

The creation of a personal space on the Internet: self presentation and self-disclosure in blogging

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This study investigates self-presentation and self-disclosure in personal blogs functioning as virtual personal spaces. Blogs are one of the newest forms of online self-presentation and self-disclosure that has been facilitated by the Internet. Being able to control the content posted in their blogs as well as the limited interactivity of blogs which permits bloggers to control comments from their readers allows them to create a virtual space where they feel secure and comfortable to write. Blogs are perceived as "protected spaces" because they allow bloggers to limit the level of interactivity with their readers and are less adversarial and more reflective in nature. The study examines the following four research questions: (1) How do bloggers self-present in their blogs and what role does this personal space have in the bloggers' life?; (2) To what extent the perception of a blog as a "personal space" allows bloggers to disclose personal information?; (3) What kind of personal information is included in the bloggers' self-disclosure? and (4) To what extent bloggers know their readers and how the readers' comments influence the bloggers' self-presentation and self-disclosure

The study was conducted for one month (December 15 to January 15, 2011) using an online survey. The blogs in the sample were selected from the 'personal blogs' category in two Israeli blog directories and it consisted of regularly maintained personal blogs written in Hebrew. The content of each blog was examined to verify that it did not serve any commercial or marketing purpose. Three hundred blogs matching the above specified criteria were identified in the two directories. Of the 300 bloggers initially contacted, 82 responded to the survey. Findings show that the majority of bloggers that participated in this study created an anonymous virtual presence; they maintained some kind of anonymity by identifying themselves using a variant of their real name or a

pseudonym. The perception bloggers have of their blog as an enclosed and protected space could partly explain why the majority of respondents disclosed personal information. Findings show that 84.1% of respondents frequently disclose personal information in their blogs. Bloggers created a protected space in which they felt free to expose their "sensitive side", to reveal embarrassing information about themselves to take down their defenses when blogging. Findings from the content analysis revealed that respondents describe their blogs as: (1) a place to express themselves freely and an outlet for feelings and emotions; (2) a tool that helps them share information and connect with people with whom they have something in common; (3) a place to keep record of their lives. Findings of this study show that blogs have become a communication genre strongly related to individuality, self-representation and self-disclosure that serves the purpose of personal expression well and represent an ideal medium for creation of an online presence.