Blogging and Identity Construction: A Study on Blogging Continuance Intentions

Research-in-Progress

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Abstract

This study examines factors that influence bloggers’ intentions to continue using blogs for self-expression. It points out that the construction and maintenance of online identities is a critical driving force of blog use and continuance. Meanwhile, blogging satisfaction, perceived usefulness, enjoyment, and habit pose a positive impact on blog continuance while privacy concern poses a negative impact. Based on the Expectation-Confirmation Model of IT Continuance (ECM-IT), a research model is developed to examine the impacts of these factors on blogging continuance intentions. Implications of the study are discussed.

Keywords

Blogging, IT continuance, online identity, expectation-confirmation model of IT continuance, self-expression, social media, privacy concern

Introduction

Blogging, short for web logging, is the publishing of discrete posts (called blog entries) on a website. It differs from other forms of web-based publishing such as personal or corporate websites in that it allows bloggers to add new posts to old ones rather than substituting for the old posts, therefore creating a compilation of previous posts (McCullagh 2008; Silva, Goel and Mousavidin 2008). The compilation of posts, called a blog, serves as a rich context for readers to get a sense of the voice, persona, or identity behind the posts (McCullagh 2008), which makes blogging a popular social medium for self-expression. A study by Blogging.org shows that there were an estimated 31 million bloggers in the United States as of July 2012. On WordPress.com alone, there were over 76 million blogs worldwide as of February 2014, with 40.5 million new posts and 50.3 million new comments published each month.

Despite its large user base, blogging faces competition from alternative social media such as social networking sites and micro-blogging sites that publish information in forms of tweets and status updates. A study shows that from 2008 to 2010 teen blogging was down, and to a lesser degree blogging among millennials dropped as well; the only age group that saw an increase in blogging was older adults (Mancuso and Stuth 2011). Given the rise of the alternative social media, should bloggers switch to those media for self-expression on the Internet? Does the trend predict the death of blog entries? Perhaps not: practitioners argue that the act of standing behind one’s words in the blogs, without the veil of anonymity, helps create an authorial and authoritative tone that builds trust between bloggers and readers, and this fundamental need for identity and trust may not be easily substituted for by alternative social media (Mancuso and Stuth 2011). The great potential of identity-based trust for business and society is undeniable, which justifies the huge population of bloggers and readers and an increasing interest of organizations to have their blogs (Xifra and Huertas 2008). This study examines factors that influence individual bloggers’ intentions to continue blogging.

Based on a review on blogging and social media literature and studies on self-disclosure behavior, I argue that a critical driving force for people to use and continue to use blogs is their intentions to construct and maintain online identities, defined as their self-perceptions (i.e., “Who I am”) on the Internet (Whitley, Gal and Kjaergaard 2014). Such online identities are built upon effective self-expressions in blog entries and serve as the basis for online social interactions. Drawing upon the Expectation-Confirmation Model of IT Continuance (ECM-IT) (Bhattacherjee 2001), I develop a model to study the impact of identity construction on blogging continuance intentions. The model also examines the impact of several other antecedent factors recognized in literature, including perceived usefulness (Kim 2011), enjoyment (Kim 2011; Krasnova, Spiekermann, Koroleva and Hildebrand 2010; Thong, Hong and Tam 2006), habit (Ortiz de Guinea and Markus 2009), and privacy concerns (Ko 2013).

The structure of the paper is as follows. First, studies on blogging continuance are reviewed, and factors that influence the use and continuous use of blogs are recognized. The review highlights limitations in the literature and the need to address identity construction in blogging research. Then, the theoretical bases are introduced, including the theory on identity construction and the ECM-IT model. The research model and hypotheses are developed next, after which the method for empirically testing the research model is outlined. Finally, potential implications of the study are briefly discussed.

**Literature Review**

A weblog (or blog) is a self-publishing website that is updated on a regular basis (Silva et al. 2008). It is a means for self-expression and social networking (McCullagh 2008). To date, several factors that influence blog use and continuance have been studied in literature, as summarized in Table 1. In addition, several other factors that influence social media use are also included in the table, which may also explain blog use. These factors are reviewed as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literature</th>
<th>Antecedents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Kim 2011)</td>
<td>Perceived usefulness, perceived enjoyment, and interpersonal influence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Lee, Im and Taylor 2008)</td>
<td>Seven motivations including: self-presentation, relationship management, keeping-up with friends, information sharing, information storage, entertainment, and showing off.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Kim, Zheng and Gupta 2011)</td>
<td>Blogging community involvement, online social skills, and online creativity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Ko 2013)</td>
<td>Habit and self-benefit.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Krasnova et al. 2010)</td>
<td>Convenience, relationship building, enjoyment, and perceived privacy risks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(McCullagh 2008)</td>
<td>Various benefits such as: documenting personal experiences and sharing with others; expressing oneself creatively; staying in touch with friends and family; entertaining people; networking and meeting people; etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Nach and Lejeune 2010)</td>
<td>Emotional responses (negative and positive).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Silva et al. 2008)</td>
<td>Construction of online identities.</td>
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*Table 1. Antecedents of blog/social media use and continuance*

First, several studies have particularly addressed factors that influence blog use. A study on 1,258 blogger from around the world shows that documenting personal experiences and sharing with others, and expressing oneself creatively, are the top two reasons for blogging; other reasons such as staying in touch with friends and family, entertaining people, and networking and meeting people are also recognized but are less important (McCullagh 2008). The study also shows that bloggers are concerned about privacy...
risk; however, this does not stop them from self-expressing online, and many bloggers are aware of privacy control mechanisms. Another study on 259 student bloggers in South Korea shows that self-presentation, relationship management, keeping-up with friends, information sharing, information storage, entertainment, and showing off are all significant predictors of voluntary self-disclosure on blogs (Lee et al. 2008). In addition, blogging community involvement, online social skills, and online creativity have positive impacts on knowledge contributions in blogging communities, but online kindness does not have a significant impact (Kim et al. 2011). Finally, a study on 283 Taiwanese journal-type bloggers shows that habit and self-benefit had positive impact on continuous self-disclosure in blogs, but the impacts of social benefits and positive feedback were insignificant (Ko 2013). Although some of the studies did not particularly address blogging continuance, since prior experience has a significant impact on subsequent behavior (Bhattacherjee 2001), those factors help to understand blogging continuance as well.

As blog is a type of social media, the antecedents to social media use are therefore helpful to explain blog use and continuance. For example, convenience, relationship building, and enjoyment have positive impacts on self-disclosure on social networking sites, and perceived privacy risks have a negative impact (Krasnova et al. 2010). Interestingly in Krasnova et al’s study, self-presentation, defined as the value users derive from being able to improve their self-concept in relation to others using social networking sites, does not have a significant impact on self-disclosure. In fact, the definition and the two measurement items (“I try to make a good impression on others” and “I try to present myself in a favorable way”) suggest that the construct may be better termed self-promotion, as it aims to build an online image that is more favorable than the actual person. This construct is significant in the study by Lee et al, where self-presentation is measured as presenting oneself in a realistic way (Lee et al. 2008).

Furthermore, perceived usefulness, perceived enjoyment, and interpersonal influence have positive impacts on continuance intentions in social networking sites (Kim 2011), which may also help explain blog use and continuance. Finally, the impact of habit and emotion on IT continuance should also be highlighted (Ortiz de Guinea and Markus 2009). For example, negative emotional response to IT challenges (such as privacy concerns in blogs) results in protective behavior such as distancing from IT (Nach and Lejeune 2010), and the impact of habit on continuous self-disclosure in blogs is confirmed in Ko’s study, as mentioned above.

Although all the factors summarized in Table 1 have impacts on blog use and continuance, their importance is different. Evidence shows that of the factors, self-expression or self-presentation is perhaps the most important motivation factor (Lee et al. 2008; McCullagh 2008). Self-expression deals with the intrinsic motivation of blog use, as many bloggers are aware of the potential risks of online self-expression but choose to do so to serve self-interests, especially the construction of online identities (i.e., how they perceive themselves, and how they are perceived by others, in the online environment) (McCullagh 2008; Silva et al. 2008). As mentioned above, blog serves as a better platform for building trusted identities than other social media, and trusted identities have important social and economic values in today’s networked society (Mancuso and Stuth 2011; Xifra and Huertas 2008). It is therefore important to examine identity construction and its relationship with blog use and continuance.

In fact, scholars are aware that IT (especially the social media) plays significant roles in shaping people’s identities by bringing in new meanings or replacing old meanings that were central to people’s positive view of themselves (Nach and Lejeune 2010; Walsham 1998). However, knowledge on the linkage between IT and identity is still limited (Whitley et al. 2014). In the social media and blogging literature, much is known about how identity develops on the social media or blog sites (Campbell, Fletcher and Greenhill 2009; Delahunty 2012; Silva et al. 2008), but little is known about how the development of identities, in turn, influence the continuous use of the media or sites (Kim et al. 2011). Although self-disclosure on blogs leads to better relationship management, psychological well-being, and the habit of blogging (Lee et al. 2008), how this habit can be sustained deserves further investigation (Ortiz de Guinea and Markus 2009). As the relationship between identity construction and blog continuance is still under-investigated in literature, I introduce several related theories to study this relationship.
Theoretical Bases

**Theory on identity construction**

Due to the existence of multiple views of identities in literature, a distinction should first be made between legal identity and social identity: the former refers to the identity that is warranted by authorities, while the latter is socially developed and accepted among related others such as a group, an organization, or a community (Whitley et al. 2014). Central to legal identity are issues such as identification, authentication, and identity theft (Milne, Rohm and Bahl 2004), but central to social identity are issues such as its construction, perception, and maintenance in various social contexts (online or offline). In addition, the relationship between personal identity and social identity should also be clarified: although the two may seem to reside at different levels, their distinctions are not always clear since personal identity cannot exist without certain social context that limits its development and potentials (La Guardia 2009; Whitley et al. 2014). Therefore, I treat the two as identical concepts and focus on the social aspect of a person’s online identity.

How is a person’s identity constructed on social media, especially via blogging? Studies on identity construction suggest that there are three stages in this process. The first stage deals with identity exploration (La Guardia 2009), in which a person attempts a variety of identities to test the reactions from others. The second stage deals with identity conflict (Campbell et al. 2009), in which a person’s identities clash with others’ identities and social/group norm, and the reactions from others help to shift personal identities or to improvise new identities. The third stage deals with identity commitment (La Guardia 2009), referring to the dedication to selected identities that suit the person’s best interests. A few interpretative studies show evidence of this process. For example, a study on Facebook users shows that identity is not an individual characteristic or an expression of something innate in a person; instead, it is a social product, the outcome of a given social environment and hence performed differently in varying contexts (Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin 2008). Depending on the characteristics of the environment in which they find themselves, individuals will choose to claim or develop identities that can help them better situate within the given social environment by selecting what to disclose, and to whom.

While constructing online identity is common to all sorts of social media such as online dating and gaming, blogging was found to render the most accurate reflection of a person’s real-self (Vasalou and Joinson 2009). This real-self, or authenticity in identity, predicts healthier functioning of individuals (La Guardia 2009). On the contrary, discrepancy between the real-self and the virtual-self obstructs self-presence in virtual identity construction (Jin 2012), confirming the value of constructing a real identity in social media. In other words, identity construction in blogs aims to achieve long-term benefits (such as establishing loyalty and trust of readers) rather than achieving short-term, opportunistic benefits (such as online crime with fake identities), which is a fundamental assumption in this study.

**The expectation-confirmation model of IT continuance (ECM-IT)**

I draw upon the ECM-IT model (Bhattacherjee 2001) as the basis to study factors that influence blogging continuance intentions. This model was developed from the Expectation-Confirmation theory that studies consumer satisfaction and post-purchase behavior (Oliver 1980). According to the theory, consumer performance expectation and perceived performance together determine the extent to which the expectation is confirmed, and performance confirmation in turn influences consumer satisfaction. Consumer satisfaction then drives repurchasing intentions. The ECM-IT model amends the expectation-confirmation theory in two aspects: first, it adds Perceived Usefulness (PU) as a consequence of performance confirmation and an antecedent of satisfaction and continuance intention; second, it drops the expectation and perceived performance constructs as it suggests that the effects of pre-acceptance variables are already captured within the confirmation and satisfaction constructs, and that post-consumption expectation, rather than pre-consumption expectation, is especially important for service continuance since expectation may change over time. While this change conforms to the goal of the ECM-IT model to explain IT continuance other than adoption, other studies recall the performance expectation and perceived performance constructs in order to explain how confirmation is developed (Kim 2012; Lin, Tsai and Chiu 2009).
In terms of blogging, the model implies that a blogger’s perceived confirmation between blog service expectation and blog service performance influences his/her satisfaction and PU regarding the blog, and the latter two will drive the blogging continuance intentions. As mentioned above, a critical expectation of bloggers is to construct (and maintain) online identities via self-expression, so that the performance confirmation in using blog services is consistent with the confirmation of online identities, which I define as the extent to which the perceived identity matches the expected identity: if a blogger’s (perceived) online identity matches his/her identity expectations (i.e., online identity is as good as, or even better than, expected identity), then the online identity is confirmed and so is the blog service; on the other hand, if the (perceived) online identity does not match identity expectations (i.e., online identity is worse than one thought), then online identity is disconfirmed and so is the blog service.

In addition to identity construction and the main constructs in the ECM-IT model, three additional factors listed in Table 1 are also included in the study: perceived enjoyment, habit, and privacy concerns. Extensions of the ECM-IT model show that perceived enjoyment is an important outcome of confirmation and a predictor of satisfaction (Kim 2011; Thong et al. 2006), and its impact on blog use is also observed (Kim 2011; Krasnova et al. 2010). Although habit is not a typical factor in the ECM-IT model based research, its impact on social media continuance is observed in literature (Ko 2013). Importantly, PU, perceived enjoyment and habit constitute the tripartite drivers of IT continuance (Ortiz de Guinea and Markus 2009). A common obstacle to blog use, namely privacy concern, is included in the study as well to examine the tradeoffs in blogging. Inclusion of these factors is deemed sufficient to examine the impact of identity construction on blog continuance in this study, and therefore other factors listed in Table 1 are currently excluded. The limitation may be addressed in further research.

**Research Model and Hypotheses**

Based on the above review, I propose a research model to examine factors that influence the continuance intentions in blog use, as shown in Figure 2.

**Identity confirmation and its antecedents**

As mentioned above, a blogger posts blog entries online in order to self-express and/or connect with others; in doing so, he/she builds an online identity that best matches the personal interests under certain social context. The online identity is not only constructed and maintained by self-disclosure, but also determines the latter (i.e., what to disclose and to whom). During the process, the blogger needs to adjust the disclosure behavior so as to balance identity expectation and identity performance. As the expectation-confirmation theory suggests (Bhattacharjee 2001; Oliver 1980), performance expectation
and performance outcome both influence performance confirmation, so that I expect online identity expectation and online identity perception (i.e., the actual identity performance) to both influence identity confirmation on blogs. Their influences, nevertheless, take different directions since identity confirmation captures the difference between the two: the higher the identity expectation is (or the lower the identity perception is), the lower the identity confirmation becomes. Therefore I hypothesize:

H1: Identity expectation is negatively associated with identity confirmation in blog use.

H2: Identity perception is positively associated with identity confirmation in blog use.

**Immediate consequences of identity confirmation**

Two immediate consequences of confirmation – PU and satisfaction – are specified in the ECM-IT model. Studies on web-based service (including social networking service) show a positive impact of confirmation on both (Kim 2011; Lee and Kwon 2011; Thong et al. 2006). In terms of blogging and identity confirmation, I argue for the same results. As mentioned above, identity construction is a major reason for people to communicate on blogging websites. If they perceive that their identity expectation coincides with identity perception, i.e., identity confirmation happens, then their cognitive response (i.e., PU) and their affective response (i.e., satisfaction) would both be positive. On the other hand, if the blog does not help to build their anticipated identity and relationship with readers, identity disconfirmation happens and would reduce the perception of satisfaction and PU. Correspondingly, I hypothesize that:

H3: Identity confirmation is positively related to perceived usefulness of blogging.

H4: Identity confirmation is positively related to blogging satisfaction.

Another consequence of identity confirmation is perceived enjoyment in blogging website. A few studies show that people do blogging because they enjoy self-expression on blogs (Kim et al. 2011; Lee et al. 2008; McCullagh 2008). This happens, however, when the perceived identity coincides with the expected identity; if the two have conflict, then a negative emotion would arise that reduces the feeling of enjoyment and may even cause distancing from the technology. In other words, the persistence of the feeling of enjoyment and excitement relies on identity confirmation. A couple of studies find evidence in web-based service (Thong et al. 2006) and particularly social networking service (Kim 2011). I expect that it also applies to blogging, and I hypothesize that:

H5: Identity confirmation is positively related to perceived enjoyment in blogging.

**Potential relationship between the intermediaries**

Literature shows potential relationships between the intermediaries. First, the impact of PU on satisfaction is specified in the ECM-IT model, which is also observed in social media research (Kim 2011). In terms of blogging continuance, perceived usefulness of blogging serves as the cognitive basis for developing emotional reaction of blog use, i.e., satisfaction, so that it may influence blogging satisfaction as well. I hypothesize:

H6: Perceived usefulness of blogging is positively related to blogging satisfaction.

Similarly, perceived enjoyment may influence satisfaction as well (Thong et al. 2006). Kim (2011) shows that perceived enjoyment of social networking sites intrinsically motivates continuous use by the users, which applies to blogging sites as well. It is therefore hypothesized:

H7: Perceived enjoyment in blogging is positively related to blogging satisfaction.

**Impacts on continuance intention**

Studies on web-based service (including social networking service) have examined the impacts of all three intermediate factors (PU, satisfaction, and perceived enjoyment) on continuance intention. For example, in a study on web-based service, Lee and Kwon (2011) show that PU, satisfaction, and intimacy each have a positive impact on continuance intention to use the service. In a study on social networking service, Kim (2011) shows that PU and perceived enjoyment have a positive impact on continuance intention to use the
service, but the positive impact of satisfaction is insignificant; he explains that this happens because of other competing social networking sites.

Although little evidence has been found regarding blogging sites, I expect that each would have a positive impact on blogging continuance intention. According to a study on IT continuance intentions by Ortiz de Guinea and Markus (2009), the cognitive (such as PU), habitual, and emotional (such as satisfaction, and perceived enjoyment) factors each play a role in driving IT continuance. From the cognitive perspective (i.e., PU), they argue that beliefs and attitudes correlate more strongly with behavioral intention for people who have had direct experience with an object, suggesting a strong influence of PU on behavioral intention and subsequent behavior. From the emotional perspective, they particularly draw upon the ECM-IT model to argue that IT continuance intention is determined primarily by satisfaction with prior use. Although enjoyment was not particularly addressed in Ortiz de Guinea and Markus', they would exhibit the same effect on continuance intention as satisfaction does. I then hypothesize:

H8: Perceived usefulness of blogging is positively associated with blogging continuance intention.

H9: Blogging satisfaction is positively associated with blogging continuance intention.

H10: Perceived enjoyment of blogging is positively associated with blogging continuance intention.

Ortiz de Guinea and Markus (2009) argue that when intentional behavior becomes habitual, learned IT use behaviors may be repeated without conscious intention. In terms of blogging, Ko (2013) shows that the self-disclosure habit on blogs positively influence the continuous self-disclosure: even though some bloggers may feel that blogging is time-consuming, they find it difficult to quit because of the habit that has been developed. Therefore, the influence of the spontaneous habit on blogging continuance intention should not be excluded, and I hypothesize:

H11: The habit of blogging is positively associated with blogging continuance intention.

Although the above cognitive and affective consequences of identity confirmation all contribute to blogging continuance intention, extensive self-disclosure is not adopted because of the online privacy concerns (Ko 2013). In fact, bloggers value privacy, as several categories of information such as personally identifiable information, emotions, financial and work information, and even political and religious views are considered too private to post on blogs (McCullagh 2008). A common reason for limiting details in blogs, for example, is to avoid being searched by employers. The privacy literature depicts a balance between the need for disclosure and the need for privacy, called privacy calculus (Smith, Dinev and Xu 2011). This type of behavioral calculus determines that the blogger will balance the benefits and risks of self-disclosure to avoid privacy risks. Correspondingly, I hypothesize:

H12: Online privacy concern is negatively associated with blogging continuance intention.

Research Method

Research design

The study employs a survey method to collect data from online bloggers to empirically test the model. To avoid the single site bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Jeong-Yeon and Podsakoff 2003), I plan to invite bloggers from a number of popular blogging sites, such as WordPress.com, Blogger.com, Tumblr.com, and Medium.com, to the study. Online survey questionnaire will be provided to the participants.

Measurement items

All the measurement items are adopted from existing literature, with necessary changes made to fit the current study. These items are summarized in Appendix A.

Concluding Remarks

In this study, I outline a model to examine the impact of identity construction and maintenance on blogging websites on the intentions to continue using blogs. Drawing upon the ECM-IT model, I study the impact of identity expectation and identity perception on identity confirmation, and then the impact of
identity confirmation on a number of cognitive and affective outcomes. Those cognitive and affective outcomes, including PU, satisfaction, and enjoyment, influence the blogging continuance intention. The impacts of two other factors, habit and privacy concern, are also analyzed.

Despite some concerns about blogging being replaced by alternative ways of online interaction such as social networking sites and micro-blogging sites, the fundamental values of blogging still exist, as Mancuso and Stuth (2011, p. 27) question, "Whose opinion has more credibility as a product or service reviewer? Is it the kamikaze Tweeter, hiding behind a fictional online persona, or the blogger who posts repeatedly and stands by what he posts, seemingly unafraid to create a memorable online identity and personality?" Their concerns suggest that when the credibility and therefore the values of many piecemeal online comments diminish, the value of blogs will (re-)surface. Therefore, the current study on blogging and its continuance has practical value. The most noticeable value of the study is the position of identity construction at the core of blogging research, calling for more attentions to this critical concept.

Reference

Identity Construction and Blogging Continuance


Appendix A: Measurement items

Identity expectation (adopted from Lee et al. 2008; Lin et al. 2009)
Please recall the moment when you started to use a blog. How did you intend to present yourself in the blog?
I intended to present myself in a realistic way.
I intended to present my true self.
I intended to present my unbiased characteristics.
I expected my presence in the blog to be good.
I expected my presence in the blog to be effective.

Identity perception (adopted from Lee et al. 2008; Lin et al. 2009)
My presence in the blog is realistic.
My presence in the blog reflects a true self.
My characteristics in the blog are unbiased.
My presence in the blog is overall good.
My presence in the blog is overall effective.

Identity confirmation (adopted from Bhattacharjee 2001)
My presence in my blogs is better than what I expected.
My experience with blogging is better than what I expected.
Overall, my expectations from presenting myself in my blogs are confirmed.

Perceived usefulness (adopted from Bhattacharjee 2001)
Blogging improves my performance in online expression.
Blogging increases my productivity in online expression.
Blogging enhances my effectiveness in online expression.
Overall, blogging is useful for me.
Satisfaction with prior blogging experience (adopted from Bhattacherjee 2001)
How do you feel about your overall experience with your blogs?
- Very dissatisfied / Very satisfied
- Very displeased / Very pleased
- Very frustrated / Very contented
- Absolutely terrible / Absolutely delighted

Perceived enjoyment (adopted from Krasnova et al. 2010; Thong et al. 2006)
Blogging is enjoyable and relaxing.
Blogging is entertaining.
I have fun when blogging.
I find blogging to be interesting.

Habit (adopted from Ko 2013)
Blogging has become spontaneous for me.
Blogging has become a natural act for me.
Blogging comes to my mind whenever I want to express myself.

Privacy concerns (adopted from Pavlou, Liang and Xue 2007)
I am concerned that blog websites are collecting too much information about me.
It bothers me when blog websites ask me for personal information.
I am concerned about my privacy when using blogs.
I have doubts about how well my privacy is protected in blogs.
My personal information on the blogs could be misused.
My personal information on the blogs could be accessed by unknown parties.

Blogging continuance intention (adopted from Bhattacherjee 2001; Thong et al. 2006)
I intend to continue using blogs in the future to express myself.
My intentions are to continue using blogs rather than alternative media to express myself.
I will keep using blogs to express myself as regularly as I do now.