wants the Drudge link [...] I'm much happier when I forget there's actually an audience out there. [...] I'm a blogger. As a blogger and not an independent peer reviewed journalist, I am able to write about what I had for lunch or my broken coffee pot without feeling as if I'm breaking some journalistic standard. I'm a blogger, hear me roar. About hot dogs, about the war in Iraq, about the state of pop music, about my noisy neighbors, about the election, about the way Saran Wrap won't stick to Tupperware, about my job, my kids, my life, Iran, Andy Rooney, education reform, crappy computer speakers and why I hate the circus.

This post explains well how some bloggers see the function of blogging and at the same time raises many questions regarding the necessity of treating the bloggers the way they are treated by the media or scholars. Based on the current study future research could investigate the blogs as a new form of communication.

## **6.7. PREVALENCE OF MALE BLOGGERS**

Based on Herring et. al. (2004) notion that public discourse is mainly centered around male bloggers, the first hypothesis posited that A-list blogs will be more likely to be maintained by males. The results drawn out of the sample proved the hypothesis true. The observed frequencies of male and female bloggers showed statistically significant difference from the expected ones.

## **6.8. TYPES OF BLOGS**

Previous research (Herring et al., 2004) found that filter blogs maintained by adult males are viewed by society as more interesting and important than those of other demographic groups. The second hypothesis of this research posited that A-list blogs would be mainly filter blogs. However, the findings proved the opposite. Of 209 blogs only 14 were filter blogs. The majority were mixed type of blogs that contained elements of several types of blogs – diary and filter, or notebook and filter. In this type, the blogger talks about personal feelings regarding the recent general event in one post and comments on and links to other blogs in another post. However,

the results also indicated that male bloggers are more likely than women to maintain filter blogs, while women are more likely to maintain diary/journal rather than any other type of blog.

This area requires future research, since technology is developing rapidly and bringing changes every day – first blogs used to be collections of links to other Web sites; then blogs became more like personal diaries; this research shows that most of them contain a little bit of everything. As the form is changing, so does the content. Therefore, it deserves attention of scholars in the future.

## **6.9. COMMON STRUCTURE OF BLOGS**

Previous studies (Scheidt & Wright, 2004) found that bloggers do not tend to make substantive structural changes to the layout of their sites. Therefore, the third hypothesis stated that the A-list blogs would maintain common structure of blog. The basic elements of blog structure were identified and studied in each blog. The findings proved that on average blogs have about five element of structure with prevalence of hyperlinks within posts, archives and comments. These three are actually those that lay in the foundation of blogs despite the changes in their types and purposes over time.

## **6.10. USE OF HYPERLINKS**

Dominick (1999) mentioned that personal Web site authors express their likes and dislikes through nominating other sites they think are of value. Walker (2002) concluded that a system of hyperlinks allows expression of connectedness and improves the ability to express some aspects of identity. Therefore, this research assumed it to be important to explore how the A-list bloggers use hyperlinks in their posts. Moreover, it is as important from the point of view of impression management. Smith (1998) measured the personal expertise of Web site authors by

two criteria: currency (frequency of the Web site update) and breadth (number and variety of hyperlinks that demonstrate author's awareness about the topic).

This research showed that majority of bloggers tends to post several times a day. The results of this study also contradict previous research (Herring et al., 2004) claiming that the researchers and media exaggerate the extent to which blogs are interlinked, interactive and oriented toward external events. The results of this study show that most of the bloggers link to external Web sites, many link to other blog posts and posts within their own blog. The A-list blogs are interlinked and externally oriented. They also frequently link to news media, providing the analysis or comments on news of the day, which also demonstrates A-list bloggers' intention to be part of certain discourse. More than half of A-list bloggers provide background information regarding the discussed issue, thus, demonstrating the competence and willingness to share the awareness about the discussed topic. Least of all these bloggers link to political party Web sites and governmental Web sites. This may indicate their willingness not to be affiliated with governmental interests and act as independent experts. Based on the results and Smith's (1998) criteria, it can be assumed that A-list bloggers reveal expertise through hyperlinking and frequency of posting.

Hyperlinking, as a mean to associate the blogger with others, once again proves that the A-list bloggers tend to use ingratiation strategy of impression management along with competence. Being associated with external events (external Web sites) refers to the willingness of the blogger to seem informed; hyperlinking to the post on external blog post gives impression the blogger is not only informed about what is happening in his closest environment, but also demonstrates that the blogger is part of a community of popular people. Hyperlinks to their archived posts demonstrate the blogger's competence and willingness to remind the reader of the

blogger's regular image, give impression of consistency and credibility, while noting that the blogger has already discussed something that is currently taking place.

### **6.11. POLITICAL SLANT**

One of the purposes of this research was to collect the data regarding the common features found in the A-list blogs that would create the baseline for future studies of the characteristics that make these bloggers popular.

One of the findings revealed by the results was that almost half of the bloggers disclose their political slant, and a majority of them are liberals (57.9%). This research collected the data regarding the presence or absence of calling for some political action, and the results showed that the majority of blogs that called their audience to take some action were maintained by liberals. Whether the A-list bloggers' opinions matter to public might be an issue for future research.

### **6.12. LIMITATIONS**

This research was not without limitations. The first and major limitation lays in the sample. This study used a purposive sample to explore the research questions and hypotheses, but the limitation is that there is no single list of A-list bloggers or even bloggers in general.

Another limitation is time constraint – most of the blogs were downloaded and data were collected during the Presidential debates that could have affected the final results, especially with regard to political statements, political slant, and calls for action.

### **6.13. CONCLUSION**

This research added to the knowledge of A-list bloggers, those whose thoughts are heard and quoted not only in blogosphere, but also in mainstream media. The A-list bloggers create the general impression in the mass audience regarding the rest of over four million bloggers and blogging as is. As literature refers to them (Blood, 2002), bloggers are opinionated people who

use this channel to communicate their thoughts, feelings and reflections about matters of interest. Even though bloggers often quote and link to each other, their opinions and takes are quite different. The subjective comment and unique, intimate style of writing makes each blogger interesting and attractive to the reader. They differ from news reporting, although comment on current events; they differ from Web sites with the format and frequently updated information; they differ from any other kind of reading, more resembling the personal diaries of other people. The intimacy and personalized tone of writing that creates impression of uncontrolled, spontaneous flow of feelings and thoughts allowing reader to look far beyond into a person's "back stage" attracts readers. On the other hand, blogging is deliberate process and allows bloggers to convey the qualities of their selves creating the impression that what the reader sees is the author's "real self" or "back stage."

With this assumption this research studied impression management strategies used by A-list bloggers and found that, indeed, most of the bloggers strive to demonstrate competence and seem likable. The impression management theory and strategies (Jones, 1990) allowed the researcher to prove that seemingly uncontrolled channel of communication, blog, is a deliberate process of building reputation and popularity. It also allowed to learn that A-list bloggers tend to use ingratiation strategy along with competence demonstration – they try to seem likable to their multiple audiences, address them directly, use self-mockery while showing own abilities, all for two-way communication, and ask for readers' comments. A-list bloggers work on the impression they make on their audiences and their image usually consists of the elements of competence and expertise, subjective, biased comments on areas of interest and current events, frequent and direct communication with audience through posts, demonstration of knowledge through linking to background information, and ingratiation.

Another important finding of this research refers to the nature of blogs. Particularly, this research found that A-list bloggers use more mixed type of blogs, rather than filter blogs that used to be the sign of blogger's expertise before. Bloggers would surf the Internet and collect links to Web sites that they found interesting and valuable to share. Higher uniqueness of the provided link guaranteed more popularity and expert's image. This study found that today's bloggers use filter blog elements and mix it with another popular, diary/journal, type blog elements, thus showing expertise through links and at the same time showing off feelings and thoughts independent from the linked Web sites. This finding implies difficulty of maintaining popularity in the Internet audience. Bloggers have to put more effort into creating the image of expert, only commenting on and linking to valuable Web sites does not seem enough any more and readers require more depth from bloggers. On the other hand, media would not ask for an opinion of a blogger that practices filter type blog and does not post original pieces of analysis. This again implies that impression management theory can explain many aspects of blogging.

One of these aspects would be the tendency among A-list bloggers to reveal more personal information about themselves. Internet communication used to be more anonymous before blogging. Bloggers tell more about themselves than people in many other forms of the Internet communications. This research found that most of the bloggers tend to allow their audience to attach the names with feelings, activities, political viewpoints, and thought.

Blogs are changing the nature of communication on the Internet and this research is another proof for such assumption. It leaves room for future research in terms of exploring blogging as a new mean of communication. This study showed that A-list bloggers use ingratiation strategy, and reveal personal information. However, what motivates them to bring the "back stage" up front is a question that future research should investigate.



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## APPENDIX A

### LIST OF BLOGS ANALYZED

	<b>Blog Name</b>	<b>Blogger name</b>
1.	0xDECAFBAD	Leslie Michael Orchard
2.	A Small Victory	Michele Catalano
3.	Aaron Swartz	Aaron Swartz
4.	Adam Curry's Weblog	Adam Curry
5.	Aged And Confused	Yvonne
6.	Akma's Random Thoughts	A K M Adam
7.	AllAboutGeorge	George Kelly
8.	Allied	Jeneane Sessum
9.	Amygdala	Gary Farber
10.	Andrew Sullivan	Andrew Sullivan
11.	Anil Dash	Anil Dash
12.	Anita Rowland's Home Page	Anita Rowland
13.	Antipixel	Jeremy Hedley
14.	Anything but ordinary	Melissa
15.	Attu Sees All	Attu
16.	AWholeLottaNothing	Matt Haughey
17.	Bag and baggage	Denise Howell
18.	BaghdadBurning	Provides only nickname
19.	Balloon Juice	John Cole
20.	Big Pink Cookie	Christine
21.	Biz Stone, Genius	Biz Stone
22.	Blog Maverik	Marc Cuban
23.	Bluishorange - two lovers walk a lakeside mile	Alison Headley
24.	BodyAndSoul	Jeanne
25.	Brad DeLong's Semi-Daily Journal	Brad DeLong
26.	Bryan Bell	Bryan Bell
27.	Burningbird	Shelley Powers
28.	BuzzMachine	Jeff Jarvis
29.	California Insider	Daniel Weintraub
30.	CamWorld	Cameron Barrett
31.	Caterina	Caterina Fake
32.	cheese dip	Lia Bulaong
33.	Chris Pirillo	Chris Pirillo
34.	Colby Cosh	Colby Cosh
35.	Counterspin Central	Provides only nickname
36.	Cup of Chica	Nathalie Rachelle Chicha
37.	Curiouser and Curiouser!	Matt Mower
38.	Cut on the bias	Susanna Cornett

39.	DaGoddess	Provides only nickname
40.	DailyKos	Markos Moulitsas
41.	Daimnation!	Damian J. Penny
42.	Dangerousmeta!	Garret P. Vreeland
43.	DanGillmor	Dan Gillmor
44.	Daniel Bricklin Log	Daniel Bricklin
45.	Danieldrezner	Daniel Drezner
46.	DaringFireball	John Gruber
47.	Defective Yeti	Matthew Baldwin
48.	Die Puny Humans	Warren Ellis
49.	Dive Into Mark	Mark Pilgrim
50.	Don Park's Daily Habit	Don Park
51.	dooce	Heather B. Armstrong
52.	Dr. Weevil	Michael Hendry
53.	Dynamist blog	Virginia Postrel
54.	eclecticism	Michael Hanscom
55.	Editor Myself	Hossein Derakhshan
56.	Eject! Eject! Eject!	Bill Whittle
57.	Electric Bugaloo	Michael
58.	ElectricVenom	Kate
59.	electrolite	Patrick Nielsen Hayden
60.	Emergic	Rajesh Jain
61.	EmptyBottle	Doug MacClure
62.	Epeus's epigone	Kevin Marks
63.	Eschaton	Duncan Black
64.	evhead	Evan Williams
65.	Flemming Funch	Flemming Funch
66.	Freedom To Tinker	Edward W. Felten
67.	Ftrain	Paul Ford
68.	Gapingvoid	Hugh Macleod
69.	Geek Ramblings	Ernest MacDougal Campbell
70.	Geisha Asobi	Asobi Tsuchiya
71.	gnomegirl	Cheyenne
72.	Gut Rumbles	Rob Smith
73.	Halley's Comment	Halley Suitt
74.	Healing Iraq	Zeyad
75.	How To Save the World	Dave Pollard
76.	Hullabaloo	Provides only nickname
77.	IMAO	Frank J
78.	Indepundit	Provides only nickname
79.	Inessential	Brent Simmons
80.	Informed Comment	Juan Cole
81.	Inluminent	John Engler
82.	Instapundit	Glenn Reynolds
83.	Interconnected	Matt Webb

84.	IpseDixit	Provides only nickname
85.	Jeffrey Veen	Jeffrey Veen
86.	Jeffrey Zeldman Presents the daily report	Jeffrey Zeldman
87.	Jenett Radio	Jenett
88.	Jeremy Zawodny's blog	Jeremy Zawodny
89.	Jill/txt	Jill Walker
90.	JoanneJacobs	JoanneJacobs
91.	JoelOnSoftware	Joel Spolsky
92.	John Robb's Weblog	John Robb
93.	JohoTheBlog	David Weinberger
94.	Joi Ito	Joi Ito
95.	Jonathon delacour	Jonathon Delacour
96.	Jon's Radio	Jon Udell
97.	Jozjozjoz	Provides only nickname
98.	Justin's Links	Justin Hall
99.	Kadyelebee	Kristine Diane Locatis Beeson
100.	Kasia In a Nutshell	Kasia Trapszo
101.	Ken Layne	Ken Layne
102.	Kevin Sites Blog	Kevin Sites
103.	Kottke	Jason Kottke
104.	Languagehat	David Foster Wallace
105.	Lawrence Lessig	Lawrence Lessig
106.	Librarian.net	Jessamyn West
107.	Library Stuff	Steven M. Cohen
108.	Lileks (james)	James Lilek
109.	LittleYellowDifferent	Ernie
110.	Loobyly	Claire Robertson
111.	Making Light	Teresa Nielsen Hayden
112.	Mamamusings	Elizabeth Lane
113.	Marc's Voice	Marc Cantor
114.	MargaretCho	Margaret Cho
115.	Mathemagenic	Lilia Efimova
116.	Matt Welch	Matt Welch
117.	Matthew Yglesias	Matthew Yglesias
118.	McGee's Musings	James V McGee
119.	Megnut	Meg Hourihan
120.	meyerweb	Eric Meyer
121.	Michelle Malkin	Michelle Malkin
122.	MightyGirl	Maggie
123.	Min Jung Kim	Min Jung Kim
124.	Mitch Kapor's Weblog	Mitch Kapor
125.	Moxie	Provides only nickname
126.	Nathan Newman	Nathan Newman
127.	Neil Gaiman	Neil Gaiman
128.	NewMedia Musings	J.D. Lasica

129.	Oblivio	Michael Barrish
130.	Oblomovka	Danny O'Brien
131.	OfftheKuff	Charles Kuffner
132.	Oliver Willis	Oliver Willis
133.	On Lisa Rein's Radar	Lisa Rein
134.	Onfocus	Paul Bausch
135.	Open Brackets	Gail Armstrong
136.	Orcinus	David Neiwert
137.	Overstated	Cameron Marlow
138.	Paolo Valdemarin Weblog	Paolo Valdemarin
139.	PatioPundit	Martin Devon
140.	Pejmanesque	Pejman Yusefzade
141.	peterme	Peter Merholz
142.	Phil Ringnalda	Phil Ringnalda
143.	Phil Windley's Enterprise Computing Weblog	Phil Windley
144.	Phillip Greenspun's Weblog	Phillip Greenspun
145.	Piquant rants and sassy impudence	Rachel Lucas
146.	PlasticBag	Tom Coates
147.	Pocket Soap	Simon Fell
148.	Promoguy	Provides only nickname
149.	Q Daily News	Jason
150.	RabbitBlog	Heather Havrilesky
151.	raelity bites	Rel Dornfest
152.	Rafe Colburn's Weblog	Rafe Colburn
153.	Randgaenge	Thomas N Burg
154.	Real Live Preacher	Provides only nickname
155.	Rebecca's Pocket	Rebecca Blood
156.	Research Buzz!	Tara Calishain
157.	Rick Klau's Weblog	Rick Klau
158.	Right Wing News	John Hawkins
159.	Roger L. Simon	Roger L. Simon
160.	Roland Tanglao's Weblog	Roland Tanglao
161.	Ross Mayfield's Weblog	Ross Mayfield
162.	Russell Beattie Notebook	Russell Beattie
163.	Scobleizer	Robert Scoble
164.	Scott Andrew	Scott Andrew LePera
165.	Scott rosenberg's	Scott Rosenberg
166.	ScriptingNews	Dave Winer
167.	Scriptygoddess	Jennifer
168.	SellsBrothers	Chris Sells
169.	Shellen dot com	Jason Shellen
170.	Shutterblog:Choosy moms choose	Provides only nickname
171.	Sifry's Alerts	David Sifry
172.	SimpleBits	Dan Cederholm
173.	Sjoerd Visscher's weblog	Sjoerd Visscher

174.	Snazzykat	Erika-Renee
175.	Solonor's Ink Well	Solonor
176.	stevenberlinjohnson	Steven Johnson
177.	Taegan Goddard's Political Wire	Taegan Goddard
178.	Talking Points Memo	Joshua Micah Marshall
179.	TedbarlowTBogg	Provides only nickname
180.	Tenth Boooooos	Provides only nickname
181.	The EGR Weblog	Chris Locke
182.	The Fat Guy	Scott Chaffin
183.	The Hivelogic	Daniel P. Benjamin
184.	The Neal Pollak Invasion	Neal Pollak
185.	The Presurfer	Provides only nickname
186.	The Road To Surfdom	Tim Dunlop
187.	The Talking Dog	Provides only nickname
188.	The Trademark Blog	Martin Schwimmer
189.	TheDocSearlsWeblog	Doc Searls
190.	TheNeuroticFishbowl	Kymerlie Renee McGuire
191.	ThePeople'srepublicofSeabrook	Jack Cluth
192.	ThePoorMan	Andrew
193.	TheShiftedLibrarian	Jenny Levine
194.	TheSpoonsExperience	Provides only nickname
195.	Tim Blair	Tim Blair
196.	Tomalak's Realm	Lawrence Lee
197.	TonyPierce	Tony Pierce
198.	Transterrestrial Musings	Rand Simberg
199.	Unquakified Offerings	Jim Henley
200.	usr/bin/girl	Provides only nickname
201.	Vodkapundit	Stephen Green
202.	Waxy	Andrew Baio
203.	Weblog Wannabe	Firda Beka
204.	Weblogged	Will Richardson
205.	What Do I Know	Todd Dominey
206.	Wil Wheaton dot Net	Wil Wheaton
207.	Wood's lot	Provides only nickname
208.	Workbench	Rogers Cadenhead
209.	Yourish	Meryl Yourish



## APPENDIX B

### CODEBOOK FOR A-LIST BLOG CONTENT ANALYSIS

This code sheet was created by Ana Keshelashvili in October 2, 2004 specifically for use on a project content analyzing popular blogs.

**Coder Instructions:** All coding should be done using the online survey tool – where the code sheet has been entered.

The front page of each blog is a single item to be coded. You should read through each blog post & review the entire page before you begin coding. If an item is present anywhere on that front page (even if only once), it is marked.

1. **Coder name:** your name (Reliability = 1.0)
2. **ID:** Give each item you code a unique ID; it is suggested that the unique ID be the folder name of the saved front page. This will allow us to go back to that item easily if there are problems with the data set. (Reliability = 1.0)
3. **Name of blog:** name of the blog itself (if available); blog names are often posted at the top of the Web page like a banner. (Reliability = 1.0)
4. **Name of blogger:** name of the person who runs the blog (if available); blogger names are often posted in the sidebar, on an “about me page,” or at the end of each post. (Reliability = .97)
5. **Gender:** Answer male, female, or coder unable to determine gender. Determine, if available by the blogger’s name, the gender of the person who created the blog. Do not guess. If the name is ambiguous (“Pat”) and the item does not refer to the person’s own gender, then select “coder unable to determine.” If the name is foreign and you are unable to assign a gender, then select “coder unable to determine.” (Reliability = 1.0)
6. **Number of posts on the page:** Count the number of posts that appear on the first page of the blog. ( $r = 1.0$   $p < 0.01$ )
7. **Frequency of posting:** Answer several times a day, approximately once a day, several times a week, approximately once a week, several times a month, approximately once a month, more than one month between each post. Look at the date provided when each post on the front page was uploaded. Determine the general trend of how frequently the blogger writes blog posts. (Reliability = .99)

8. **Word count:** Calculate the total number of words on the page highlighting the posts and titles. ( $r = .97$   $p < 0.01$ )

**Features found on a blog:** review the blog and determine if the following features are present and click all that apply.

9. **Topic statement explaining what blog posts are about:** A topic statement will describe what content the blogger likes to post about (e.g. “This blog talks about my cat & computers.” It can be thought of as a purpose statement. The statement can either be written on the blog front page or linked to in an “about this blog” link. (Reliability = .99)
10. **Blogroll:** this is normally on the side of the blog (sidebar) & is commonly seen as a list of links to other blogs. It can be labeled blogroll or just be a long list of links to other blogs. The links must be to blogs to be considered a blogroll. (Reliability = 1.0)
11. **Calendar:** this typically appears on the sidebar & allows users to jump to blog posts on specific days. It looks just like a calendar. (Reliability = 1.0)
12. **Archive in text links:** this is typically on the side (sidebar) and is a list of months that the blogger has written posts. In the links is an archive of old posts. (Reliability = 1.0)
13. **Syndication like RSS or XML:** this is typically a button or text links that say “syndication,” “RSS,” or “XML.” This allows people to subscribe to the content. (Reliability = 1.0)
14. **Comments:** this is a link associated with every post that allows readers to respond to the blogger’s post. (Reliability = 1.0)
15. **Trackback:** this is a link associated with every post that links to other people who are linking back to that particular post. It is often next to the comments & sometimes called “reference” or “ping.” (Reliability = 1.0)
16. **Hyperlinks within posts:** does the blog have any hyperlinks within the posts on the front page? Check if at least one post has a hyperlink. (Reliability = 1.0)

**Extent of self-revelation:** review the blog and determine if the following features are present and click all that apply.

17. **Biography:** look for an “about me” or biography statement or link on the front page of the blog. This would possibly tell you the name of the blogger, profession, or describe hobbies. This is different from the topic statement because the item is about the blogger himself; topic statements and biographies can be together. If the biography is a link then count it as present. (Reliability = 1.0)

18. **Blogger photo:** look for a blogger's photo on the front page only, usually placed on the sides of blog. (Reliability = 1.0)
19. **Contact information:** look for an e-mail, instant messenger, phone number or other such contact information for the blogger. This can be available in a link "contact" or be right on the front page of the blog. (Reliability = 1.0)
20. **Type of blog:** answer diary or journal, notebook, filter. Diary or journal means that the blog describes the bloggers personal thoughts and feelings – it rarely contains information about work and gives off the sense that you stumbled upon someone's journal (even if it is written to friends). Notebook contains longer posts and it can be written for professional advancement reasons and the person seems to write primarily professional type posts that either center around work or could even be a part of the person's job, also can be commenting some issue of the author's interest. Filter means that blog has relatively short posts mainly commenting on other blogs. Mixed refers to blog where some posts are more personal, some are short and have comments on other blogs, and some are project or interest-related (Reliability = .98)
21. **Posts seemed to demonstrate the following:** Praising something or somebody – expresses excitement about the idea, person, product, technology; Competence – demonstrates knowledge of topic, arguing own point of view, discusses in-depth the topic; Blaming something or somebody – blames somebody's ideas, somebody, product, technology. Answer: praising something or somebody, demonstrate competence, blaming something or somebody, unable to identify – answer unable to identify if you are not certain whether the author is promoting some idea or product (praising), promoting own work or abilities (competence), expresses dissatisfaction or criticism (blaming). (Reliability = .95)

### **Hyperlinks within posts**

*Instructions for this section:* Only analyze the item if there are hyperlinks within the posts. Check all that apply in any of the posts on the front page of the blog:

22. **Posts within that blog:** if any post has any hyperlinks that goes to another post, then this is present. This excludes a permalink to the item being analyzed. (Reliability = 1.0)
23. **External blog posts:** if any post has any hyperlinks that go off to another blog, then check this item. This excludes a permalink to a trackbacked post if the item being analyzed is a trackback. (Reliability = 1.0)
24. **Media:** if any post has any hyperlinks that go to news articles published by media organizations, then mark this. (Reliability = 1.0)

25. **Products:** if any post has any hyperlinks that go to a place where you can buy a shirt, movie, book, as well as software products, devices, or any other product then mark this. (Reliability = .97)
26. **Government:** if any post has any hyperlinks that go to any government site (EU, national, etc.), then mark this. Government Web sites are typically organizations or departments, not people. (Reliability = .98)
27. **Political party Web site:** if any post has a hyperlink to a political, then mark this. This link must be to the actual party's Web site rather than a politician running for office. (Reliability = 1.0)
28. **Multimedia such as Flash, video, or audio:** if any post has a hyperlink that goes to a Flash movie, streaming video, or any other type of multimedia file then mark this. (Reliability = 1.0)
29. **Special interest group Web sites:** answer present or absent. If the item has any hyperlinks to a special interest group, such as Moveon.org, women's groups, religious groups, gay rights, etc., then this item is present. (Reliability = .96)
30. **Did the hyperlink provide background information to the topic discussed in the item?** answer yes or no. Read the information contained in the hyperlink and determine if background information regarding the topic is explained on it (e.g. linking the words "record sales fell" to an article about the Dixie Chicks record sales after they made an anti-Bush statement at a concert in London). (Reliability = .98)

### Topic of the Item

*Instructions for this section:* Read all of the posts on the front page of the blog and determine if the following topics were discussed in any of them. Check all that apply and occur at least once in any of the posts (even if it only occurs once).

31. **Record of the day** (as a special day or mundane "this is what I did today", etc.): Read the item and determine if it discussed what the person who wrote it did that day, described daily activities, or talked about the day as a "special day." (Reliability = 1.0)
32. **General news announcement/link to article or event that just occurred:** Read the item and determine if it is a general news item or announcement of something that just occurred. For example, linking to a breaking news story, providing a link to other media content, etc., are examples where this is present. (Reliability = 1.0)
33. **Interests/hobbies:** Read the item and determine if it discusses what the person who wrote it likes to do as a hobby or interest. (Reliability = 0.99)
34. **Family/Friends:** Read the item and determine if it discusses friends or family in anyway. (Reliability = .99)

35. **Colleagues/authorities:** Read the item and determine if it discusses colleagues or authorities in the field. (Reliability = .99)
36. **Field of education:** Read the item and determine if it discusses blogger's field of education. (Reliability = 1.0)
37. **Current projects or work** (new project at work, etc): Read the item and determine if it discusses a current project (professional, work-related) the blogger is working on or a new job. (Reliability = .98)
38. **Feelings, thoughts:** Read the item and determine if it discusses a blogger's feelings or thoughts about something (political, experience, life, etc.). (Reliability = 1.0)
39. **Bloggers/blogging:** Read the item and determine if it discusses blogging as such, talks about other bloggers, presents quotes from other blogs (Reliability = 1.0)
40. **Politics/politicians:** Read the item and determine if it discusses politics or politicians in any way (Reliability = 1.0)
41. **Law/legal issues:** Read the item and determine if it discusses legislation or legal issues in any way (Reliability = .99)
42. **Technology:** Read the item and determine if it discusses new technologies, software, hardware, products, tools, Internet, etc, anything related to the technology (Reliability = 1.0)
43. **Art/culture:** Read the item and determine if it discusses arts or cultures or lifestyle. (Reliability = .99)
44. **Thanked readers for support:** Read the item and determine if it is made as a call for support or giving of support for some hardship (emotional, physical, etc.) (Reliability = 1.0)

**Political Statements:** Read the item and determine if it makes a political statement or contains any type of political content in it.

45. **Did the item ask for the reader to do something (call for action)?:** Answer yes or no. Read the item and determine if there was a call for action or asking the reader of the item to do something in particular in response to the topic discussed. Examples of this would be asking someone to vote, write a congressman, e-mail some, etc. (Reliability = 1.0)
46. **Determine the ideological slant of the post:** Determine if the item is conservative, moderate, liberal, or coder unable to determine. If the coder is unable to determine mark the item as such. (Reliability = .98)

47. **Use of expert authorities to shore up argument:** features non-political sources (newspaper articles, scientists, educators, doctors, nurses) to support position (Reliability = .95)

**Graphics:** review all of the graphics on the front page of the blog & determine if any of the following are present at least once; if so, check each item accordingly.

48. **Number of graphics:** answer for the whole front page, answer 0 if there are no graphics at all. ( $r = 1.0$   $p < 0.01$ )

49. **People:** graphic contained images of people (human beings, not pets) (Reliability = 1.0)

50. **Blogger:** graphic contained likeness of the actual blogger (e.g., blogger posts picture of himself) (Reliability = 1.0)

51. **Friends or family:** graphic contained images of blogger's friends or family (Reliability = 1.0)

52. **Celebrities:** graphic contained images of a celebrity (e.g., actor, author, singer, writer, famous personality) (Reliability = .99)

53. **News stories:** graphic contained images taken from news stories (images not taken by blogger, rather collected from media sources) (Reliability = 1.0)

54. **Things the blogger had seen or places blogger had been:** graphic contains an image of something the blogger had seen such as a sign, product, etc. or image of a place the blogger had visited or physically been, such as vacation photos, grocery store, building, etc. (Reliability = 1.0)

**Design features:** Review the whole front page and then answer:

55. **Use of multimedia:** say present or absent for: audio element (background sound, online radio, person's voice, musical files), video element (any kind of video file) (Reliability = 1.0)

### **Memorable quote**

56. **Memorable quote from this item:** paste in something that is memorable about this blog. This may be used in the discussion section. Do not use semicolon in the text. You should copy and paste text in this section. Not all items will warrant this.

57. **Did the item address the audience directly?** Answer yes or no. Read the item and determine if the audience of readers was addressed directly. EX: "I know you have been waiting for my big announcement ..." or "All of the e-mail messages and support you all have given me ..." (Reliability = 1.0)

## APPENDIX C

### CODESHEET FOR A-LIST BLOG CONTENT ANALYSIS

Coder name

ID

Name of blog

Name of blogger

Category of blog

Gender: Answer Male, Female, or Coder unable to identify

Number of posts on the page

Frequency of posting:

- several times a day
- approximately once a day
- several times a week
- approximately once a week
- several times a month
- approximately once a month
- more than one month between each post

Word count: Calculate the total number of words on the page

Type of a blog:

- Diary/Journal
- Notebook
- Filter
- Mixed

Features found on a Blog

- Topic statement explaining what blog posts are about
- Blogroll
- Calendar
- Archive in text links
- Syndication like RSS or XML
- Comments
- Trackback
- Hyperlinks within posts
- Biography
- Blogger's photo

E-mail  
Instant Messenger  
Webcam  
Phone  
Address

Posts seemed to demonstrate the following:

Praising - promoting some idea or product  
Competence - promoting own work or abilities  
Blaming - expresses dissatisfaction or criticism  
Coder unable to identify

Use of Hyperlinks within posts

Posts within that blog  
External blog posts  
External websites  
Media  
Products  
Government  
Political party Web site  
Multimedia such as Flash, video, or audio  
Special interest group Web sites  
Hyperlink provides background information to the topic discussed in the item

Topic of the Item

Record of the day  
General news announcement/link to article or event that just occurred  
Interests/hobbies  
Family/Friends  
Colleagues/authorities in the field  
Feelings, thoughts  
Field of education  
Field of work  
Politics/politicians  
Law, legal issues  
Bloggers/blogging  
Technology (product, software, tools)  
Arts/culture  
Foreign countries  
Humor  
Celebrities  
Thanked readers for support  
Other

Political statements: Only analyze for blogs with posts that make political statements.



Call for political action - Did the item ask for the reader to do something? Answer yes, or no

Determine the ideological slant of the post

- Conservative
- Moderate
- Liberal
- Coder unable to determine

Use of expert authorities to shore up argument: answer present, or absent

Graphics

Number of graphics (exclude ads): Answer for the whole front page, answer 0 if there are no graphics at all

Graphics in the item include (exclude ads)

- People
- Blogger
- Friends or family
- Celebrities
- News stories
- Cartoons
- Blogger's works
- Things the blogger had seen or places blogger had been
- Other

Use of multimedia

- Background sound
- Online radio
- Person's voice
- Musical files
- Video element
- Animations
- Other
- None

Did the item address the audience directly? Answer: yes or no

## VITA

Ana Keshelashvili graduated with a bachelor's degree from Tbilisi Independent University from the Journalism Department in 1996. From her first year at the University she worked as a reporter for local weekly newspaper; later she practiced in TV-reporting. In 1997 she started working with non-profit organizations as a web-developer and trainer. Meanwhile she was freelance reporter with several Georgian magazines. In 2003 Ana went back to studies and obtained a master's level degree from the Caucasus School of Journalism and Media Management where she worked as a Teaching Assistant after graduation and won a scholarship for participating in a master's program in Louisiana State University, and she will graduate in 2005 with degree of Master of Mass Communications.