

Exploring New Types of Motives in Social Media

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by

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Social media has profoundly affected people, institutions and societies around the world. More time is spent on social media than on any other online activity (Nielsen, 2012). It has been suggested the social media empowered the Arab Spring revolutions in Egypt and elsewhere (Kassim, 2012). Changes wrought by social media are far-reaching and widespread. This paper suggests that the unique participatory nature of social media—where users can create, respond to, and share content—has changed how and why people use media. Social media has expanded the role of the user from receiver to creator and distributor. It argues that content creation, content sharing, and other interaction within social media environments bring users' motives related to self-identity into play when using these media. This paper suggests that traditional motive scales applied in uses and gratifications research may not be sufficiently inclusive when studying individual involvement in social media, and that other types of motives drawn from other disciplines, specifically impression management theory, can usefully be applied to those already identified within uses and gratifications research. Further, this study examines how impression management strategies are employed by bloggers in developing and maintaining their social media self-presentations. It also examines whether there are differences between motives and approaches used in personal blogs when compared with professional blogs maintained by the same individuals. Findings from this research suggest that a closer alignment of uses and gratifications theory with impression management theory may serve as a model for a richer and more inclusive understanding of individuals' motives for the use of social media.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Uses and Gratifications Theory

Media, its effects, and how people use media have long been favorite topics for research within both popular and academic circles. There are a plethora of models and theories that has been applied to the study of relationships between people and media (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989). One theoretical framework that has been widely applied over the last 70 years is the uses and gratifications theory, an approach that suggests people are active in the selection and use of media to satisfy a range of personal needs. Researchers such as Herzog (1940) and Lazarsfeld (Lazarsfeld & Stanton, 1942) provided much of the pioneering research in the elaboration of uses and gratifications theory and its application to media research. Early researchers applied the theory to the study of specific media such as radio (Herzog, 1940), newspapers (Berelson, 1949), television (Herzog, 1944), and comic books (Wolf & Fiske, 1948) as well as specific content genres—including quiz shows (Herzog, 1940), daytime serials (Herzog, 1944), and music (Suchman, 1942).

Unlike other earlier media effects theoretical models, uses and gratifications research concentrates on what audiences do with media rather than what media do to audiences (North, 2000). In contrast, other research often treats audiences as though they were largely passive media receivers, who were significantly affected by media sources (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). Theories such as the “Magic Bullet” theory or “Hypodermic Needle” effect examine how audience members react to messages generated by media sources. In contrast, uses and gratifications research treats

audiences as active selectors and interpreters of media, rather than mere receivers experiencing the effects of decoded messages.

Katz, Blumer, and Gurevitch (1974) outlined the primary assumptions on which uses and gratifications research are based. These are: (a) the audience is active and goal oriented; (b) audience members have substantial power in the media process by their choice of media and their linking of those choices with specific uses; (c) media compete with other sources of need satisfaction; (d) the goals of mass media use can be derived directly from statements made by individual audience members; and, (e) value judgments regarding the cultural significance of mass communications should be suspended while audience orientations are explored on their own terms. Rubin revised this list in 1994, listing the fundamental principles as: (a) communication behavior, including media selection and use, is goal-directed, purposive, and motivated; (b) people take the initiative in selecting and using communication vehicles to satisfy felt needs or desires; (c) a host of social and psychological factors mediate people's communication behavior; (d) media compete with other forms of communication (i.e., functional alternatives) for selection, attention, and use to gratify our needs or wants; and, (e) people are typically more influential than the media in the relationship, but not always (Rubin, 1994).

While these premises suggest that audiences *use* media, it is also essential to understand the purpose of the use. Uses and gratifications theory holds that media users are goal-oriented and focused on using media to meet their personal needs, and so an understanding of user goals and needs is an essential element in understanding media use. In other words, to understand media use, one must explore individuals'

motives for media use—what they hope to gain or accomplish, or what needs they hope to satisfy. So, early researchers within the uses and gratifications tradition began to study different media, such as radio or television, as well as genres such as call-in programming or news, in terms of how people used them—and the motives that people bring to that use. These motives are articulated as scales, a taxonomy that enables researchers and theorists to structure and evaluate an individual's use of media—including media type, genre, and content—and how media use connects with the person's social and psychological needs (Severin & Tankard, 1997). Some researchers have also explored how background and personality are related to the selection and use of particular media to satisfy specific needs (Haridakis, 2002), while others have focused on elaborating a more common or universal motive scale applicable to media use more generally.

Continued research has led to a proliferation of motives for media use. For example, using factor analysis Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas (1973) identified 35 different motivations that they clustered into five categories: cognitive needs, affective needs, personal integrative needs, social integrative needs, and tension release needs. McQuail, Blumler, and Brown (1972) suggested a four-part classification of motives: diversion, personal relationships, personal identity, and surveillance. McQuail (1983) later modified his motive structure as: information, personal identity, entertainment and integration, and social interaction. He broke each of these down further, suggesting a total of 21 more specific motives. Similarly, Haridakis (2002) identified 21 specific motives associated with the viewing of violence on television. Differing from McQuail,

Haridakis structured his motive scale around the categories of: (a) passing time, (b) unwinding, (c) entertainment, (d) information, (e) social interaction, and (f) arousal.

As McQuail and Haridakis found, social interaction has been identified as a category of motives for media use. In recent years opportunities for social interaction via digital platforms have expanded dramatically with the popularization of the Internet and, later, social media. Facebook, Twitter, blogs, Skype, and other popular platforms give people a wide variety of ways to interact with others online. This explosion of social interaction via digital media warrants a reexamination of traditional motive scales and their applicability in these increasingly social environments. But, in order to address this question, it is important to review how prior uses and gratifications research has examined motives related to social interaction.

In studying talk radio, Avery, Ellis and Glover (1978) examined the interaction between listeners calling in to a radio program, and the host of that program. They found that an important element in the motivation of the listener/caller, related to the role of the host. Specifically, they suggested that listeners looked to the host as a source of confirmation or disconfirmation of the ideas of the caller and to their self-concept. Narrowing the focus from talk radio generally to public affairs talk radio, Rubin and Step (2000) explored the role of motivation, interpersonal attraction, and parasocial interaction among listeners/callers. They identified motives involving passing time, exciting entertainment, escapist relaxation, and seeking information. Taking a different tack on the study of motives associated with the use of talk radio, Perse and Butler (2005) suggested that listeners tuned into talk radio not as a form of compensation for the lack of interpersonal communication opportunities as explored by Turow (1974) and

others, but rather as a source of enrichment. They identified motives related to information, argumentativeness, value for conversations, and civic engagement.

Another medium that provides opportunity for social interaction is video gaming. For example, in a study of online gamers Sun et al. (2006) identified three dominant motivations among participants: relieving everyday pressures while relaxing the body and soul, excitement brought about by intense interactions with other players, and a strong sense of participation in team work. Two other factors namely, novelty in communicating with strangers, and self-expression in front of others, were also found to be significant motives. Consistent across all of these studies is the theme that interaction with others via a specific medium is an important element in the motives of the participant.

Applying uses and gratifications to the Internet and social media. Not surprisingly, researchers have applied uses and gratifications theory to digital media such as the Internet, and more specifically, social media. Rafaeli (1986) studied gratifications sought by users of electronic bulletin boards. Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) applied both interactive/social and informational/task-oriented dimensions to Internet use. They identified six motives for Internet use within this framework: affection, inclusion, expression, social interaction, control, and surveillance. Other researchers have suggested a host of other potential motivations for use, including diversion and interactivity (Ko, 2002), information and social uses (Eighmey & McCord, 1998), entertainment, control, socialization, economic motivations, transactional security and privacy, non-transactional privacy, and social escapism (Korgaonkar & Wolin, 1999). Korgaonkar's and Wolin's motive scale includes 41 motives organized into seven

clusters which included: a) social escapism, b) transactional-based security and privacy, c) information, d) interactive control, f) socialization, g) non-transactional privacy, and h) economic. These studies suggest that the advent of the Internet has created new opportunities for direct social interaction, adding new means of addressing users' needs.

Socially oriented motives are seen to take on a more important role when the use of social media is studied. Even before the advent of blogs, Twitter and Facebook, researchers were already studying Internet environments which allowed users to create and post content, interact with the content of others, and develop ongoing interpersonal interactions. For example, Rafaeli (1986) examined motives associated with bulletin boards, while Ginossar (2005) explored how discussion communities provide users with informational exchange support and emotional exchange support as well as advocacy-related value.

Ginossar's concepts of emotional and informational exchange, as well as affinity, appear in greater detail in studies focused on more recent forms of social media, such as Weblogs, also known simply as blogs. Papacharissi, an early researcher of blogs (2003) and (2004), found that social utility—that is social interaction, self-expression and the desire to acquire information for interpersonal use—was the predominant motivation among bloggers. Similarly, Trammell (2005) examined blogs, specifically celebrity blogs, in terms of entertainment, information, social interaction, self-expression, passing time and professional advancement. Self-expression, information, social interaction, and professional advancement were the most frequently identified motivations. Trammell also identified distinctions between motives of blog authors and

those who comment on the blog. She found that while blog authors focused primarily on self-expression, commenters were driven by the desire for social interaction. However, Trammel's research does not cover what is thought to be the largest segment of blog users (What Percentage of, 2006)—lurkers. These are individuals who read a blog but who do not interact with the author or other readers.

Professional advancement is a well-documented motive associated with use of social media, especially blogs. Bortree (2005), Papacharissi (2004), Jung, Youn & McClung, (2007), McLane (2013), and others have identified professional advancement among the motives of authors of blogs. However, none of the studies examined attempted to distinguish between motives associated with explicitly professional blogs (those authored as part of a job or profession) with those of a more personal nature. The current study will attempt to differentiate among motives associated with each type of blog.

To summarize the above discussion, the following table compares motives identified in select early uses and gratifications research, with those uncovered in later uses and gratifications research on social media.

Table 1

Comparison of Motives Among Uses And Gratifications Studies

McQuail (1983)	Korgaonkar & Wolin (1999)	Haridakis (2002)	Trammel (2005)
Information	Social escapism	Passing time	Self-expression
Social interaction	Transactional privacy	Unwinding	Information
Personal identity	Information	Entertainment	Social interaction
Entertainment	Interactive control	Information	Professional
	Socialization	Social interaction	advancement
	Non-transactional privacy	Arousal	Entertainment
	Economic		Passing time

While by no means exhaustive, this review attempts to demonstrate that studies of social media use have identified new categories of motives—in particular Trammel’s study of blogging. The current study represents an effort to continue to expand understanding of motives related to using social media by exploring motives related to the presentation of self by content creators in social media.

Studying the presentation of self in social media. Trammell’s blogger research is also relevant to this current research study, because it explores the issue of impression management —how one crafts or maintains an image before others. Goffman (1959) first elaborated the concept of impression management by arguing that people actively manage their actions and information to maintain an image before others in the same way that actors in a play have an on-stage persona supported by back-stage activities that are not visible to the audience, but that contribute to the

audience's image of the actors. Impression management suggests that people play a variety of roles and manage differing impressions depending on the specific situation they are involved in. Papacharissi (2002a) incorporated this idea of impression management in examining motivations for maintaining personal web pages. She noted that surveillance, diversion, self-expression, social utility, professional advancement, and passing time, were the primary dimensions of motives associated with creating personal web pages. Papacharissi also examined how creators of personal web pages manipulated personal information, creativity, and expressiveness to form such self portraits (Papacharissi, 2002b). Building on Goffman's definition, Papacharissi (2002b) argued that, "a web page provides the ideal setting for this type of information game, for it allows a carefully crafted performance through which impression management is achieved under optimal conditions." Similar claims could be made for a Facebook or MySpace page or a blog.

Motives identified for authoring blogs. In fact, Papacharissi (2004) identified two primary motivations for blogging: personal expression and social interaction. Her study of bloggers found that motives related to expressing ones thoughts, opinions and commentary on personal or public events were by far the most commonly motives cited for authoring a blog. Social interaction with friends, family and others were also cited frequently as reasons for blogging. Papacharissi's research demonstrates that motives for using social media, in particular blogging, have strong connections to motives related to presentation of one's own thoughts and ideas as well as interaction with others within the social media environment.

Keshelashvili (2005) looked at how bloggers use impression management strategies involving demonstrations of competence as well as ingratiation, rather than using criticism or boasting in blogs in an effort to be seen as likeable by their readers. A study by Trammell and Keshelashvili (2005) explored similar territory in their examination of prominent bloggers. Looking to better understand impression management motives and behaviors, the authors found that these so-called “A-list” bloggers reveal more information about themselves than other bloggers do, and that they actively engage in impression management (Trammell and Keshelashvili, 2005). In another study, the subject of blogging was extensively explored through a survey of 3,747 blog users (Kaye, 2005). This study identified six motives for using blogs, namely: information seeking and media checking, convenience, personal fulfillment, political surveillance, social surveillance and expression, and affiliation. Kaye also found that political involvement was a strong predictor for all six motives. While illuminating, the value of Kaye’s research is limited by the use of a convenience sample. In her research, Kaye identified 28 possible motivations. However, both the complete list of possible motivations and the six for which findings were significant are heavily skewed toward blog users as content seekers and recipients rather than as content creators.

On the other hand, Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, and Swartz (2004) conducted individual interviews with 23 bloggers, and identified five motives specific to authoring a blog: expressing opinions, documenting one’s life, cathartic outlet, thinking by writing, and community forum. While these motivations do not align completely with existing uses and gratifications motive scales, they are fascinating nonetheless. Of the five, four relate to individual self-expression—where the motives of the blogger are primarily

focused on their creation of content—being a message producer. Only one of these—community forum, is primarily focused on interaction. While the authors did not attempt any statistical analysis to determine the relative frequency or priority of these types of motivations, the study points to self-expression as a primary motive for blogging. This research, along with Kaye’s study, is also instructive because it is based on interviews, while the vast majority of other research into blogging motivations is based on the content analysis of blogs.

In one notable example of content analysis research Trammell, Tarkowski, Hojmokl, and Sapp (2006) identified self-expression as the primary motivation that appears to drive bloggers in Poland. The research study used prior studies involving online diaries as a foundation for their work. In these earlier studies, researchers noted that online diaries have potential both in terms of communication and interaction (Kitzmann, 2003). Kitzmann argued that online diaries are not merely written diaries transferred online, but that they are also substantively distinct from diaries in other media because of a material/social dynamic arising from being in a computer-mediated communications environment, in which the diarist “situates oneself within a different material place—a place that engenders experiences, perceptions, and realities markedly different” than in other diary media.

Other researchers have also emphasized the importance of factoring in the diarists’ impression management activities before different audiences, and the purpose for the creation of the content since the diaries, by nature, are public documents (Sorapure, 2003). Trammel et al. (2006) argued that blogs should be studied using psychological categories based on motivation as either exhibitionist, extrovert, or

autotherapeutic and that blogs perform the social functions of fulfillment of emotional needs, fulfillment of the need for social ties, sociability, pleasure, and self-expression.

Li (2005) also studied motivations for blogging. This research study identified seven motivations for blogging, including: self-documentation, improving writing, self-expression, medium appeal, information, passing time, and socialization. Li further found that some motivations correlate with specific aspects of blog usage, such as feedback management, impression management, readership expectation, design elements use, and use of hyperlinks. He found that, for example, self-documentation is a predictor of feedback management, impression management, and readership expectation, while socialization motives predict use of hyperlinks, impression management, and readership expectation. Li's research is of particular interest because he linked specific motivations to particular aspects of the blogging experience. This provides additional insight into how blogging might align with multiple motivational structures, and indicates that those involved may have multiple motivations for their activities.

In addition to blogging, other forms of social media have been subjected to uses and gratifications analysis. Peters, Almekinders, Van Buren, Roy, and Wessels, (2003) identified four types of motivations associated with the use of short message service (SMS), now commonly known as texting. They found that entertainment, social interaction, immediate access, and time efficiency were the primary motivations for using the service. They also found that these motivations correlated with participant age: adolescents use texting more for intrinsic or social use like entertainment or social interaction, while young adults use texting more for instrumental purposes such as time

efficiency. Leung (2001) examined college students' use of ICQ, an Internet conferencing program. This study differentiated between instrumental use of the technology and intrinsic use of ICQ. Leung found that relaxation, entertainment and fashion provided dominant motives for instrumental use, while inclusion, sociability, affection and escape related to intrinsic use.

Uses and gratifications theory has also been applied to Twitter, a micro-blogging service that allows people to follow each other's activities and to interact in real-time. Hyder (2007) for instance, found that the primary motive for users to "tweet" was to provide an escape from their usual work tasks, in much the same way people in offices might leave their offices and chat by the water cooler. Urista, Dong, and Day (2009) applied uses and gratifications to their study of young adults using Facebook and MySpace. They found that these individuals sought selective, efficient and immediate connection with others to satisfy needs for interpersonal interaction and to seek the approval and support of other people. Also studying social networking use, Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) found that interaction with existing friends and finding new friends are the predominant motives among college-age men and women for their use of MySpace and Facebook. Taken together, these studies suggest that social media use is associated with a number of motives in which self-identity and the presentation of self before others are important factors, as the following table illustrates.

Table 2

Motives Identified in Blog Research

Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Swartz (2004)	Li (2005)	Urista, Dong, & Day (2009)
Expressing opinions	Self-documentation	Interpersonal interaction
Documenting one's life	Improving writing	Approval
Cathartic outlet	Self-expression	Support
Thinking by writing	Medium appeal	
Community forum	Information	
	Passing time	
	Socialization	

Given the significance of motives related to self-image and impression management within uses and gratifications research, it might be valuable to consider whether other theoretical traditions that focus on similar concepts, particularly impression management theory, can further inform our understanding of motives for use of social media.

Impression Management Theory

Since Goffman first articulated impression management theory in the 1950s it, like uses and gratifications theory, has provided a robust foundation for research and elaboration on human behaviors. In his research building on Goffman, Jones (1964) argued that in presenting oneself, the individual purposefully attempts to ingratiate himself or herself in an effort to influence the perception of others regarding

attractiveness of personal characteristics and that such actions are purposefully undertaken by the individual.

Following its early articulation, impression management has been the focus of extensive study into its role in communications settings involving interaction. It should be noted that researchers in different studies since the 1950s have used both the term impression management and the term self-presentation to describe the theory first articulated by Goffman. Leary & Kowalski (1990) and Owens (2003) studied use of both terms and found that they are often but not always used interchangeably in research. For consistency, the term impression management will be used in this study in reference to research based on Goffman's original theory. Schlenker (1980) defined the impression management concept as, "the conscious or unconscious attempt to control images that are projected in real or imaginary social interactions." Nezlak and Leary (2002) argued that an individual's presentation of self before others is shaped by five factors, namely: self-concepts, constraints imposed by relevant social roles, their desired and undesired identity images, the values of the people they are managing their impressions before, and the potential nature of their public images.

Impression management has been applied to social media use by several researchers. Haferkamp and Kramer (2010) found a variety of motives for using social networking sites, including curiosity, communication, entertainment, passing time, self-disclosure, and social affiliation. They also found that individuals with stronger tendencies for impression management activities were more active in social networking and demonstrated a stronger need to belong to groups. Lola (2009) identified three impression management strategies among YouTube contributors, including: basking or

connecting with socially prominent individuals, maintaining a mysterious identity, and self-promotion of abilities and accomplishments. Kramer and Winter (2008) suggested that impression management in social networking sites is correlated with an individual's perceived ability to achieve desired impression management impressions or outcomes among audiences.

In studying impression management within blogs, Bortree (2005) found that female teenage blog authors employed impression management strategies including ingratiation, demonstration of social and creative competence, and (occasionally) supplication, as a way to win the approval and affection of their readers. Interestingly, she also argued that these bloggers maintain two distinct presentations of self—those aimed at a close circle of offline friends, and those aimed at a larger, mass audience of peers. Bortree found that respondents used different strategies of impression management depending on their targeted audience. This concept of managing distinctly different impressions or images in front of different audiences one of the central elements of impression management theory. As Bortree's research suggests, individuals often use different strategies to achieve goals when presenting themselves before different audiences.

A 2007 study of Korean social media users (Jung, Youn & McClung) examined use of impression management strategies—including competence, supplication, exemplification, and ingratiation in the creation and management of personal homepages on the Cyworld platform. Demonstrating competence was found to be the approach that was most employed. In addition the research studied motives against six factors: entertainment, self-expression, professional advancement, passing time,

communication with family and friends, and to be part of a trend. Of these, self-expression and entertainment were the primary motives, followed by professional advancement and passing time.

McCullagh (2008) also examined motives associated with authoring blogs and found that the primary motive for blogging was self-expression, and that respondents use blogs as a medium for self-reflection. McCullagh suggested that the act of blogging helps shape one's self image, "because the self is only developed through interactions with others and because the reflexive project of the self is a characteristic of late modernity, the opportunity to continuously work on the project of the self via the interaction on blogs and comments to posts was the main reason why the majority of bloggers engaged in blogging." This dominant motive was followed by the desire for creative expression, entertaining others, and staying in touch with family and friends. Paralleling Bortree (2005), McCullagh found that bloggers sometimes maintain different identities on different blogs, and that they have different levels of self-disclosure—impression management—strategies for different audiences.

In other studies on impression management in blogs, Mazur (2010) found that impression management motives were more important than interaction among younger bloggers, while Chen (2010) found significant differences in the types of impression management strategies employed by Taiwanese bloggers in comparison to American bloggers. Sanderson (2008) studied the impression management demonstrated by baseball pitcher Kurt Schilling in his blog and found that "critic," "committed individual", and "accountable person," were the three primary impression management strategies

employed. Other motives for blogging have included voyeuristic surveillance (Jung, 2008), and self-identity discovery (Gonzales & Hancock, 2008).

A summary of motives from the above impression management studies could be articulated as follows:

Table 3

Motives Identified In Impression Management Studies

Bortree (2005)	Haferkamp & Kramer (2010)	Jung, Youn & McClung (2005)	McCullagh (2008)	Jung (2008), Gonzales & Hancock (2008)
Win affection	Curiosity	Entertainment of others	Develop self-identity	Voyeuristic surveillance
Win approval	Entertainment	Professional advancement	Creative expression	Self-identity discovery
	Passing time	Passing time	Entertain others	
	Self-disclosure	Communication with others	Stay in touch	
	Social affiliation	Being part of a trend		

As noted earlier, some of these motives, such as passing time and entertainment correspond to motives often identified in uses and gratifications research. Others, such as self-disclosure, development of self-identity and winning of affection or approval, represent types of motives not commonly associated with uses and gratifications research. This raises the interesting possibility that researchers could combine

elements of uses and gratifications theory with those of impression management theory, to develop a more comprehensive catalog of motives associated with the use of social media.

Taxonomy Issues

Impression management theory and uses and gratifications theory do not always share a common taxonomy or lexicon, which poses a challenge to anyone attempting to understand these concepts in relation to one another. For example, some impression management studies characterize motives in terms of interpersonal outcomes (e.g. to win affection or approval from others), emphasizing the goal of the particular actions or groups of actions being undertaken. Uses and gratifications frames these goals as needs that people seek to meet (e.g. to have information or to be entertained). Thus, while both outcomes and needs refer to the goals of particular actions, impression management theory and uses and gratifications theory uses different terms to identify these goals.

Impression management theory also introduces the concept of strategies, the ways in which people attempt to establish or reinforce an impression before others in order to achieve desired outcomes. Examples of strategies include ingratiation, supplication, intimidation, exemplification and self-promotion (Jones, 1990). There is no corresponding concept in uses and gratifications theory, although many impression management strategies (e.g. maintaining anonymity, self-promotion, demonstrating social competence) are similar to established uses and gratifications motives (e.g. maintaining privacy, professional advancement and social interaction). Other strategies,

such as ingratiation and criticism, do not appear to have parallels among uses and gratifications motives.

To further complicate the issue, some concepts—such as seeking approval—are identified as outcomes in impression management research and as motives in uses and gratifications research. Thus any research attempting to more closely align insights gained from impression management research with those from uses and gratifications research will encounter these semantic difficulties. For purposes of this research study, motives specifically identified as such in impression management literature will be accounted for. Further, where impression management strategies parallel uses and gratifications motives, these strategies are incorporated in the current research on blogging. Finally, no established motive scales combining motives from both theoretical disciplines exist. This research, while not attempting to establish such a scale, will seek to determine whether motives from both theoretical traditions can be identified among bloggers.

CHAPTER III

Research Methods

Social media has proven to be popular and fertile ground for research—for those studying uses and gratifications theory and those focused on impression management. A few researchers have touched upon both in their studies on social media. Jung, Youn & McClung (2007) explored both the motives of and impression management strategies employed by Korean social media users, finding both to be present. In a study of online privacy and legal issues, McCullagh (2008) suggested that managing one's presentation of self in social media comprised part of the motives for using social media.

However no studies reviewed to date have attempted to align motives from uses and gratifications theory with those of impression management theory in order to begin development of a more comprehensive understanding of motives associated with the use of social media. Jung, Youn & McClung (2007) applied uses and gratifications theory in terms of motives while addressing impression management strategies. McCullagh (2008) touched upon both the issue of uses and gratification motives and impression management strategies but did not attempt to align the two or explore the relationship in depth.

My research was intended to begin to address this research gap. I conducted a qualitative research study among blog authors to explore whether motives from both impression management and uses and gratifications can be identified and to what extent a closer alignment of motives from these two theoretical traditions is appropriate and useful. I studied whether uses and gratifications motives associated with use of social media, specifically blogs, might be expanded to incorporate motives specifically associated with impression management based on the goals associated with various impression management strategies. Further, this research explored whether goals associated with impression management—such as winning approval and affection, social affiliation, and social support—could be aligned with gratifications sought by users of blogs within a uses and gratifications theoretical framework.

Research Questions

The overall intent of this study was to explore whether motives derived from impression management theory research can usefully be added to those identified in uses and gratifications theory in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding

of people's motives for using social media. Social media is a term that is applied to many types of platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Skype, Youtube, Flickr, and Foursquare. This study focused on a single type of platform—blogs. As noted earlier, blogs have been the subject of substantial research within both the impression management and uses and gratifications traditions. Papacharissi (2004), Keshelashvili (2005), Kaye (2005), Trammell, Tarkowski, Hojmokl, & Sapp (2006), McCullagh (2008), Bortree (2005) and others focused their research on understanding motives associated with blogging.

Blogs have several characteristics that make them appropriate for this study. First, there are a number of online services such as Technorati, Radian 6, and Spiral 16 that actively collect and collate information about blogs, providing access to a large sample population for study. Second, blog authors often can be readily identified and contacted directly through email or contact forms on their blogs. Third, blogging encompasses a wide range of subjects—from fashion and the arts, to business and politics—enabling motives to be identified across different subjects. Finally, blogs can be authored as personal or commercial communications, providing an additional dimension to the study of motives.

In order to understand whether impression management theory motives are useful additions to motives already applied in uses and gratifications research, it is necessary to understand whether impression management plays a discernible role in people's motives for blogging. Determining this will help indicate whether impression management is an important element in people's motivational structures. It also is useful to explore whether motives for blogging might differ across differing types of

blogs, such as personal blogs and professional blogs. Since maintenance of different images or impressions in front of different audiences is central to impression management theory, identification of distinctly different motives across personal and professional blogs by the same author would support the thesis that impression management plays a pivotal role in people's use of social media.

To address these subjects, two research questions were proposed:

RQ 1: Can motives from impression management theory be identified among those reported by respondents as motives for blogging?

RQ 2: Are there motives associated with personal blogs that differ from those associated with professional blogs?

Use of Qualitative Research Techniques

There is no valid motive scale that incorporates both uses and gratifications and impression management motives, making use of scales inappropriate for this study. Additionally, this research was intended to be exploratory in nature rather than descriptive or explanatory. Such an exploratory purpose, and the absence of established scales, made qualitative methodologies most appropriate for this type of study. Babbie (2004) suggests that exploratory qualitative research is suited to accomplish any of three purposes: 1) to satisfy the researcher's curiosity and desire for better understanding, 2) to test the feasibility of undertaking a more extensive study, and 3) to develop methods to be employed in any subsequent study. This study aligns with all three of these purposes. Pitt (1994), Silverman (2001), Guba (1981), and Shenton (2004) have suggested that research employing qualitative methodologies can provide useful and trustworthy findings and insight. Miles and Huberman (1984) argue

that qualitative data are “a source of well-grounded, rich description and explanation of processes.” In the case of this study those processes are the ones involved in the activity of blogging. They also suggest that qualitative data enable researchers to assess causality and uncover fruitful explanations of particular phenomena. Qualitative research also enables serendipitous findings and new theoretical integrations. This last characteristic makes qualitative research particularly appropriate for this type of study, where I am exploring possible integration of motives from uses and gratifications theory with those of impression management theory.

Miles and Huberman (1984) suggest that, far from being an “art,” careful qualitative research, involves “an intense observer’s scrupulous recording of naturally-occurring social interactions from which patterns are inferred and interpreted.” They further note that quantitative research often involves qualitative-like inductive analysis such as naming particular factors and articulation of the researcher’s interpretation of meaning from the data, suggesting that both qualitative and quantitative research are useful tools in research.

Given that the intent of this research was to identify motives for social media use and behavior among individuals, rather than to document their use and behavior itself, qualitative research instruments were deemed be the most appropriate method for this study. Further, as there is no established scale that incorporates both impression management motives and uses and gratifications motives appropriate for use in this study, the use of Likert-type scales, yes-no questions, multiple choice questions, or other standard closed-ended questions—common elements of quantitative surveys—were considered less useful as a way to identify blogging motives that may be

associated with impression management theory. Qualitative survey methods also fit well with both Babbie's and Miles' and Huberman's position on useful applications for qualitative research. Open-ended questions also allow respondents to describe their thoughts and motives in their own words, expressing their individual thoughts and ideas. This enables the researcher not only to identify specific motives but also to observe how respondents relate concepts to one another. Open-ended questions also enable the researcher to follow the narrative of thought of respondents and to gauge the respondents' intensity of thought and feeling as they express their thoughts and ideas in their own words. Thus, open-ended questions provide the researcher with a rich tapestry of information on which to base his or her analysis. Of course, open-ended questions in qualitative research can be vulnerable to credibility of response (Babbie, 2004), and qualitative methodologies are subject to limitations related to epistemology, conflation of phenomena with symbolism, ambiguous data interpretation, and sampling biases (Toomela, 2011). However, some of these factors can be mitigated by the rigorous application of well-established analytical methodologies. Miles and Huberman (1984) suggest that qualitative analysis must include data reduction (selecting, focusing, simplifying abstracting and transforming raw data), creation of data displays (organized assemblies of information) and conclusion-drawing and verification (drawing meaning from reduced and displayed data). In this study data were imported into a research tool for coding and analysis. Motives previously identified in impression management and uses and gratifications research on social media were used as the basis for identifying data codes, which were then analyzed. Further, Guba (1981) and Shenton (2004)

suggest that trustworthiness in qualitative research can be established across four dimensions that correspond to similar criteria used by positivist researchers:

- a) credibility (in preference to internal validity)
- b) transferability (in preference to external validity/generalisability)
- c) dependability (in preference to reliability)
- d) confirmability (in preference to objectivity)

Shenton suggests that these criteria can be addressed using several disciplines such as use of established data gathering and analysis, familiarity with the culture and language of the participant community—in this case the blogger community—employment of tactics promoting honesty in participants, iterative questioning such as probes and follow-up questions, congruence with prior research findings, and triangulation of findings across differing types of participants. This research attempted to employ each of these qualitative research disciplines to maximize trustworthiness.

Because of all the advantages of qualitative methods cited above, despite some limitations, qualitative research was considered to be the most appropriate for this research. In this study an online research instrument was conducted among authors of various blogs. Employing online methodologies enabled me to contact bloggers around the world, something that would have been virtually impossible using other qualitative techniques such as in depth interviews or focus groups. This methodology also enabled participants to take the time to give careful thought to their descriptions of their motives. It also ensured that each participant answered the questions without influence from other participants, as can occur in group methodologies such as focus groups. The

research questions noted above were operationalized in an online qualitative survey distributed to bloggers via their blogs. The survey questions explored:

- 1) Reasons for writing a blog
- 2) What benefits authors obtain from writing a blog
- 3) Sources of pleasure or satisfaction for authoring a blog
- 4) Their self image as a blogger
- 5) How bloggers decide what to write about
- 6) How bloggers react to criticism
- 7) The importance of reader feedback to the blog author
- 8) The impression bloggers believe their readers have of them

In addition, several screening and profiling questions were included to ensure respondents were active bloggers and to better understand the demographic characteristics of the respondents to the online survey.

Sampling

Because this study made no attempt to reliably quantify the relative frequency, interaction, or dominance of any motives, statistical analysis of data was neither needed nor even possible in the study of the survey results. Therefore, there was no need for a rigorous random sampling schema. Non-probability sampling, which is common in qualitative research and fits with interpretivist paradigms characterizing most qualitative methods, would not present a serious barrier to the usefulness of this research. Trochim (2006) suggests that while non-probability sampling cannot depend upon the rationale of probability theory, it can be appropriate when probability sampling is not practical, feasible or theoretically sensible. No comprehensive list of blogs and bloggers is known

to exist. This presents a significant challenge to any researcher attempting to identify a truly random sample of bloggers. For example, the widely cited blog monitoring authority Technorati reportedly has indexed more than 133 million blogs since 2002 (Takahasi, 2008), but it actively tracks only 1.2 million (Technorati Browse the directory, 2011). Reliable probability sampling across all blogs and bloggers was therefore not practical, feasible or desirable for a qualitative study such as this.

Instead the sampling methodology incorporated blogs listed in Technorati as the initial sample population combined with snowball sampling techniques. Babbie (2004) suggests that snowball sampling is appropriate where the members of a sample population are difficult to locate and reach. Certainly this standard applies to the proposed research. As noted above, only a small percentage of blogs are tracked by listing services. However, by surveying a small number of blog authors, it is possible to reach and survey a much larger number of bloggers. This was accomplished by asking each respondent to share a survey link with other bloggers with the goal of expanding the number of bloggers reached. This approach leveraged the inherently social nature of the blogosphere as a way to attempt to reach a larger sample of the blogging community. However, there was no mechanism for determining how many, if any, bloggers contacted by the researcher shared the survey link with other bloggers.

Data Collection

Contact was made with 180 blog authors listed in the Technorati database. Technorati organizes its blog directory by general subject: entertainment, business, finance, sports, politics, autos, technology, living, green, and science. These blogs are listed in rank order, based on Technorati Authority, which measures the frequency with

which other social media sites link to content on the blog, whether the content on the blog matches the Technorati subject category in which it is listed, and other unspecified measures of popularity and influence (Technorati Authority FAQ, 2013). I visited the first 6 blogs listed on each of the last 8 pages of each subject directory in the Technorati database, a total of 480 blogs. This approach was selected because it was hypothesized that authors of lower authority and popularity blogs might be more likely to respond to an unsolicited message than those with higher authority and popularity. Since participants were to be recruited via an unsolicited email or contact form message, I decided to approach bloggers who might not have a large amount of interaction with readers, as determined by the blogs' Technorati ranking. Focusing on blogs with less authority and popularity minimized risk that my email would be overlooked or ignored, as it might be the case on blogs with very high levels of reader interaction. On some, but not all, blogs a method of contact was discovered. This consisted either of an email address or a contact form. On each site where a method of contact was available, the blog author was sent an invitation to take the survey and a link to the survey.

The invitation included a description of the research and researcher, its intended purpose, statements regarding anonymity and confidentiality, a link to an online survey and a request that the recipient pass the link on to other bloggers. I directly sent the survey link to 118 bloggers. It is not known how many additional bloggers were reached through respondents sharing the survey link with other bloggers.

The survey comprised a list of questions regarding reasons why individuals author his or her blog(s). These comprised predominantly open-ended questions to

enable respondents to describe in their own words their motives for various activities involved in blogging. In addition several profiling questions were asked. These included gender, education, region, blogging frequency, type of blog, and age. The survey remained live for 30 days during which 31 surveys were completed. Upon review of the 31 completed surveys it was found that redundancy had been achieved and that common themes could be readily identified among responses.

Of the 31 completed surveys five respondents failed to complete all of the profiling questions. Among the remaining participants about one-third were women and most respondents resided in North America with one each in Asia and Africa. In terms of education, respondents reported having bachelor's degrees most frequently, followed by education that included some college. About half of respondents were under 35 years of age, with 25-34 being the most common age range, followed by 35-54. About one-quarter of respondents indicated they blogged at least daily; most of the remainder were split evenly between blogging frequency of several times a week and several times a month, with one respondent indicating she blogged only several times a year. Half the participants authored both professional and personal blogs, enabling an examination of whether there were differences in motives for authoring professional or personal blogs among the same respondents. Of those reporting only authoring one blog, a personal blog was most common.

Analysis

Responses were imported into the Dedoose research tool for coding and analysis. Motives previously identified in impression management and uses and gratifications research on social media were used as the basis for identifying data

codes. Existing motives from impression management research that were used for coding were: being part of a trend, communication, creative expression, curiosity, developing self-identity, entertainment, entertainment of others, passing time, professional advancement, self-disclosure, self-expression, social affiliation, winning affection, and winning approval. Existing motives from uses and gratifications research that were used for coding were: approval, arousal, catharsis, community forum, economic, entertainment, improved writing, information seeking, interactive control, medium appeal, non-transactional privacy, passing time, personal identity, professional advancement, self expression, self documentation, social escapism, social interaction, support, thinking by writing, transactional privacy, and unwinding. Where a response indicated a motive found in both traditions, the response was coded with both motives.

Once all responses were organized into excerpts based on responses to individual questions and then coded, the responses were examined for terms that relate to motives either from uses and gratifications theory or from impression management theory. Such terms that appeared frequently were noted. Also, differences in motives associated with personal or professional blogs were noted.

CHAPTER IV

Research Findings

A total of 24 motives were identified among the 31 completed surveys. In addition to the 21 motives previously found in prior research, three additional motives not previously listed in prior research were identified: social obligation¹, helping others, and non-media-related benefit.

1. This motive was labeled societal responsibility in earlier versions of this research but was changed to social obligation to better reflect the character of this motive.

Social Obligation

Social obligation refers to responses related to motives associated with duty to society generally or a broad community. For example, one respondent wrote, “There is a lot of stuff out there these days (thank you Internet) which require proper analysis and explanation. I believe that a well informed citizenry can be relied to vote and push for better society, so doing my own part by writing about the issues is a form of public service.” Another wrote, “I like to make difference in (public) opinion, because some people can't face the truth sometimes, so I try to make them.” A third respondent described his motives this way, “It is important to lead people to success in business, because since the business economy is failing, people need to step up their leadership skills, talent, and personal growth!” In each case, the blogger indicated he or she sought to beneficially affect the society at large or a broad community, such as business people. Further, these respondents consistently used values-laden terms such as “truth,” “leadership,” “public opinion,” and “agendas of the powerful and influential,” suggesting they saw their work as serving an important social role.

Helping Others

The helping others code was applied to responses where the respondent identified individuals or specific groups as the objects of their assistance, rather than describing a social duty or responsibility. One respondent wrote, “I am a huge cheerleader for other writers. Blogging lets me help them.” Another indicated, “I want to help people grow and succeed in personal and business life.” Another described their motives in these terms, “To help people gain more knowledgeable about the specific

subject I am writing about...to make a difference in opinion...to lead people to a better relationship with each other.”

Non-Media-Related Benefit

Non-media-related benefit is used to describe a benefit the respondent derived from their blogging activity but that was not derived directly through the medium. Such benefits include meeting celebrities in person, traveling and getting to test new consumer products. For example, one blogger characterized one of the benefits he receives from blogging as, “I get to meet and interview celebrities!” Another blogger who writes about her daughter’s chronic illness said, “I am able...to afford her certain opportunities I would never have been able to imagine had I not been a blogger.” An author who maintains a professional blog wrote, “Writing for this professional blog has opened a lot of doors for me: I’ve been able to attend events and participate in panels.” Another blogger wrote that the one of the benefits is, “The opportunities for travel, interviewing and reviewing subjects,” while a different blogger expressed non-media benefits in these terms, “I get to learn more about different products so I can give my honest opinion about it.” In each case the benefit was connected to and derived from their activity as a blog author but was a benefit experienced outside of the medium itself.

Multiple Motives and Motive Diversity

In many cases respondents described multiple motives for their blogging activity. These combinations of motives often were diverse. For example, one respondent described motivations related to passing time, social interaction, creative expression and social affiliation, while in another’s responses motives related to winning affection,

winning approval and non-media-related benefit could be identified, and in a third motives around entertainment, professional advancement and helping others were found.

Motives of social interaction and social affiliation were found in combination with that of helping others, the single most common co-occurrence of motives. For example, one respondent described his motives for writing a blog in these terms, “(I blog) to help instruct business owners and workers to grow...to establish a relationship with other business people...to help lead people to success in business.” Another wrote, “Blogging lets individuals invest time as a capital resource to gradually develop an audience, affirm their own values, and have meaningful connections that are not primarily based on commercial interests...(I make) personal connections...interpersonal interaction on the web is a vital part of communicating ideas and values in the 21st century.” This suggests that the motives of blog authors often are complex and that blogging meets several different kinds of needs. Several of the respondents explicitly combined often diverse motives together when explaining why they authored blogs, as the following excerpts illustrate:

- “I like to blog because I like to connect to other people through my blogs. It also keeps me well aware of the current event (sic) and helps me to keep myself updated.”
- “For fun...as a creative outlet...as an exercise to sharpen my writing skills...positive feedback from readers both online and in person...participation in the blogging community.”

- “Bond with readers of my novels, grow my book readership, provides (sic) an outlet for my brain.”
- “Exposure to a bigger audience, a pittance of an income, and early exposure to products.”
- “To provide commentary on various political and business issues. To identify the agendas of the powerful and influential. To think out aloud and indulge in my interests.”

Motives from both impression management and uses and gratifications were found frequently among the responses. For example, the impression management motives of winning approval and affection, or liking, are clearly evident across many respondents’ answers. In the same way, self-expression and social interaction motives that figure prominently in earlier uses and gratifications studies also were widely reported in this study.

As noted earlier, both traditions share a number of similar motives, though in some cases a slightly different label is used. In instances where a response indicated a motive found in both traditions, the response was coded with both motives. Of these related motives, social interaction/social affiliation, professional advancement (which was not surprising given that more than half the respondents wrote professional blogs or both professional and personal blogs), self-disclosure, self expression, winning approval, and entertainment were identified 10 or more times among all responses. In addition, the impression management motives of creative expression and developing self identity were identified more than 10 times. The following table lists the motives from both impression management and uses and gratifications that were identified

among the responses most frequently, noting that many respondents mentioned the same motives more than once across their answers to all the questions:

Table 4

Motives Identified Frequently Among Bloggers

Motive Identified	Frequency of Occurrence
Social interaction/social affiliation	46
Win approval	23
Helping others	11
Professional advancement	21
Self disclosure	17
Self expression	14
Creative expression	13
Develop self identity	13
Entertainment	12

The surveys did not show strong connections between motives and profile descriptors related to gender, age or region. When looking at motives by profile descriptor (considering only those motives identified 10 or more times), several patterns emerged. For professional blogs, professional advancement was cited as a motive much more frequently than those who authored only personal blogs. However, improved writing was not associated with professional blogs. Creative expression and self expression were not associated strongly with one blog type, suggesting that professional bloggers are motivated by personal development, as well as professional

development, considerations. On the other hand, it was found that helping others was associated with personal blogs more often than professional blogs.

The interests and opinions of readers also weighed heavily in bloggers' minds. Virtually all respondents indicated that the opinions of their readers were important to them. Most respondents said they considered their readers' interests when determining what to write. Most respondents also said criticism from readers affected them. A majority of respondents said comments and feedback from readers was important to them. This suggests that bloggers are very conscious of their audiences when they create content on their blogs, that readers affect what bloggers present and that bloggers manage presentations with their audiences in mind, a central tenet of impression management theory. Further, all respondents identified specific characteristics that they associated with themselves as bloggers. These characteristics were, in most cases, consistent between how respondents described themselves and how they expected readers to describe them, suggesting that bloggers often consider the impression they make on their audiences and seek to align those impressions with a desired self-image.

Several people expressed that they felt that blogging was a relatively safe platform for self disclosure. One respondent wrote, "I've never been a particularly talkative person, so not many people know much about me. Using writing as an outlet for my thoughts allows me to express opinions that would otherwise most probably have gone unheard." Another expressed a similar thought in this way, "I'm shy by nature so it's a way of challenging myself to become more open and let other people get to know me better...I'm getting over my insecurities because if I write on my blog that I am like

this or that, then that's it, I'm not going to make excuses for feeling or thinking the way I do." Another respondent expressed it this way, "In a world that is very self-absorbed, this is a corner of the universe where I can be me. I can vent openly. I can show off my maternal pride. And I do not feel guilty for doing so whereas in real life, I may be more modest." Interestingly, while all three of these examples relate to self-disclosure as a motive, consideration of their audiences was evident through terms like "gone unheard" rather than "gone unspoken," "let other people get to know me," and "show off."

However, responses regarding the importance of reader comments, reaction to criticism and descriptions of how readers might see them or think of them, differed widely. Most individuals reported that reader feedback was important, although they differed in how they reacted to criticism. At one end of the spectrum a respondent wrote, "(My blogging) doesn't say much (about me). The fact that I've kept my blog going for 4 years possibly says I have perseverance, but that's about it." One respondent commenting on criticism wrote, "We are all human so of course it will upset me when someone criticizes me," while another wrote, "No one ever has (criticized me), but I wouldn't have cared much if they did." Respondents also tied the impressions they thought readers would have of them to the value they sought to provide to their audiences through their blogs. One woman wrote that she thought readers would say about her that, "(I'm) knowledgeable...(I'm) a sharing, caring female," while another wrote, "It says I care enough about the community to blog daily," and another expressed her thought as, "I really enjoy hearing that something I shared help make a situation better." These excerpts also suggest that being a helpful person is an important facet of the impression they want to create in their minds of their audiences.

Responses about whether and how authors considered what would appeal to readers when deciding on content were varied. “I post what interests me and what I am thinking about at the time, and I hope that people enjoy reading it,” one man wrote, suggesting he did not give much consideration to what audiences would like but that communicating with his audience was the focus of his blog. One woman wrote about her professional blog, “I try to make sure the content I post is relatable. While I enjoy writing, I want it to be relevant or funny to people. I never just post personal things—I hate that.” Several bloggers said they considered the interests of their readers but did not merely cater to those interests. Instead, they wrote about topics that interested themselves and their readers. “I basically post about what matters to me—with a little sprinkle of what I think my audience would like,” one blogger wrote. However, there was no connection between whether respondents considered what would appeal to readers in determining content with whether reader commentary was important or the respondents’ ability to articulate what impressions they expected readers to have of them as bloggers.

Several respondents indicated that they felt they had something of value—such as knowledge, information, perspectives, experience—that they wanted to share with others for the benefit of those audiences. This parallels the findings of Jung, Youn & McClung (2007) who noted that a primary impression management strategy used by Korean bloggers was demonstrations or expertise or competence in a particular subject area. The current study found these examples of comments regarding the importance of presenting knowledge or competence in the motivational structure of bloggers:

- “I love to share my knowledge...I love sharing my knowledge and beauty is one thing I have a vast knowledge of.”
- “I want to help people grow and succeed in personal and business life...”
- “Helping others—I like to share my experiences and information to help others.”
- “It is important because it can help to contribute a lot to the people, educate them and inform them.”

Motives for Professional Blogging and Personal Blogging

More than a dozen respondents authored both professional and personal blogs. In several instances, bloggers reported some similar motives for authoring both personal and profession blogs, although there occasionally were differences in nuance. For example, one blogger identified social interaction or affiliation as a motive for both his personal and professional blogs. However, he described it in this way, “Book readers may read a book, and never engage with the author, and that's fine. But readers who engage with the author (in a good way), and have a deeper bond with author tend to follow that author's career, buy more of their books, and discuss that author with their friends.” Describing his personal blog, he described his motives in this way, “(To) allow people to feel like they are part of my family...to document changes in my life...to show people who are struggling with the same issues I am, how I approach it, to give them hope.” In both instances interpersonal connection was noted as important, but the professional blog had a goal of professional advancement, while in the personal blog one of the author's primary goals was to help others.

In other instances, similar motives could be identified, but the respondents expressed these motives in different ways, using more intimate and personal language when referring to their personal blogs than when referring to their professional blogs. For example, when writing about their personal blogs, terms like, friends, family, feeling, staying in touch, fun, and staying connected were more used more commonly than when writing about professional blogs. This suggests that motives for blogging have multiple intertwined layers, some of which may be tied to the type of blog and others may have deeper connections with the beliefs, values and personality of the blogger.

However, as noted earlier, bloggers most often expressed clear differences in motives for professional blogging than for personal blogging. In fact, most respondents who authored both professional and personal blogs articulated several motives that were different for personal blogs than for professional blogs, though they also identified similar motives across both blogs. These patterns suggest that motives for authoring professional blogs can be substantially different when compared with personal blogs. The following table shows three instances of the numerous examples identified in the research:

Table 5

Examples of Motives Associated with Professional and Personal Blogs

Blog type	Respondent #15	Respondent #23	Respondent #22
Professional	“To be part of a writing community; to be more involved with people and events that are important to me; to maintain my public writing identity.”	“1) It becomes an opportunity to showcase myself to academic institutions and employers; 2) It allows me to spread my ideas; 3) It creates new social/professional connections; 4) I receive income based on something I feel passionately about; and 5) It helps me create a network of contacts who may be interested in purchasing my creative work.”	“Bond with readers of my novels. Grow my book readership Provides an outlet for my brain.”
Personal	“Fun; creative outlet; self-expression; tracking my running.”	“1) keeping in touch with friends and family. 2) It gives me a chance to post pictures. 3) I can talk about my travel narratives. 4) I can comfortably get a bit more political.”	“Allow people to feel like they are part of my family. To document changes in my life. To show people who are struggling with the same issues I am, how I approach it, to give them hope.”

These authors also often reported different impressions they thought readers of their professional blogs would have of them compared with their personal blogs. For example, one blogger described impressions readers would get from reading their professional blog as, “That I’m interested in a certain set of topics - in my case, geek

interests and parenting,” while they talked about impressions from their personal blog as, “I like to run, and I like writing about the past.” Another wrote about their professional blog, “Authoring a successful blog shows that I’m an independent, resourceful, social creature who has something to say,” while they wrote about impressions readers would have of them from their personal blog, “That I’m a traveler, a socialist, and pseudo-philosopher.” A third suggested that people reading their professional blog would think, “That I’m interesting and have greatly matured over the years. That I am a source of good information,” while readers of their personal blog would say, “That I’ve got a lot going on (in my life).” This suggests that both uses and gratifications motives and impression management motives can differ based on the type of blog the author is writing. It further suggests that bloggers seek to create different impressions on audiences based on the type of the blog the author, maintaining different images in different contexts, as Goffman originally suggested.

While this research found that motives and impressions management approaches differed between professional and personal blogs, there was no clear and consistent connection between the subject of the individual blog and the authors’ motives. There were only two instances in which such connections could be found. Authors of blogs focused on political or social issues were more likely to see informing others as central to their motives for blogging. Bloggers who were writing about particular personal life experiences (such as raising a child with disabilities or coping with cancer) tended to identify helping others as an important motive for their blogging. Beyond these, specific motives and impressions were not associated with the subjects the authors wrote about.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore whether motives from both impression management theory and uses and gratifications theory could be identified among those associated with blogging, thus suggesting that motives from impression management might usefully be added to established motives from uses and gratifications theory in order to develop a more inclusive and robust motive framework when studying social media. The potential usefulness of such an alignment arises from the ability of individuals to create and manage impressions before others using social media, thus adding self presentation in media as an additional category of motives.

Specifically, this research set out to answer two questions: whether motives from impression management theory could be identified among those reported by respondents as motives for blogging, and whether motives associated with personal blogs differ from those associated with professional blogs. Answers to these questions would help support the suggestion that impression management motives might be considered in future research into social media use.

On the first question, that of whether impression management motives could be identified among motives for social media use, this research strongly suggests that such motives are present. Most of the frequently identified motives among respondents were those that are found both in uses and gratifications theory and impression management, including social interaction or affiliation, professional advancement, self disclosure, self expression, development of self identity and entertainment. In addition, two motives specific to impression management, creative expression and winning approval, were

also among those most frequently found. This suggests that impression management is an inherent part of people's motivations for authoring a blog. Further, the research suggests that bloggers are acutely aware of the audiences they are presenting themselves and their thoughts to. Respondents consistently included references to their readers when they described why they blogged and what benefits they gained from blogging. Most respondents were able to articulate what they believed their audiences would think of them, what impression the bloggers made, and these impressions generally aligned with their own perceptions of themselves as bloggers. On the other hand, not all bloggers surveyed considered the interests of their audiences important when deciding what to write about, yet almost all of those surveyed reported that feedback from readers was important to them. Likewise, reactions to criticism by readers were mixed with some respondents reporting that they are personally affected and others suggesting criticism had no effect on them or what they wrote. Most respondents reported that providing some benefit to readers—imparting knowledge, sharing experiences, showing empathetic support—were among the dominant motivations for blogging. The motives of helping others and social obligation were among those most frequently identified in this study. This aligns with impression management's argument that people attempt to affect the impressions of others by ingratiating themselves to their target audiences through a variety of strategies including helping those audiences, presenting themselves as smart or capable, or as having similar attitudes or behaviors with their target audiences.

Motives identified, reported impressions, importance of reader feedback and response to criticism were not associated with age, gender, region, education or

frequency of blogging. Rather, this study found no link between demographic characteristics and blogging motives, suggesting that similar motives can be found across different audiences. The research suggests that bloggers, to use Goffman's phrasing, attempt to influence the perception of others regarding attractiveness of personal characteristics and that such actions are purposefully undertaken by the individuals involved. Taken together, these findings do suggest that motives from impression management theory can be found alongside those of uses and gratifications theory and that impression management plays a conspicuous role in the motivations of the authors of online blogs. This, in turn, suggests that while uses and gratifications theory provides a solid foundation for understanding why people use particular media, other theoretical traditions can help expand and further illuminate people's motives, especially motives for using social media. Further, since social media use is exploding across wide segments of the population, gaining a deeper and fuller understanding of people's motives for using social media can only advance our knowledge and understanding of these increasingly important media.

As to whether motives for writing a professional blog differed from those of writing a personal blog, the research suggests that while there are similarities, there also are differences. When looking at the responses of individuals who authored both personal and professional blogs, substantial differences could be noted. Thus, while self expression, social interaction and social affiliation were commonly reported motives for both personal and professional blogs, professional blogging was more commonly associated with professional advancement, helping others and non-media-related benefits. In other instances motives for professional and personal blogging fell into

similar categories but were expressed in more personal terms, suggesting that respondents thought differently about their reasons for professional and personal blogging and the benefits they derived from those activities. Thus, this research suggests that while some motives may differ between writing professional and personal blogs, it might be more accurate not to think only in terms of differing motives but rather differing descriptive frameworks, personal blogging being more closely associated with personal and emotional terminology than professional blogs. This is similar to the phenomena Bortree (2005) described in research among teenage bloggers. That study found that bloggers maintained qualitatively different relationships among a close circle of companions and a different one among broader circles of acquaintances. Interactions within the close circle tended to be more emotional and personal with greater self disclosure.

While differences were found between motives for personal and professional blogging, there was no consistent connection between specific motives and blog topics. On the one hand, authors covering social or political topics more frequently cited social obligation and information sharing among their motives, and those sharing certain life experiences such as parenting or coping with cancer almost universally cited helping others as a motive. However, these motives were identified in the responses of other bloggers whose topics ranged from travel to fashion to business. Also bloggers writing about politics, social issues or serious life experiences reported motives that aligned with those writing on other topics. Thus, the research does not suggest a clear consistent connection between motive and topic, leaving open the possibility that the medium itself, that is a blog, might play a more prominent role in defining relevant

motivations rather than the topics the writers cover in their blogs. It may also be the case that a key driver of motivational difference lies in the blogger's perception of the relationship between himself or herself and the reader, with bloggers presenting different personas depending on how they see their connection to the audience. This also is consistent with impression management theory which suggests that individuals often seek to maintain different impressions in front of differing groups of people such as friends, family or co-workers. This research cannot be used to support an argument for or against a connection between motives and the topics that bloggers write about in their personal or professional blogs, suggesting further research is needed.

Limitations and Future Research

This research is the first, rather than the final, word on whether motives gleaned from other theoretical traditions such as impression management can usefully be applied to expand our understanding of uses and gratifications associated with social media. The value of this study is limited by several factors. First, the research focused only on writing blogs. Social media, as noted earlier, embraces a wide range of platforms with differing uses and appealing to differing audiences. Further research is needed to explore whether impression management motives can be discovered in other social media.

Also, this research was conducted only among blog authors and focused exclusively on motives associated with writing, that is creating content for, personal and professional blogs. It can be hypothesized that different motives might obtain for other blog-related activities such as commenting on blogs, linking and reading blogs. An activity such as commenting on a blog involves creating and sharing content, while

linking involves only the sharing of existing content with others. While impression management motives might be associated with the blogging activities of commenting and linking, this research does not illuminate motives involved in those activities. At the same time motives associated with the activity of blog reading, since it is most similar to media consumption in general and does not involve creation or sharing of content, might mirror motives for using other online media. Also as noted earlier, this study could not determine whether the topics written about in blogs are strongly associated with motives for writing a particular blog. Further research to determine whether the topic being written about affects motives is needed.

A third set of limitations of the current study was imposed by the methodological approach. As noted earlier this research was intended to be exploratory in nature rather than descriptive or explanatory. Further, it will be remembered that no established motive scale incorporating impression management and uses and gratifications motives exists. For these reasons, this study employed qualitative data collection and analytical methodologies. However, this also means that the results of this study are not projectable over the larger body of blog authors. The survey was conducted in English, eliminating the possibility that non-English speakers could participate and raising the possibility that motives in other cultures might differ from those among English speakers.

A further methodological limitation was imposed by the lack of any type of comprehensive list of blogs and absence of universally available methods for contacting blog authors. As noted earlier, many of the blogs reviewed for this study had no identifiable mechanism for contacting the author, eliminating them as potential

participants in this study. Additionally, the survey link was directly distributed only to bloggers with relatively low Technorati Authority because it was hypothesized that bloggers with smaller followings and fewer comments and links would be more likely to participate than those with high levels of reader interaction. It is possible that the motivational patterns of the authors of blogs with high Technorati Authority might differ from those with lower authority ratings. Also, the methodology employed in this study included a snowball sampling component in an effort to extend the distribution of the survey to bloggers not listed on Technorati. It is unclear how many, if any, of the respondents were obtained via snowball sampling.

Finally, as noted earlier, five respondents failed to fully complete all the profile questions. This raises the possibility that, had this data been complete, some association between motives and respondent profile characteristics might have been discovered which could have helped provide a more thorough understanding of what motivates particular bloggers.

Conclusions

Uses and gratifications theory has proven to be one of the most useful and fruitful theoretical models for media research since its initial articulation more than 70 years ago. It emphasizes that media use is intentional and goal driven, that people are active and intentional in media selection and use. The advent of the Internet and social media in particular has provided people with new platforms and uses for media. Among these uses is the ability of people to shift from merely being content consumers to being content creators and distributors, enabling them to pursue a number of new types of goals and tapping into new categories of motives. Among these motives are those

relating to social interaction, the development and maintenance of relationships with others through the Internet generally and social media in particular.

The Internet and social media thus enable people to present their thoughts, ideas, opinions, desires, likes, dislikes, attitudes and beliefs to others, giving others an image or impression of those sharing this information. This presentation of the self is central to the theoretical tradition of impression management. This theory suggests that, in the same way that people are intentional and goal-oriented in their use of media, they are intentional and goal-oriented in how they present themselves to others. Further, impression management theory suggests that people adjust the impression they attempt to make based on the audience they present themselves to and the goals they have for that interaction or relationship. This behavior has been documented in several impression management studies involving use of the Internet and social media.

The expanded application of uses and gratifications theory to social media use, along with ability of people to develop and maintain distinct online presentations of self in their interactions with different audiences and in different situations as suggested by impression management theory suggests that a closer connection between these two theories might be productive in the study of how and why people use social media. This study represents an attempt to begin to discover whether bringing together more closely the models of uses and gratifications and impression management is appropriate and useful. This study set out to determine whether motives from both theoretical traditions can be uncovered in blogging and whether specific impression management motives and strategies can be identified in blogging behavior.

My research demonstrates that motives from both theoretical traditions can be identified among bloggers, particularly those relating to social interaction and affiliation, winning approval, self disclosure, self expression and development of identity. In addition, this study found that previously documented impression management strategies such as demonstrations of competence and social support could be identified among the self-reported behaviors of individuals maintaining both personal and professional blogs.

Further, this study suggests that the impression management phenomenon in which individuals create different impressions with different audiences arising from distinct, situationally determined motives can be identified among those bloggers who maintain both personal and professional blogs. Different motives associated with professional and personal blogs were identified, and the respondents' descriptions of these motives suggest the kind of differences in impression management techniques Bortree (2005) found in prior research among bloggers. On the other hand, no clear consistent connection between blog topics and motives could be identified, suggesting that subject matter may not be a determining factor relative to which motives are in play when writing a blog.

While this research did not attempt to produce a new motive scale embracing both impression management and uses and gratifications motives, the motives identified through the research may be able to be used in the development of such a scale through further study. Eventually, researchers could model a larger and inclusive motivation scale that draws not only from the uses and gratifications tradition of media study but also from the impression management tradition of psychological research.

This course of study also may suggest an approach for further differentiating among motives associated with different uses of the same medium.

These findings suggest that a more robust exploration of impression management in people's use of social media may be informative in understanding of how and why individuals use these media. While this research focused exclusively on writing blogs, it can serve as a starting point for future research exploring closer alignment of uses and gratifications and impression management in the study of other social media and in deepening our understanding of the role of self presentation in social media. This study suggests that by drawing from the body of impression management research, it is possible, and potentially profitable, to apply insights gained from impression management theory to the development of a more comprehensive understanding of motives associated with the use of social media.

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