

Blogs:

**A study into current uses and
perceptions in Irish society.**

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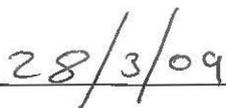
Declaration

This Dissertation is entirely my own work, and has not been previously submitted to this or any other third level institution.

Word Count: 14,855

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "H. Leclerc", written above a horizontal line.

Signature

A handwritten date "28/3/09" in black ink, written above a horizontal line.

Date

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Abstract

The aim of this research was to investigate attitudes, perceptions and behaviour of Irish internet users towards blogs. A survey was conducted online and participants (n = 422) placed into two groups – Bloggers (n = 244), blog authors; Non-Bloggers (n = 178), blog readers. Results found that Non-Bloggers are more concerned about the persistent nature of the Internet than Bloggers, with no difference regarding online privacy. Over 60% of Irish bloggers publish online using their real name; with their primary motivation to blog being the ability to articulate their ideas through writing, and almost 52% consider their blogging as a form of journalism. This research found that blogging can increase social capital and has no negative effect on blogger's lives.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1. Introduction

This research will focus on Irish bloggers and their Irish readers. Non-Irish bloggers living and blogging from Ireland will also be included. This group is of interest due to their very small size when compared to the worldwide average per active Internet population head e.g. in the UK 25.3% are bloggers, in Ireland this figure has been estimated at less than 1%.

The overall aim of the research is to investigate the attitudes, perceptions and behaviour of Irish bloggers and non-blogging Irish internet users to Irish blogs. An investigation of any significant changes to the demographic profile of a prototypical Irish blogger made in 2006 will be conducted. The reading habits of Irish bloggers and Non-Bloggers will be queried and their attitudes to both international and Irish blogs investigated. Attitudes to issues of identity and privacy online, the persistent nature of the internet and how the law applies to the Internet will be analysed, and the behaviour of anonymous and named bloggers will be compared. What percentage of Irish bloggers feel connected to the Irish blogosphere will be looked at, how blogging has impacted Irish bloggers lives will be investigated and what their primary motivation for blogging is. This research will query levels of honesty and accuracy in Irish blogs and investigate Non-Bloggers attitudes to same.

1.1 Introduction to Blogs

Blogs are described as “frequently updated websites where content (text, pictures, sound files, etc.) is posted on a regular basis and displayed in reverse chronological order” (Schmidt, 2007, p1) and features archive functionality. Blogs often consist of regular, date-stamped articles that represent a time-line (Kirchhoff, Bruns, & Nicolai, 2007) and are primarily used for “personally oriented written communication” (Kirchhoff et al, 2007, p3) where the author publishes information about themselves or about topics of interest to them (Baker & Moore, 2008). Using a blog system, authors can significantly simplify the steps required for online publication, self description and interaction with others (Miura & Yamashita, 2007) and give the author the potential of reaching out to vast audiences online (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus & Wright, 2005). Blogs are unlike web-pages because they are effortless, as they require either no or very little technical ability and can be published online for free. They also differ from web-pages due to the temporal nature of blog entries and the informal writing techniques employed by most bloggers (Kirchhoff et al, 2007).

1.2 The Social Aspects of Blogging

Blogs are used by both individuals not only to publish content to the web, but also to interact with readers by giving them the option of leaving comments on individual postings, which the blog author can then reply to (Miura & Yamashita, 2007). The comments system facilitates peer review (Johnson & Kaye, 2004) and allows users to actively contribute content (Sundar, Edwards, Hu & Stavrositu, 2007). Readers who are fellow bloggers also have the option of replying with their own blog post, using the track-back system they can link their reply back to the original article. The track-back system notifies the author (and subsequent readers of the original posting) that a blogger has posted a reply on their own blog. This facilitates conversations that readers can follow that will often span across several different blogs (Miura & Yamashita, 2007).

Track-backs are also used as a form of social acknowledgement, bloggers use these to cross-reference each other's blogs (Sundar et al. 2007) and another way in which they link to one another is through their blogroll. These are lists of hyperlinks to blogs the author reads; often embedded in the overall design of the blog they are used as navigational tools for readers to find other authors with similar interests. Many bloggers rate the effectiveness of their writing based on the number of links to their blog (Marlow, 2004). Through comments, links to other blogs (either in the blogroll or as track-backs) and other online sources, many blogs form clustered networks of interconnectivity (Schmidt, 2007). This is referred to as the blogosphere. "The structure of the blogosphere can be seen as a combination of a network of information and a network of people." (Kirchhoff et al, 2007, p3). These networks are often formed out of a commonality e.g. interests, political outlook, geography. As a result, diverse social networks (Kirchhoff et al, 2007) and online communities can develop, demonstrating the strength of "weak ties" i.e. acquaintances.

Weak ties are typical of relationships among casual acquaintances and are important for sharing information, making contacts and increasing awareness about new ideas (Wellman & Gulia, 1999). Weak tie relationships focus on information exchange and debate (Granovetter, 1973). Most people have only a few strong ties (closely-knit groups) and many weak ties. Weak tie groups contain people that have common interests but do not rely on each other emotionally. Wellman (1997) argues that weak ties are very useful, despite providing less social support than strong ties; they connect people socially dissimilar and link people to other social worlds, providing new resources and sources of information. Claims that online weak ties are of poorer quality when compared to strong ties already established offline have been made (Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, Kiesler, Mukopadhyay & Sherlies, 1998), however, research by Ando and Sakamoto (2008) found that online friendships, weak ties, were psychologically beneficial. Also, strong tie relationships can and do initiate online and can successfully move offline (Whitty & Joinson, 2008).

Though the Internet does help to support strong tie relationships, it is particularly effective for weak tie groups, allowing for the efficient flow of information and facilitating the development of ideas (Wellman & Gulia, 1999), blogospheres are a particularly good example of how the internet facilitates this. The blogosphere is a classic social network but its characteristics differentiate it from most social networks, where communication is predominantly verbal and unrecorded (Tremayne, 2007). Networks of bloggers will often aggregate all of their individual blogs to a centralised location online, and these are referred to as planet aggregators an example is Irishblogs.ie. However, some blogs are more connected to a blogosphere than others, with some bloggers not being connected to any blogosphere at all (Viégas, 2005). This research will seek to investigate how connected to the blogosphere Irish bloggers perceive themselves as being, and how social they are with fellow bloggers both online and offline, asking if they have ever met anyone in real life because of their blogging and if there are individuals they communicate with online but have never met in person.

1.3 Motivations for Blogging

Blogging can be affectively ego gratifying, behaviourally empowering, and authorship/ownership of a blog can give individuals a sense of autonomy that is intrinsically motivating (Sundar et al. 2007). Individuals write blogs for a number of reasons, sometimes personal, or professional and sometimes to gain notoriety (Whitty & Carr, 2006). Blogs can be used to plan and organise ideas, or to help process emotionally difficult situations, allowing the author to engage in emotional expression and cathartic venting (Baker & Moore, 2008). Blogging has been compared to keeping a journal or diary, which is known as being therapeutic in nature, the difference being that blogs offer the presence of peer commentary (Baker & Moore, 2008). Blogs have also been described as “the cyberspace version of the soapbox” (Kaye, 2007, p138) and can be utilised to express opinions and commentary on a variety of topics (Kaye, 2005). Blogs have the potential to offer social support, friendship and positive interactions through feedback from readers, this in turn serves as an acknowledgement of the author's thoughts, creativity, emotions and sense of self (Baker & Moore, 2008). Li (2005) identified 6 motivations for blogging: self-documentation, improving writing, self-expression, medium appeal, information, and socialisation.

Research conducted in 2006 found that Irish bloggers are motivated by a desire to publish, to provide information to others and to present information on their interests and refine their thinking (Loftus, 2006), however, this study was concerned with personal blogs only. This research will investigate the primary and secondary motivations of all types of Irish bloggers, including but not exclusively personal bloggers. Two categories will be looked at: personal motivations and

professional motivations. The personal motivations being investigated are: To document my life (self documentation), to express deeply felt emotions (self documentation) and to meet and connect with likeminded people (socialisation). The professional motivations being investigated are: To provide commentary and opinions (self expression), to share my knowledge and experience (information/knowledge sharing), to articulate ideas through writing (improving writing) and to promote myself online (medium appeal).

1.3.1 Social Capital

In an international online survey it was found that blogging is both personally satisfying and has a positive impact on its writer's lives, with some bloggers claiming to have received speaking or publishing opportunities and career advancement because of their blogs (Technorati.com, 2008). This suggests that blogging has the potential to increase social capital. Social capital can be described as the resources accumulated through the relationships amongst people (Coleman, 1988). Social capital allows individuals to draw on the resources of other members of their network, these resources vary in form, from personal relationships, to useful information, to the ability to organise groups (Paxton, 1999). What facilitates social capital is the network of social relationships, trust among members and the norms of behaviour (Blanchard, 2004). The Internet supports social networks, helps build social capital (Boase, Horrigan, Wellman & Rainie, 2006) and having access to individuals outside one's usual close circle can provide access to non-redundant information, resulting in benefits such as employment connections (Granovetter, 1973). This research will query Irish bloggers with regard to benefits to their social capital as a result of their blogging, by questioning how positive an impact blogging has had on their social, professional and academic lives.

1.3.2 The Effect of ICT on Knowledge Sharing

Information communications technologies (ICT) facilitates socially rich communication, and can encourage a strong identification with a group; this in turn can positively contribute to the emergence of a collectivist norm (Hooff, Ridder & Aukema, 2004). Collectivism is a social pattern of closely linked persons who define themselves as interdependent members of a collective; dissimilarly, individualism emphasises individual autonomy and independence, where personal interests prevail over group needs (Triandis, 1989). Collectivists tend to show greater conformity to group norms, are more orientated toward group goals and are more inclined towards co-operation (Wagner, 1995). A collectivist norm in a group positively influences a group member's willingness

to share their knowledge (Hooff, Ridder & Aukema, 2004). ICT contribute to knowledge sharing “through the enhanced efficiency of communication, and through the creation of a more collectivist norm within a group” (Hooff, Ridder & Aukema, 2004, p177).

Coleman (1988) outlines three ways in which social relations can compose useful resources: “mutual obligations, expectations and trustworthiness”, “information channels”, and “norms and effective sanctions”. Information channels refers to the potential for information or knowledge each social relation carries, and providing knowledge to others can establish an expectation that others will reciprocate (Coleman, 1988). Knowledge sharing contributes to the creation of a public good in the form of shared intellectual capital (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). The amount of knowledge sharing an individual contributes to the collective intellectual capital depends on the gains they expect to derive from it, predominantly how much the individual expects others to reciprocate (Hooff, Ridder & Aukema, 2004). However, some individuals will participate in knowledge sharing without an expectation of reciprocity, but instead as an effort to elevate their reputation (Hooff, et al 2004). Bloggers cognitively engage with their blogs, placing themselves in a position of self importance as a content creator (Sundar et al. 2007) and research by Hsu and Lin (2008) into what motivates people to continue to blog found that social factors (community identification), ease of use and enjoyment, and knowledge sharing (altruism and the positive effects upon reputation) were positively related to attitude towards blogging, which in turn had a significant influence on a blogger's intention to continue blogging. This research will question if knowledge sharing is a primary motivation of Irish bloggers.

1.4 Self-Disclosure Online

Self-disclosure (revealing personal details), particularity within a couple (either friendship or romantic) fosters mutual understanding and builds trust (Laurenceau, Barrett & Pietromonaco, 1998). Self disclosure is often reciprocated and strengthens ties between people in friendship or romantically based relationships (Jourard, 1971). Disclosure within a group can enhance bonds of trust between members, strengthen group identity and help towards legitimising an individual's membership within a group (Galegher, Sproull, Kiesler, 1998). Research has found that people are more likely to disclose more information about themselves online in comparison to face to face encounters (Whitty & Joinson, 2008). How much someone self-discloses online is, however, dependant on the space online and the audience (Whitty & Joinson, 2008). Truthful self-disclosure online is also linked to an individual's perceptions of the situation, the goals of the disclosure, factors related to the interactional dynamic (who they are disclosing to) and their privacy concerns (Whitty & Joinson, 2008) if any. For bloggers that write about and talk about their problems online

there are possible positive psychological benefits, in a survey conducted in 2006 over half of the American bloggers surveyed indicated that the main reason that they kept a blog was for therapeutic reasons (The Register, 2005). Research by Ko and Kuo in 2008 found that self-disclosure by bloggers had a significant effect on their perception of social integration and social capital, which in turn promoted their subjective well-being. They suggest that self-disclosure through blogging could promote the creation of intimate relationships and the social capital built through blogging may improve a blogger's social contact, interpersonal communication and overall quality of life (Ko & Kuo, 2008). This research will query if self disclosure, e.g. expressing deeply felt emotions and/or documenting their lives, is a primary or secondary motivation for Irish bloggers, specifically interested in a comparison between anonymous and named bloggers.

1.5 Deception & Trust Online

The Internet offers individuals the freedom of truthful self disclosure but also allows users to “engage in creative self-presentation, misrepresentation and outright lies.” (Whitty & Joinson, 2008, p55). Lying is part of daily life (DePaulo, Kashy, Kirkendol, Wyer & Epstein, 1996) and the Internet simply provides another space in which individuals can lie (Whitty & Joinson, 2008). Feature based theory suggests that three dimensions must be considered when examining deception – if the medium is synchronous, recordless and distributed (Hancock, Thom-Santeilli & Richie, 2004). Hancock et al. (2004) proposed that individuals were less likely to lie in a recordable medium, due to the archiving feature of blogging this could suggest that bloggers are less likely to lie on their blogs in comparison to other online mediums, such as synchronous chat. However, with regard to blogging there are issues of identity concealment to consider, whilst deceptive, they are necessary to preserve the bloggers’ privacy (Utz, 2005). Identity play might also be considered, which has been found to be therapeutic in nature (Whitty & Joinson, 2008).

It has been suggested that there is as a three-stage model for understanding how individuals assess the trustworthiness of a website (Sillence, Briggs, Harris & Fishwick, 2006). The first stage is a rapid heuristic based analysis on the visual design of the site, the second is a systematic analysis of the content, where the individual is influenced by the apparent integrity, benevolence and expertise exhibited (Sillence et al. 2006). The third stage is where the individual forms a relationship with the site based on their continued use and further experience of (Sillence et al. 2006). However, Internet users adopt different techniques in assessing trust depending on their level of experience and expertise (Stanford, Tauber, Fogg & Marable, 2002). For example, Stanford et al (2002) reported that experience Internet users assessed websites based on reputation and by analysing the information quality, whereas consumers based it more on the perceived attractiveness

of website design.

This research seeks to investigate issues of trust, asking Irish bloggers if they publish articles before checking the reliability of any sources they have used and will ask readers if they have ever double-checked information they have read on blogs. This research seeks to compare levels of trust, asking the same questions with regard to non-Irish blogs.

1.6 Identity and Anonymity Online

Anonymity online is often cited as the explanation for the high levels of self-disclosure online (Sobel, 2000) as it can help individuals to explore their identity, reduce shyness and encourage interactions with others online (Whitty & Carr, 2006). However, Whitty and Joinson (2008) suggest that the readers of blogs are usually known to the blogger, rather than strangers and Joinson and Paine (2007) argue that increased surveillance of online activities makes anonymity an invalid explanation for high levels of self-disclosure, and that trust, control, costs and benefits, are other factors which much be considered with regard to the disinhibitory effect of the Internet. Blogs offer individuals a novel vehicle in which to express their identity and “has significant psychological consequences by way of involvement, identity and control” (Sundar et al. 2007, p85) and Walther (1996) suggests that hyperpersonal social interactions occur online, in part, because we can control what information we choose to disclose and how we disclose it.

In a survey conducted in 2008 two-thirds of respondents indicated that they openly exposed their identities on their blogs (Technorati.com, 2008) and according to research conducted in 2006 the majority of Irish bloggers identify themselves by their real name (Loftus, 2006). This research will seek to compare the behaviour of anonymous and named bloggers, and inquire as to the importance of the reader knowing the identity of the blog author.

1.7 Privacy and Permanence Online

Privacy is both a preference and state, individuals can either have privacy, or desire privacy (Margulis, 2003) and there are many different approaches to understanding privacy, many of them dealing with the access of information (Whitty & Joinson, 2008). Though there have been arguments that privacy is more about having the right to prevent the disclosure of personal information (Westin, 1967). The Internet poses unique information privacy threats. Advances in processing power, storage capacity and wider communication connectivity mean that information can be efficiently and cheaply collected, stored and exchanged (Sparck-Jones, 2003). Once information is recorded online it rarely disappears. It has permanence, and the individual the

information belongs to can in many cases have no power to decide what happens to it (Sparck-Jones, 2003). This research will compare Bloggers and Non-Bloggers attitudes to issues of privacy online, and the persistent nature of the internet described.

1.8. The Popularity of Blogs

Blogs are used for both one-way and two-way communication, with readers choosing to be as active or as passive with blogs as they like, this varies from session to session and is determined not by the technology but by the user (Kaye, 2007). Blogs are popular as due to their flexibility and interactive components which differentiates them from the traditional publication formats, print or digital (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus & Wright, 2005) and gives the audience the ability to immediately respond and therefore gratify different needs from those met by other online resources (Kaye, 2007). Blog users enjoy expressing their opinions, and have a perception that bloggers present information in ways that aren't found elsewhere (Kaye, 2007). Researchers have identified convenience, checking information found in other media, information seeking and a sense of community are the four main reasons why Internet users frequent blogs (Johnson, Kaye, Bichard, & Wong, 2007). They play an important role in spreading information and new ideas, and are becoming increasingly popular online (Kale, 2007). 73% of active Internet users worldwide are reading blogs (Universal McCann, 2008) and research by Universal McCann in 2008 estimated that 184million Internet users had started a blog and that there are 346million blog readers worldwide. Technorati.com (2008), an internet search engine for searching blogs, lists 133 million blogs recorded online since 2002, in 81 different languages. At their current rate of growth, by 2010 there will be over 500 million blogs online (Keen, 2007). "Blogging has become such a mania that a new blog is being created every second of every minute of every hour of every day." (Keen, 2007, p3).

1.8.1 Blogging Worldwide

China has 61million active Internet users (use the Internet every day or every other day), and 42million bloggers - the largest blogging community in the world, and over 88% of Chinese Internet users read blogs (Universal McCann, 2008). South Korea, Taiwan and China have the largest penetration (over 70%) of blog writing, and the lowest levels of penetration are in the Eastern European countries Hungary (7.8%), Czech Republic (18.2%) and Romania (21.3%) (Universal McCann, 2008). Though there are much higher levels of blog readership, with over 50% of active Internet users from Hungary claiming to have read blogs, 69.8% from the Czech Republic, and 69.7% from Romania (Universal McCann, 2008). The Universal McCann (2008) study did not

include any reference to Ireland. However, it did indicate that from the 17.8million active Internet users from the UK that there was a 65.8% readership of blogs and 25.3% were blog authors.

1.8.2 Blogging in Ireland

Since 2005 there has been a 300% growth in the number of Irish people blogging and it is estimated that there are between 3,000 and 4,000 active bloggers in the Irish blogosphere (Kennedy, 2008a). In a 2006 face to face survey conducted by Comreg (2007), the Irish Communications Regulator, 27% of Irish Internet users surveyed indicated that they had read blogs, and 22% revealed that they regularly read blogs. In July 2008 there were 2640 blogs listed at Irishblogs.ie, this website is an aggregator that requires the blogger to manually request being added to the list (opt-in), and in February 2009 there were over 3700 blogs listed, indicating a 40% increase over a 6 month period. In October 2008 there were just over 3700 Irish blogs listed on the opt-out search blogging search engine Technorati.com (2008a), but for a blog to appear in the Irish search listings the author is required to manually specify this. This research will ask bloggers how connected they perceive themselves as being to the Irish blogosphere and if they are listed at an aggregator.

These estimated numbers of Irish bloggers fails to include the number of bloggers unconnected from the blogosphere and this number is inconsistent with Comreg (2007) survey results indicating that 14% of Irish internet users were blogging (Comreg, 2007) as there are an estimated 2million or more Irish internet users (Internet World Stats, 2008) suggesting that there should be approximately 280,000 bloggers instead of the 4,000 known. Other data suggests that 17% of Irish Internet users claimed to be writing their own blog (Amárach, 2008) “Almost one in five Irish Internet users have started or contributed to a blog in the past year.” (Amárach, 2008, p6).

It is estimated that the percentage of bloggers, in comparison to the number of active Internet users, is far larger worldwide (Universal McCann, 2008). This research will ask how popular Bloggers and Non-Bloggers rate blogging in Ireland, how popular it is in other countries. It has been argued that there are low levels of blogging in Ireland due to the unavailability of high-speed Internet connections (Loftus, 2006; Kanellos, 2008) however over 1 million Irish Internet users (half the estimated number of active users) have access to a broadband connection (Mulligan, 2008). Despite the estimated small number of Irish bloggers, Blogger.com, a Google owned free blogging publishing tool which hosts millions of blogs from around the world, in October 2008 was listed as the 11th most visited site from Ireland (Alexa.com, 2008). This could suggest that a significantly larger number of Irish Internet users are interacting with blogs (either reading or writing) than has been estimated. This research will inquire as to whether blog readers are reading blogs based in other countries more often than Irish blogs and compare reader’s perceptions of and

levels of trust in both. Bloggers will be asked about how connected they are to the Irish blogosphere and if they are listed with a planet aggregator, this is to determine if the estimated number of bloggers could be incorrect. Due to low-levels of corporate blogging in Ireland (Corcoran, 2008; Kennedy, 2008b) the research questionnaire has not been designed with business in mind, but will instead consider individuals that use blogs to promote themselves online e.g. entrepreneurs and job seekers.

1.8.3 Irish Blogging in 2006

132 Irish bloggers were surveyed, and 128 Irish blogs were analysed to build a prototypical demographic profile of an Irish blogger – male, aged between 26 and 35, with at least 10 years experience online, employed in the I.T sector, and likely to be an expert computer user with strong technical skills (Loftus, 2006). Only 14% of respondents were female (Loftus, 2006). This research will compare the current demographic profile of a prototypical Irish blogger to the profile made in 2006, and investigate if over the last 3 years there have been any significant changes e.g. are there more females bloggers?

1.9 Credibility in Blogging

Credibility is important because people are less likely to pay attention to a medium perceived as not being credible (Johnson, Kaye, Bichard & Wong, 2007) and “Bloggers are communicators whose potential to influence is derived from their credibility (i.e., expertise on a subject or perception of being trustworthy, unbiased and independent)” (Kaid & Postelnicu, 2007, p152). Internet users may perceive blogs as being more credible because they are viewed as being independent from corporate controlled media (Johnson et al, 2007). However, previous research has found conflicting results concerning how much trust the public puts in blogs (Johnson et al, 2007) and a study such as this has not yet been conducted with Irish Internet users. Although, research into word of mouth has found that 84% of Irish consumers are more likely to trust word of mouth recommendations, with 66% trusting consumer opinions posted online, either completely or somewhat (Nielsen, 2007). Research also suggests that the more an individual relies on a source, the higher credibility they attribute to it (Johnson & Kaye, 2000). This could suggest that frequent users of Irish blogs would rate them as highly credible sources, and this research will query that. This research will also investigate if blogs based outside of Ireland are read more often and perceived as being more credible. To best gauge media credibility the following variables are measured: believability, fairness, accuracy and depth of information (Johnson et al, 2007) and this question will feature in

this research. This research will also examine how honest and accurate Irish bloggers attempt to be in their blogging and ask both Bloggers and Non-Bloggers how trusting they are of the information posted on blogs.

1.10 Liability in Irish Blogging

Bloggers are in danger of legal challenges in the areas of libel, prior restraint (this refers to a government's actions that prevent materials from being published) and copyright (Carroll & Frank, 2007). Research has shown that bloggers believe that are liable for the content they post on their blogs, however, they also don't believe that anyone could sue them for what they have published online. (Viégas, 2005). Bloggers will often reveal the names of companies in blog postings in order to provide a service to other people – for example, reviewing a product or service, but blogging about commercial companies makes bloggers potentially liable for defamation (Viégas, 2005). In the same study it was noted that bloggers were not concerned about the potential misuse of the information contained within their blogs, nor were they overly concerned about the persistence of their published materials (i.e. the contents of their blog remaining online indefinitely e.g. within search engine caches) (Viégas, 2005). In the same study by Viégas (2005) when respondents were asked how often they had gotten into trouble from content posted on their blogs 36% indicated that they had gotten into some trouble and 6% had indicated that this had occurred frequently. This research will ask similar questions of Irish bloggers, and compare Irish Bloggers and Non-Bloggers attitudes to how the law applies to the Internet, specifically regarding the content of blogs.

There have been a small number of known cases of legal action (Deeney, 2009), or threatened legal action (Raftery, 2007), having been taken against Irish bloggers. In January 2009 a controversial anti-migration blog went offline and in a message posted on the blog itself claimed that an individual associated with the blog had been arrested and charged under the Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred, 1989 (Deeney, 2009). The blog was taken offline for these reasons, though the Gardaí refused to confirm or deny this story (Deeney, 2009). There have been occurrences of defamation charges and legal action has been taken against Irish messageboard contributors (RTE News, 1999; Cochrane, 2008) and negative media attention given to out of context comments posted by bloggers on a successful Irish commercial blog (Independent.ie, 2007). This research will ask bloggers to describe incidents where legal or personal issues have arisen from information posted on their blog.

1.11 Blogging and Journalism

Blogs offer a space online where information usually overlooked by the mainstream media can be published, offering individuals the opportunity for amateur journalism (Papacharissi, 2007) and 34% of America bloggers do consider their online work as a form of journalism (Keen, 2007). Blogs are a highly personalised medium with the ability to involve the reading public in an integral manner, and unlike the traditional media they are not edited or gate kept (Sundar et al. 2007) and for this reason traditional journalists argue about how much trust to place in the content of blogs (Johnson et al, 2007), however, it is argued that the comments system facilitates peer review (Johnson & Kaye, 2004). Some blog users have also stated that they are attracted to reading blogs because they do not like or do not trust the traditional media and see blogs as an alternative (Kaye, 2007). "Blogs provide an outlet that is not associated with traditional journalism or media systems and does not conceal itself behind the guise of objectivity" (Kaye, 2007, p141). It has been suggested that there aren't many bloggers in Ireland and therefore there have been few arguments over the differences between journalists and bloggers in Ireland (Kanellos, 2008). This research will ask Irish bloggers if they consider their writing online as a form of journalism and will also investigate any incidences where the traditional media has illegitimately sourced their work.

Chapter 2. Research Questions

2. Research Questions

2.1 Aims of the Present Study

The overall aim of this research was to explore the perceptions, attitudes and behaviours of Irish Bloggers and non-blogging Irish internet users that read blogs. Perceptions of the credibility and popularity of blogging in Ireland in comparison to other countries was to be investigated. Attitudes to the issues surrounding blogging - trust, honesty, liability, privacy and permanence, were to be explored. Readership behaviours – frequency and origin of blogs read, were to be examined. Writer's behaviours with regard to identity, motivations, and socialisation were to be investigated and the social, academic, professional and negative effects of writing a blog were to be explored. A number of hypotheses were drawn from the literature on blogging and statistical data gathered about Irish internet users.

2.2 Hypotheses

H1: Irish bloggers have lower levels of concern with regard to issues of privacy and the persistent nature of the internet in comparison to non-blogging Irish internet users.

H2: Blogging has had a positive impact on the social lives of Irish Bloggers.

H3: Non blogging Irish internet users rate blogs based in other countries as more credible as sources of information.

H4: Bloggers that use their real name will be more likely to cite professional reasons as their primary motivation for blogging.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3. Methodology

3.1 Design

This was a correlation study using the survey method and was conducted using an online survey website (www.surveymonkey.com). Cluster sampling was applied to gather participants and a snowball technique was used that allowed respondents to forward the survey to fellow blog readers and writers. The survey consisted of 18 standard questions, and either 19 additional question (37 questions in total) or 4 additional questions (22 questions in total) depending on which group the participant was placed into. The primary variable being investigated was if the participant was the author of a blog. The secondary variables being examined were: levels of concern, and ratings of credibility. Other variables being investigated were - the affect of blog writing on social/academic/personal lives of bloggers, and if personally motivated bloggers publish under a pseudonym.

Hypothesis 1: H1 sought to investigate if there was a positive correlation between blog writing and low levels of concern with regard to privacy online and the persistent nature of the internet as measured by the 5 point likert scales (in ascending order from “very unconcerned” to “very concerned”) in q6 and q7 in section 3 of the survey (Appendix A, p5).

Hypothesis 2: H2 queried if blogging has had a positive impact on the lives of bloggers as measured by q5, q6, q7 (yes or no questions) and a 5 point likert scale in q8 (in ascending order from “very negative” to “very positive”) in section 4 of the survey (Appendix A, p7).

Hypothesis 3: H3 inquired if individuals that do not blog rate blogs based in other countries as more credible as sources of information. Credibility was measured using 4 categories (believability, fairness, accuracy and depth of information) and a five-point likert scale (in ascending order from 1 to 5), cited in Johnson, Kaye, Bichard, & Wong (2007) study on blog credibility, these are q3 and q4 in section 3 of the survey (Appendix A, p4).

Hypothesis 4: H4 was interested in investigating if bloggers that use their real name were more likely to cite professional reasons as their primary motivation for blogging as measured by q9 in Section 4 of the survey (Appendix A, p8). Q9 asks participants to choose from a list of possible motivations which were later coded as being either personal or professional motivations.

The personal motivations listed are:

- To document my life.
- To express deeply felt emotions.
- To meet and connect with likeminded people.

The professional motivations listed are:

- To provide commentary and opinions.
- To share my knowledge and experience.
- To articulate ideas through writing.
- To promote myself online.

Q9 also featured the option for the participant to not choose from this list and to instead briefly describe their primary motivation; this qualitative data was then coded as either professional or personal. The initial coding was done by the author, and a co-coder assisted and supported during the coding procedure.

3.2 Participants

There was a sample size of 422 subjects in total. Cluster sampling was applied to gather Irish Internet users to participant in this study. 65.2% of the participants were male and 34.8% were female, 275 male participants and 147 female participants. The age range varied from 18 to 86. The mean age for males was 31.81 (sd = 8.229), and the mean age for females was 31.19 (sd = 9.952). The total mean age was 31.59 and the standard deviation was 8.860.

3.3 Materials

3.3.1 Consent form

Research has shown that a strong privacy policy has a more positive effect on participant's willingness to disclose personal information in comparison to displaying information about the research project (Whitty & Joinson, 2008). Therefore the consent form section of the survey had a strong privacy policy, and due to the importance of stressing anonymity and confidentiality participants were notified that their IP addresses was not being recorded (Appendix A, p2). The first page of the online survey (Appendix A, p2) required the prospective participant to click either "I agree to participate in the study" and they would be brought to the first section of questions, or "I do not agree to participate in the study" and then they would be brought to an exit page.

3.3.2 Debrief Form

The online survey featured two exit pages, one for individuals that did not consent and one for those that did (Appendix A, p11, p12). For those that did participate this exit page featured a number of methods in which the participant could contact the researcher and research supervisor, they were also given the option of entering their email address into a prize draw (for a prize to the value of €50) and receiving updates with regard to the results of the research (Appendix A, p12).

3.3.3 Online survey

The online study was created online, using an online survey website (www.surveymonkey.com). The online survey consisted of 18 standard questions, with an additional 18 questions for Group 2 (36 questions in total) and an additional 2 questions for Group 1 (20 questions in total). A print out of the survey questions can be found in Appendix A (p2-10).

The survey consisted of 4 sections. The first section gathering demographic details such as age, gender and the question "Please enter the name of the Irish county you are from, or living in." as the research was only interested in recruiting Irish (or living in Ireland) participants, the data from those that entered an unrecognisable county was not utilised in this research. The second section asked questions regarding attitudes and behaviours, an identifying question here was "Do you currently write a blog?" for participants that answered "Yes" they were taken to a page containing questions for Group 2 only (Appendix A, p7 to p9), and participants that answered "No" were taken to a page containing questions for the Group 1 only (Appendix A, p10).

3.4 Procedure

3.4.1 Pilot Study Number 1

A word document version of the questionnaire was distributed to 5 Irish bloggers and their feedback was utilised in the design of the final questionnaire. Modifications were made to questions that had previously included terminology that might have been unfamiliar to some participants. For example the following question: "Would you consider yourself a member of a blogosphere?" was changed to "Can you give a brief description of the blogosphere (the community of blogs and bloggers) you most identify with online (if any)?" Possible confusing questions were changed. For example in an original draft the following question: "Are you Irish, Non-Irish but living in Ireland, or neither" this would stop any individuals not from the particular group of interest from proceeding with the survey. This question was changed to "Please enter the name of the Irish county you are from, or living in" and afterwards the investigator deleted any datasets from individuals unable to provide a legitimate answer.

In question Q9 of the survey participants are asked to choose from a list of 7 possible motivations, in the initial survey there was an eighth option "To form and maintain community forums" but feedback indicated that this was too similar to the other option "To meet and connect with likeminded people" and was thus removed from the survey, the option to choose "other" and for the participant to enter their own text was decided upon. Feedback was also used to decide on which motivations should be placed into either the personal or professional categories.

3.4.2 Pilot Study Number 2

A secondary pilot study was conducted with 10 participants of varied age and experience, 5 males and 5 females. 5 Non-Bloggers and 5 Bloggers participated. Conclusions from the pilot study were that the questionnaires did not require any changes, and that the online survey worked correctly (e.g. answering defining questions such as "Do you currently write a blog?" brought the participant to the correct next stage in the survey). H1 was neither fully supported nor discredited as the survey responses were varied across the two groups. H2 was partially supported. H3 was neither fully supported nor discredited as the survey responses were varied across the two groups. H4 was neither fully supported nor discredited as only 1 out of the 5 bloggers surveyed used a pseudonym in their blogging.

3.4.3 The Study

Gathering Participants

Participants are more open and candid when responding to online surveys in comparison to face to face interviews (Whitty & Joinson, 2008) and due to the topic being studied the survey was conducted online and participants were collected online. A link to the survey was published on the author's blog (Cochrane, 2009a) and Irish bloggers were encouraged to post a link to the survey on their own blogs and request that their readers fill it out. The following message, with a link to the survey was posted on Twitter (the microblogging service): "Irish Blog Research 09: If you read blogs or write a blog, spare 10mins for the survey: <http://tinyurl.com/5jobeu> thx." (Cochrane, 2009b) This message was also re-posted by other twitter users at the request of the author.

The following message, with a link to the survey was posted on two Irish messageboard community websites (www.boards.ie and www.politics.ie): *"I'm a post-graduate student from IADT currently in the process of conducting a major research project focused on blogging, but from an Irish perspective, looking at the attitudes and behaviour of Irish bloggers and Irish blog readers. (further info can be found on my blog). I'm looking for people that read blogs, and write blogs to fill out my survey (you can fill out the survey here). The questionnaire is 100% anonymous and at the end of the survey you can enter a prize draw for either a €50 Amazon voucher or a €50 Ticketmaster voucher - if you win, you can choose either prize. Thank you in advance to anyone that can take 5-10 minutes to fill it out."*

The Survey

The first page of the online survey (Appendix A, p1) required the prospective participant to first consent to partaking in the study before progressing to the survey questions. The first section gathering demographic details such as age and gender, the second section asked questions regarding attitudes and behaviours, an identifying question here was "Do you currently write a blog?" for participants that answered "Yes" they were taken to a page containing questions for the Bloggers group only (Appendix A, p5 to p7), and participants that answered "No" were taken to a page containing questions for the Non-Blogging group only (Appendix A, p8). At the end of the survey participants were given the option of entering their email address into a prize draw (for a prize to the value of €50) and receiving updates with regard to the results of the research (Appendix A, p10). Email addresses were collected using a separate form to reinforce the confidentiality and privacy statements (Appendix A, p1 and p10).

3.5 Ethical Considerations

This study complied with APA and BPS ethical guidelines and was formally approved by the IADT Department of Learning Sciences Ethics Committee. There were no known ethical issues identified, there was no deception necessary for this study and there were minimal risks to participants.

- Anonymity and confidentiality of the participants was ensured.
- There was informed consent.
- Participants were informed of the minimal risks involved in the study, and informed that they could withdraw at any time.
- Participants were debriefed.
- There was a moderate incentive for participation and this was deemed appropriate and minimally coercive.

Chapter 4. Results

4. Results

4.1 Participants

There was a sample size of 422 subjects in total.

4.1.1 Gender

Table 1.0 describes the raw figures of 275 male participants and 147 female participants. Figure 1.0 and Table 1.0 describe the frequency of males (65.17%) and females (34.83%).

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	275	65.2	65.2	65.2
Female	147	34.8	34.8	100.0
Total	422	100.0	100.0	

Table 1.0 – Gender of participants

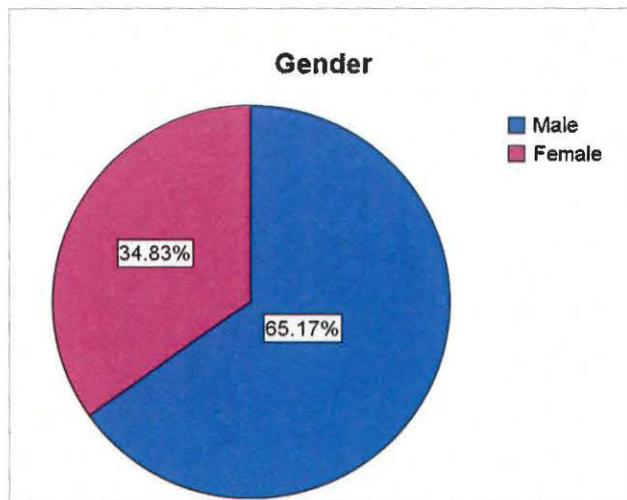


Figure 1.0 - Gender of participants

4.1.2 Age

Figure 2.0 describes the age range as 18 to 86 years. Table 2.0 describes the mean age for males was 31.81 (sd = 8.229), and the mean age for females was 31.19 (sd = 9.952). The total mean age was 31.59 (sd = 8.860).

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Male	31.81	275	8.229
Female	31.19	147	9.952
Total	31.59	422	8.860

Table 2.0 – Age of participants.

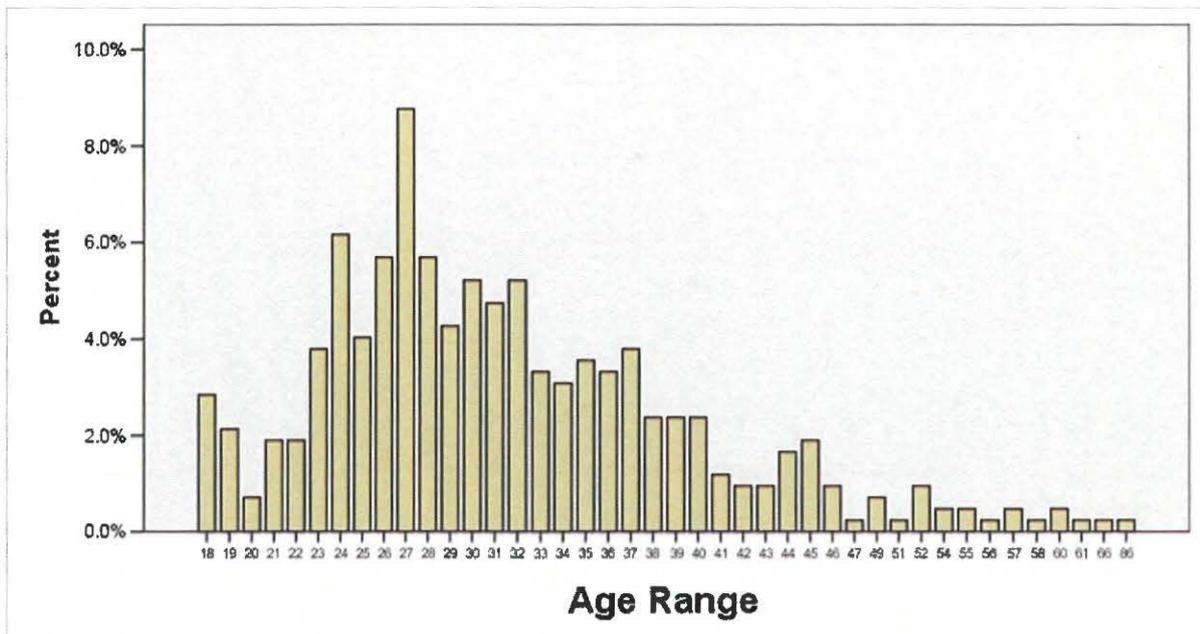


Figure 2.0 – Age range of participants.

4.2 Hypotheses

4.2.1 Hypothesis 1

Non-Bloggers were found to be slightly concerned with issues of online privacy (mean = 3.69, sd = 0.069) and Bloggers were also slightly concerned (mean = 3.64, sd = 0.064). The mean difference between groups was 0.53 and the 95% confidence interval for the estimated mean difference was between -.135 and .241. An independent t-test showed that the difference between groups was not significant ($t = .555$, $df = 419$, $p = .2895$).

Non-Bloggers were found to be slightly concerned with the persistent nature of the Internet (mean = 3.54, sd = .957) and Bloggers were found to be less concerned (mean = 3.28, sd = 1.057). The mean difference between groups was .262 and the 95% confidence interval for the estimated mean difference was between .065 and .469. An independent t-test showed the difference between groups was significant ($t = 2.617$, $df = 420$, $p = .0045$).

These results indicated that the hypothesis was partially supported.

4.2.2 Hypothesis 2

Writing a blog was found to have a slightly positive effect on the social lives of Bloggers (mean = 3.745) and the 95% confidence interval for the estimated mean difference was between 3.64 and 3.85. Figure 3.0 describes 81.3% of Bloggers have made online friends because of their blogging, Figure 3.1 describes 62.07% of Bloggers have met people in real life because and Figure 3.2 describes how 28.45% of bloggers have made close friends because of their blogging. These results indicate that the hypothesis was supported.

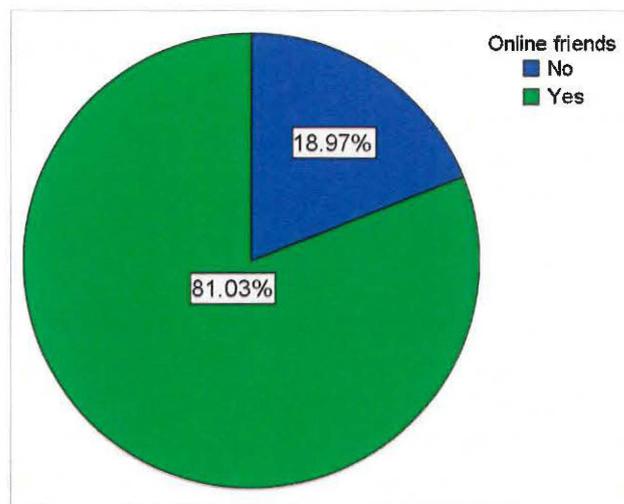


Figure 3.0 – Made online friends.

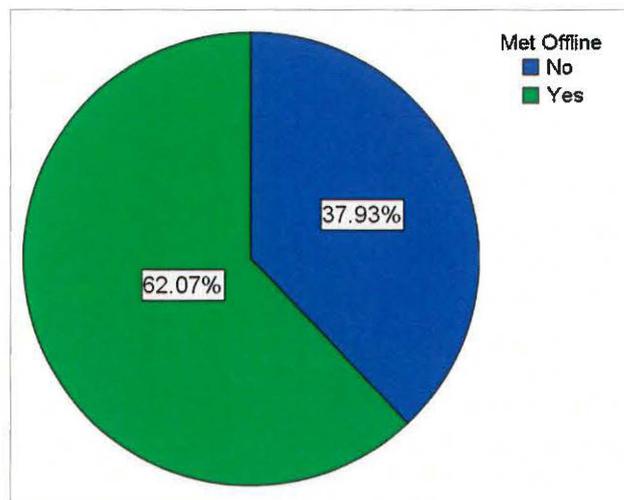


Figure 3.1 – Met people offline.

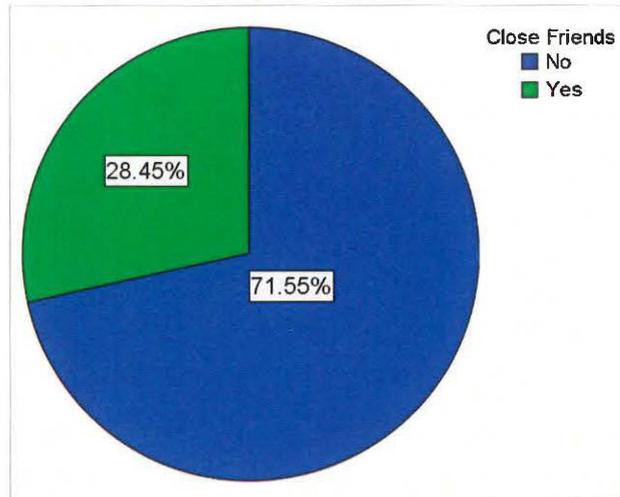


Figure 3.2 – Made close friends.

4.2.3 Hypothesis 3

Out of a maximum score of 20, Non-Bloggers rated both Irish (mean = 13.02, sd = 2.999) and non-Irish blogs (mean = 12.64, sd = 3.237) similarly with regard to their credibility as a form of media. Bloggers also rated Irish blogs (mean = 14.01, max = 20, sd = 2.743) and non-Irish blogs (mean = 13.38, max = 20, sd = 2.857) similarly. An independent t-test showed that the difference between groups with regard to credibility ratings for Irish blogs was significant ($t = -3.558$, $df = 420$, $p = .0005$). An independent t-test showed that the difference between groups for non-Irish blogs was significant ($t = -2.286$, $df = 420$, $p = .0065$). These results indicate that the hypothesis was not supported.

4.2.4 Hypothesis 4

Figure 4.0 describes the 39.49% of Bloggers whom indicated that they used a pseudonym online, and 60.51% indicated that they used their real name online. 77.7% of Bloggers who blog using their real name cited professional reasons as their primary motivation for blogging, thus the hypothesis was fully supported.

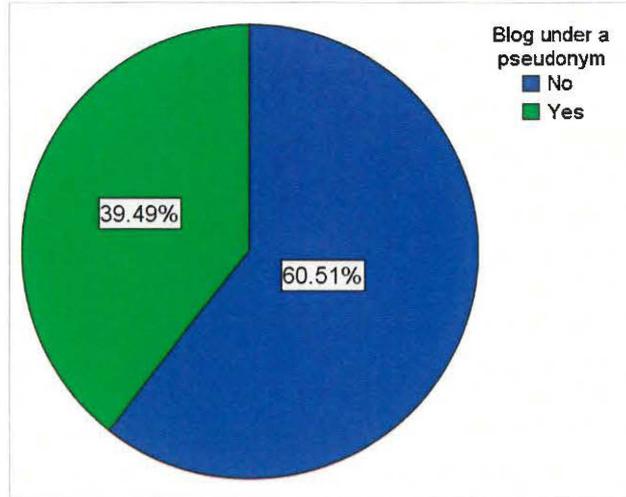


Figure 4.0 - Using a pseudonym.

4.3 Participant Groups

There were two participant groups, Figure 5.0 describes the frequency in each group. 178 participants (42.18%) were placed into the Non-Blogger group. 244 participants (57.82%) were placed into the Blogger group.

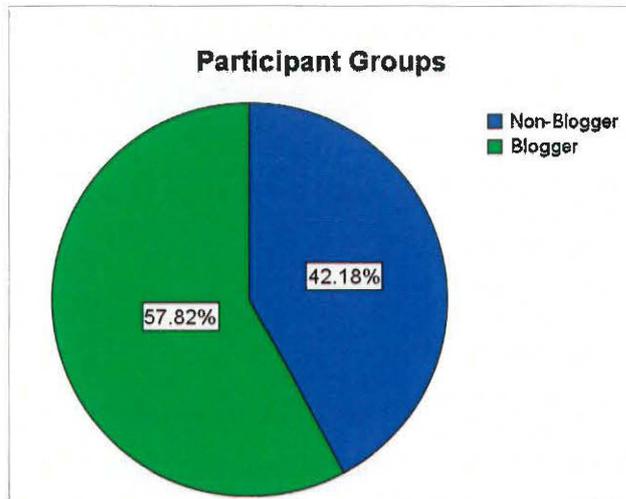


Figure 5.0 – Participant Groups

Figure 5.1 describes 28.9% of the Non-Bloggers group that have blogged in the past, and Figure 5.2 – describes 35.06% that have intentions to blog in the future.

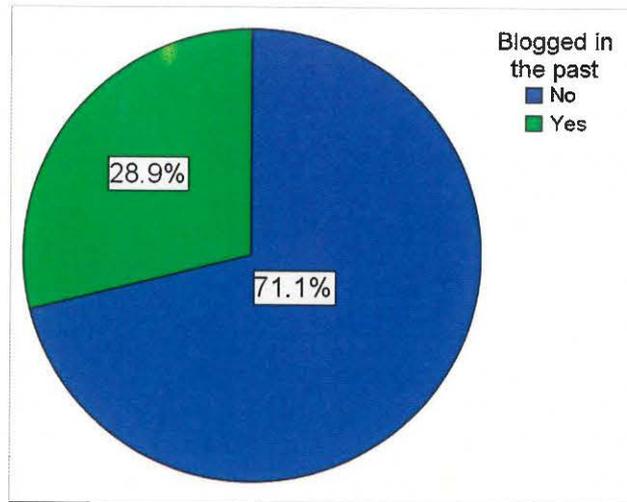


Figure 5.1 – Blogged in the past.

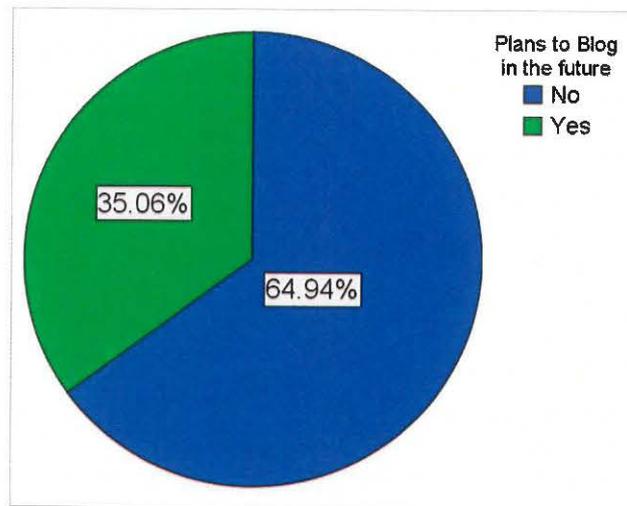


Figure 5.2 – Plans to blog.

4.3.1 Participant Groups: Gender

Table 3.0 describes the gender break down in both groups. 60.6% of Non-Bloggers were male and 39.3% were female. 68.4% of Bloggers were male and 31.6% were female.

	Male or Female		Total
	Male	Female	
Non-Blogger	108	70	178
Blogger	167	77	244
Total	275	147	422

Table 3.0 – Gender of participants across Groups.

Figure 5.1 describes the distribution of male and females into the groups. 47.6% of the 147 females were Non-Bloggers, and 52.4% were Bloggers. 39.3% of the 275 males were Non-Bloggers, and

60.7% were in Bloggers. A Pearson's chi-square found that there was no relationship found between gender and writing a blog: $(n = 422) = 2.736, p = 0.098$.

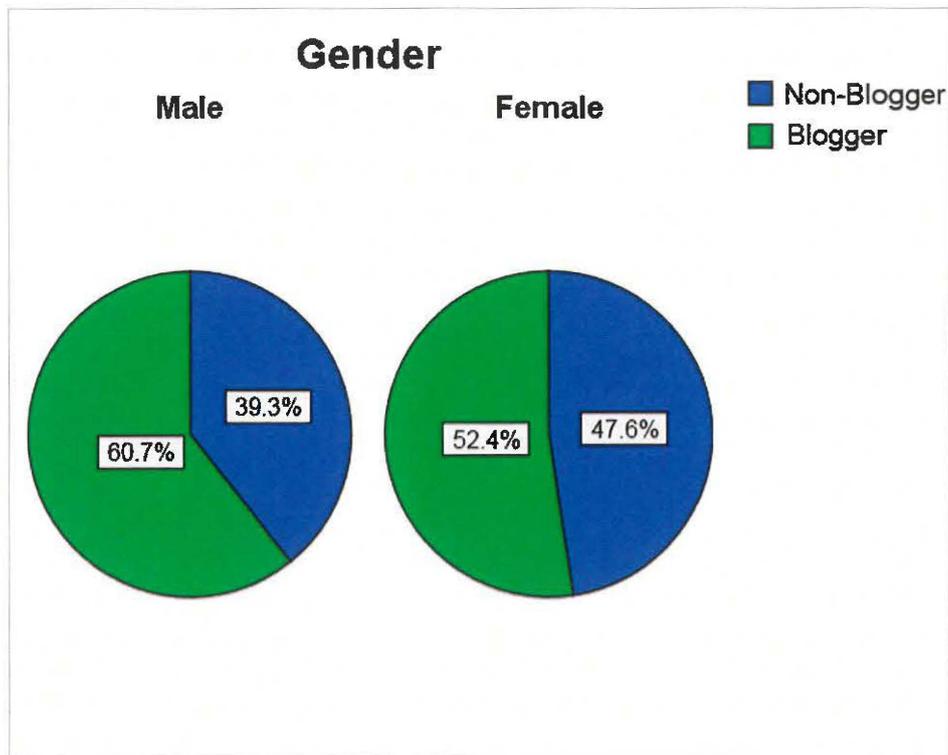


Figure 5.1 – Participants: Groups and Gender

4.3.2 Participant Groups: Age

The age range for Non-Bloggers varied from 18 to 86 and the age range for Bloggers varied from 18 to 66. Table 3.1 describes the mean age for participants, for the Non-Bloggers group this was 31.93 (sd = 9.295), in the Bloggers group it was 31.35 (sd = 8.540). The mean difference between groups was .584 and the 95% confidence interval for the estimated mean difference was between -1.134 and 2.302. An independent t-test showed that the age difference between groups was not significant ($t = 0.668, df = 420, p = 0.252$). Table 3.2 describes the gender and age range of participants in both groups.

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Non-Blogger	31.93	178	9.295	18	86
Blogger	31.35	244	8.540	18	66
Total	31.59	422	8.860	18	86

Table 3.1 – Age across participant groups.

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Min	Max
Male	Non-Blogger	31.35	108	7.672	18	55
	Blogger	32.11	167	8.579	18	66
	Total	31.81	275	8.229	18	66
Female	Non-Blogger	32.83	70	11.357	18	86
	Blogger	29.70	77	8.273	18	61
	Total	31.19	147	9.952	18	86
Total	Non-Blogger	31.93	178	9.295	18	86
	Blogger	31.35	244	8.540	18	66
	Total	31.59	422	8.860	18	86

Table 3.2 – Gender and Age of participants across Groups.

4.4 Behaviour Toward Blogs

4.4.1 Blog Reader Behaviour

4.4.1.1 Frequency

60.7% of overall participants indicated that they read blogs more than once a day, 16.4% read them once a day, 15.6% read them a few times a week and 7.4% read them infrequently (once a week, a few times a month, once a month or a few times a year). Figure 6.0 describes the frequency of reading across groups. 44.4% of Non-Bloggers and 72.5% of Bloggers read blogs more than once a day, 17.4% of Non-Bloggers and 15.6% of Bloggers read them once a day, 24.2% of Non-Bloggers and 9.4% of Bloggers read them a few times a week. 14.1% of Non-Bloggers and 2.4% of Bloggers read them infrequently.

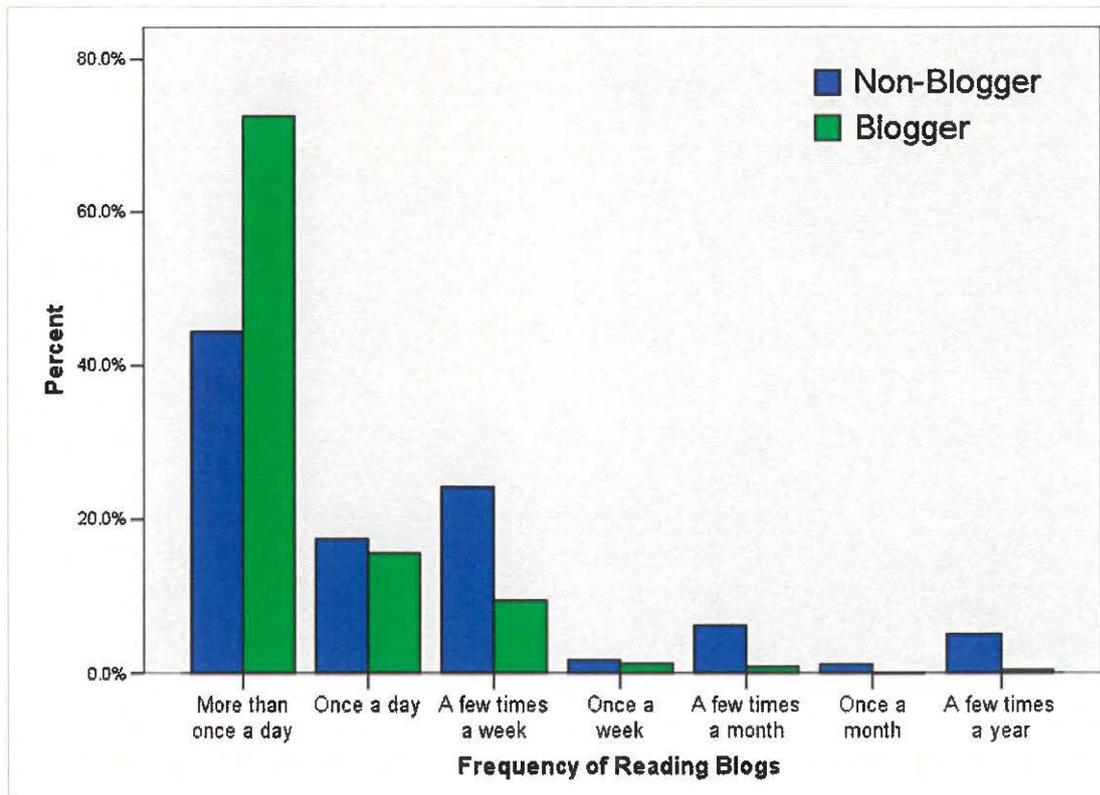


Figure 6.0 – Frequency of Reading Blogs, across groups.

4.4.1.2 Country of Origin

35% of participants indicated that the majority of the blogs they read originate from Ireland, 12.1% indicated they originated from other countries, 50.5% read a mixture of both and 1.7% did not know. Figure 6.1 describes the origin of blogs read, across groups. 36% of Non-Bloggers and 35.7% of bloggers read mostly Irish blogs, 14% of Non-Bloggers and 10.7% of Bloggers read mostly blogs based outside of Ireland, 46.6% of Non-Bloggers and 53.3% of Bloggers read a mixture of both.

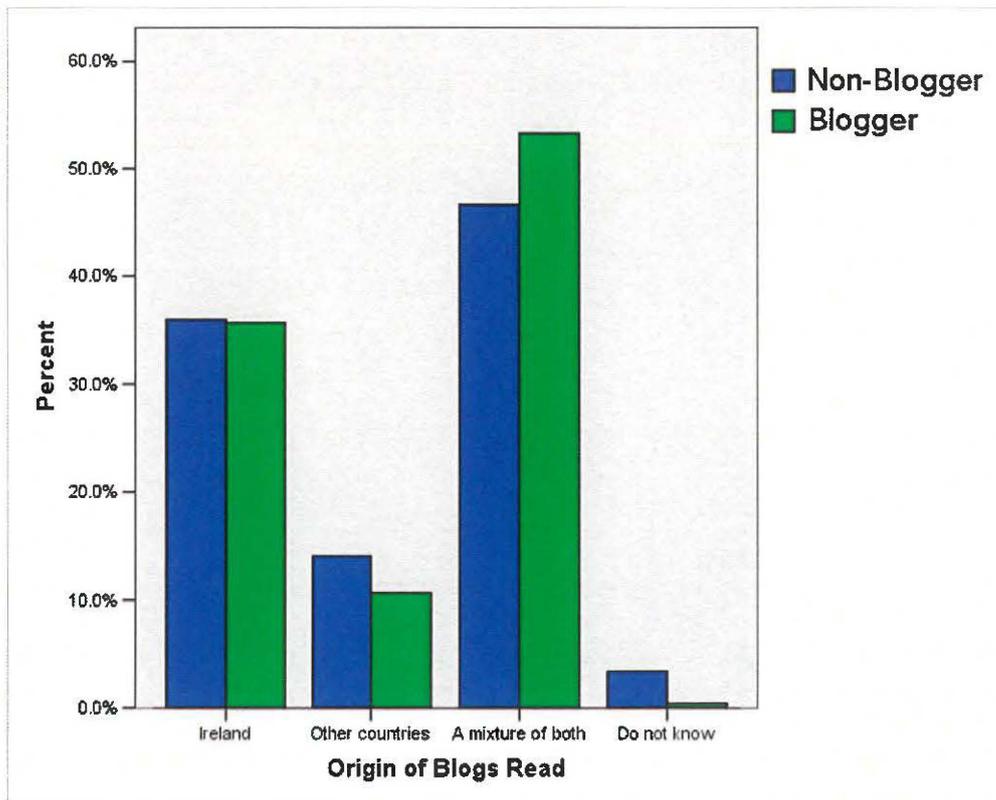


Figure 6.1 – Origin of blogs read, across groups.

4.4.1.3 Double Checking Information

Figure 6.2 describes 84.8% of the overall participants that indicated they had at least once attempted to double check information found on Irish Blogs and 15.2% that indicated they had never done this. Figure 6.3 describes that 83.4% of overall participants had attempted to double check information on non-Irish blogs and 16.6% had never done this. 84.3% of Non-Bloggers had at least once attempted to double check information found on both Irish blogs and non-Irish blogs. 85.2% of Bloggers had double checked Irish blogs and 82% of Bloggers double checked non-Irish blogs.

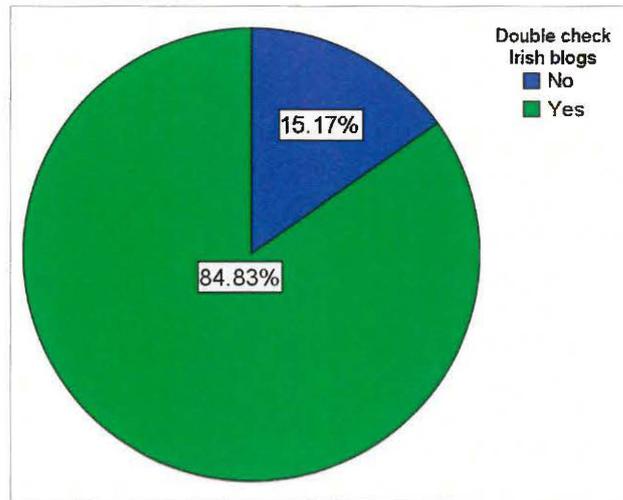


Figure 6.2 – Double checked information on Irish Blogs.

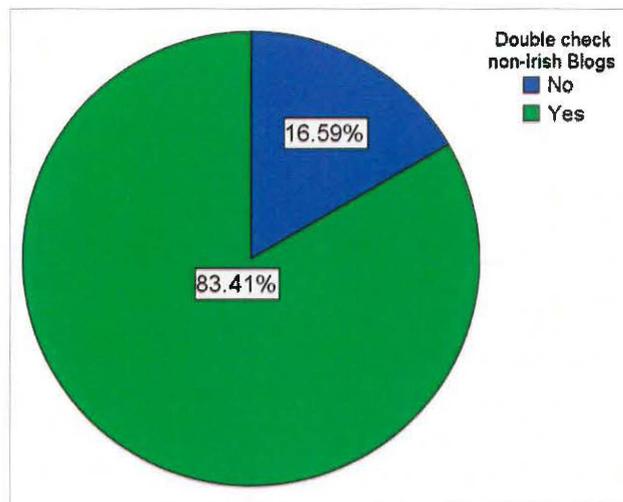


Figure 6.3 – Double checked information on non-Irish Blogs.

4.4.2 Blog Writer Behaviours

4.4.2.1 Identity

Figure 4.0 describes 39.49% of Bloggers use a pseudonym, and 60.51% use their real name. Of the 39.49% that blog under a pseudonym, 23.1% of this group indicated that they also blog using their real name. A Pearson's chi-square found that there was no relationship found between using a pseudonym and levels for concern for online privacy ($n = 78$) = 4.618, $p = .336$, and no relationship between using a pseudonym and level of concern for online permanence ($n = 78$) = 2.154, $p = .714$. These analyses showed that 2 cells had expected count less than 5, so an exact significance test was selected for Pearson's chi-square. Table 4.0 describes the mean scores of both the Non-Bloggers and Bloggers with regard to the importance of knowing the identity of the blog author. Non-Bloggers

indicated it was of medium importance ($m = 3.25$, $sd = 1.087$) and Bloggers scored similarly ($m = 3.28$, $sd = 1.102$).

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Non-Bloggers	178	3.25	1.087	.081
Bloggers	244	3.28	1.102	.071

Table 4.0 – Importance of knowing the identity of the blog author.

Figure 7 describes the 90.56% of bloggers that indicate on their blogs that they are Irish or that their blog originates from Ireland. Figure 7.1 describes how 65.67% of bloggers are listed on a planet aggregator, and 34.33% indicated that they were not. Figure 7.2 describes how 63.63% of bloggers consider themselves a member of the Irish blogosphere, and 36.64% do not.

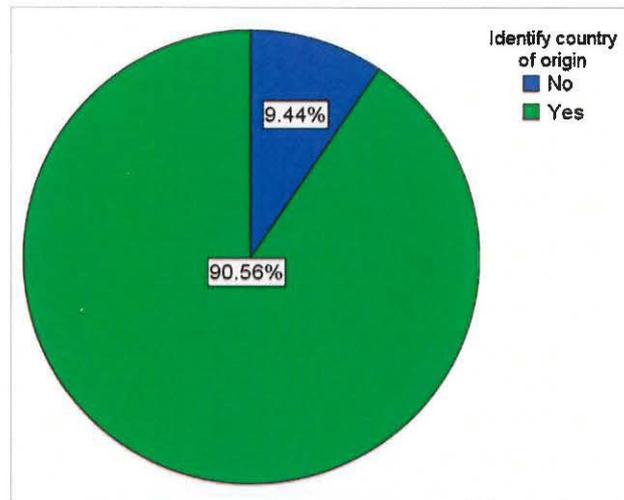


Figure 7 – Identifying country of origin.

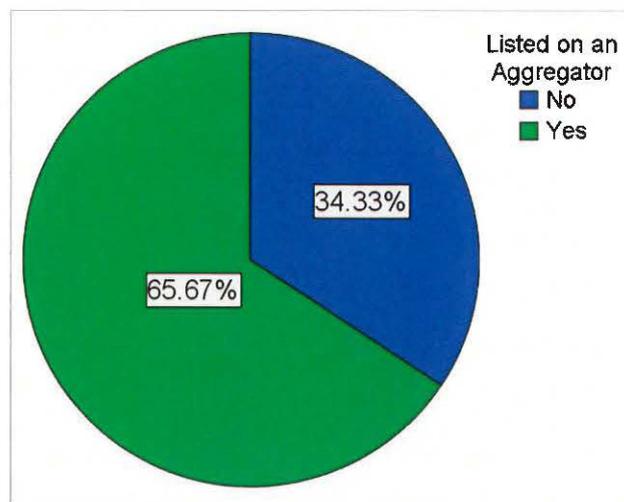


Figure 7.1 - Listed on a planet aggregator.

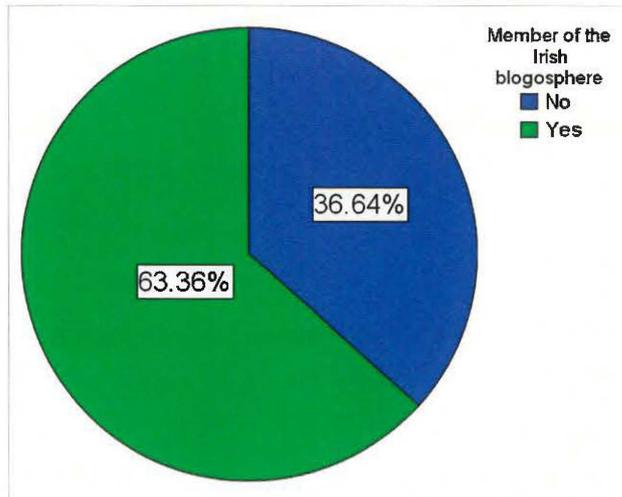


Figure 7.2 – Member of the Irish Blogosphere.

Figure 7.3 describes how 61.83% of bloggers indicated that the blogosphere that they most identified with was based around their interests, 15.05% indicated that it was geographical, 7.53% was based around social groups and friendships, 3.76% indicated other areas (technology, gender and language) and 11.83% of bloggers indicated they did not identify with any blogosphere.

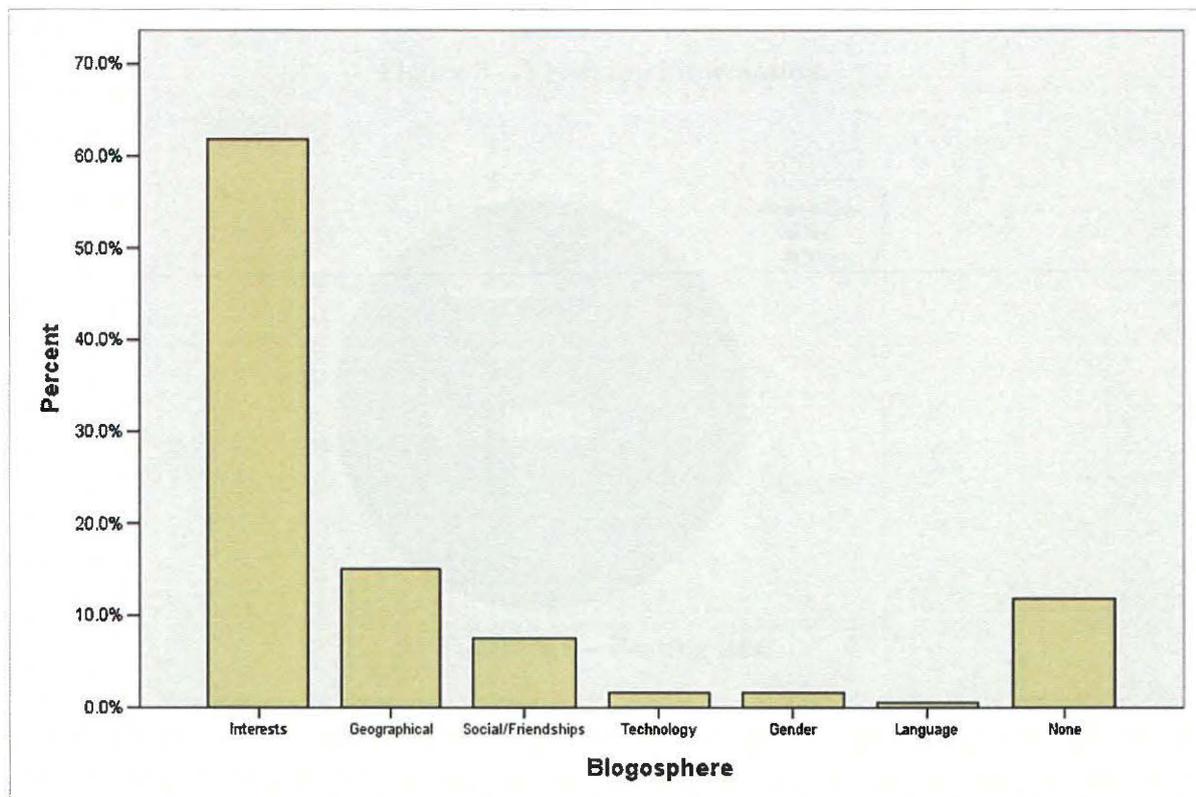


Figure 7.3 – Blogosphere most identified with.

4.4.2.2 Writing blog content

Figure 8 describes how 86.96% of blog writers indicated that they actively attempt to verify information before posting it to their blog and Figure 8.1 describes how 87.07% of bloggers indicated that they had never posted a lie on their blog. Figure 8.2 describes how the 12.93% whom had ever lied on their blog, 22.58% indicated this was due to maintaining anonymity, 35.48% indicated it was to embellish or for obvious fiction/satire, and 41.94% did not indicate a reason for doing so.

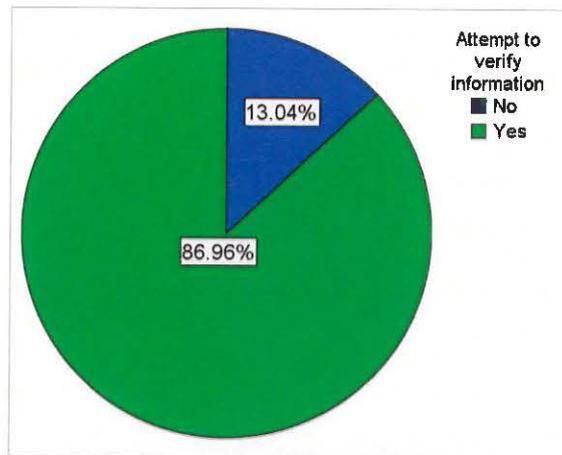


Figure 8 – Verifying information.

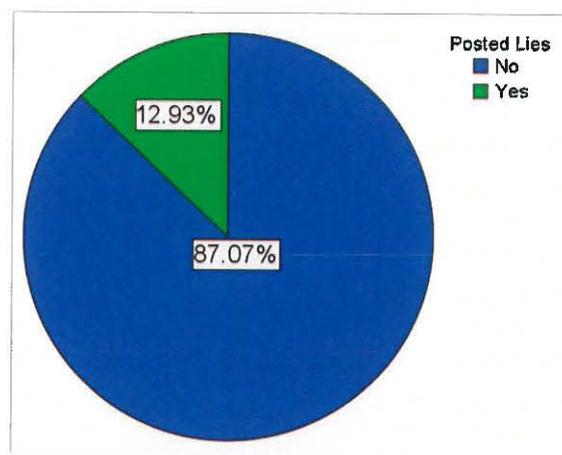


Figure 8.1 – Posting lies.

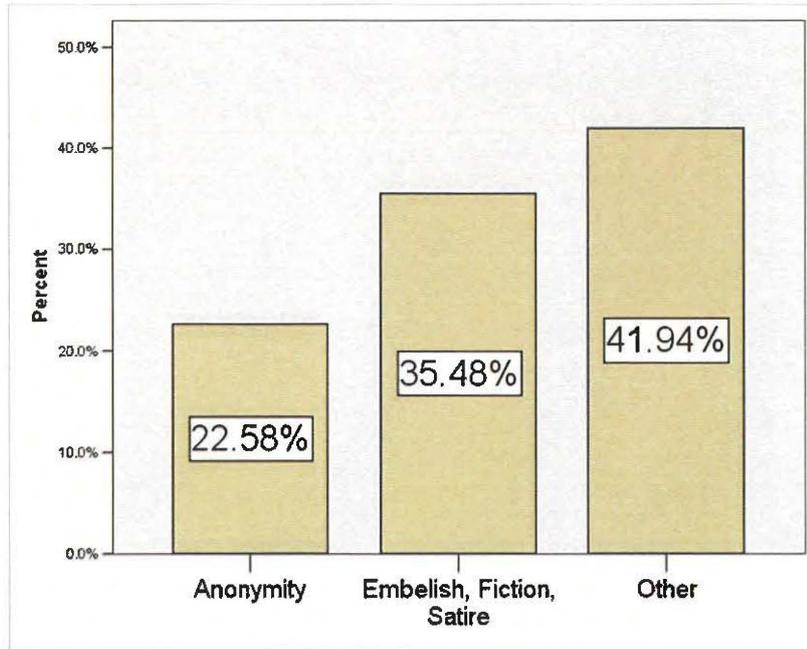


Figure 8.2 – Reasons for posting lies.

Figure 11.3 describes how 51.74% of bloggers (n = 194) consider their blogging as form of journalism, of this group 58.6% blog using their real name and 46.2% blog under a pseudonym.

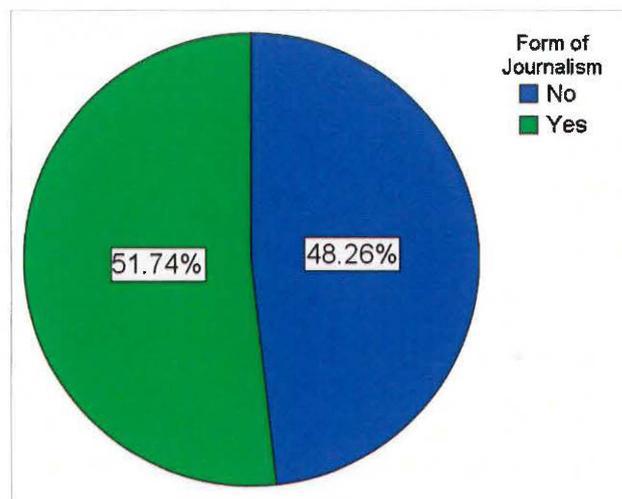


Figure 8.3 – Consider blog writing a form of journalism.

4.5 Perceptions

4.5.1 Credibility

Table 5.0 and Table 5.1 describe credibility scores of blogs. Out of a maximum score of 20 the mean score of Irish blogs by Non-Bloggers was 13.02, and non-Irish blogs was 12.64 (sd = 2.999).

Bloggers scored Irish blogs with a mean of 14.01 and non-Irish blogs mean score of 13.38 (sd = 2.743).

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Non-Bloggers	178	13.01	2.999	.225
Bloggers	244	14.01	2.743	.176

Table 5.0 – Credibility scores of Irish blogs.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Non-Bloggers	178	12.64	3.237	.243
Bloggers	244	13.38	2.857	.183

Table 5.1 – Credibility scores of non-Irish blogs.

4.5.2 Legal Action

Figure 9 describes how 87.56% of the overall sample indicated that they believed it was possible for a legal action to be taken against a blogger because of what they had published. Figure 9.1 describes the 85.54% of Bloggers thought legal action is possible, and 14.46% did not think this was possible. 90.34% of Non-Bloggers think legal action is possible, and 9.66% thought it was not possible.

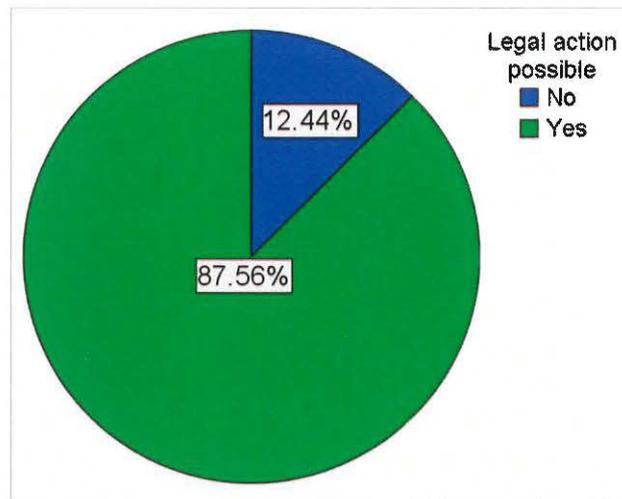


Figure 9 – Possibility of legal action against bloggers.

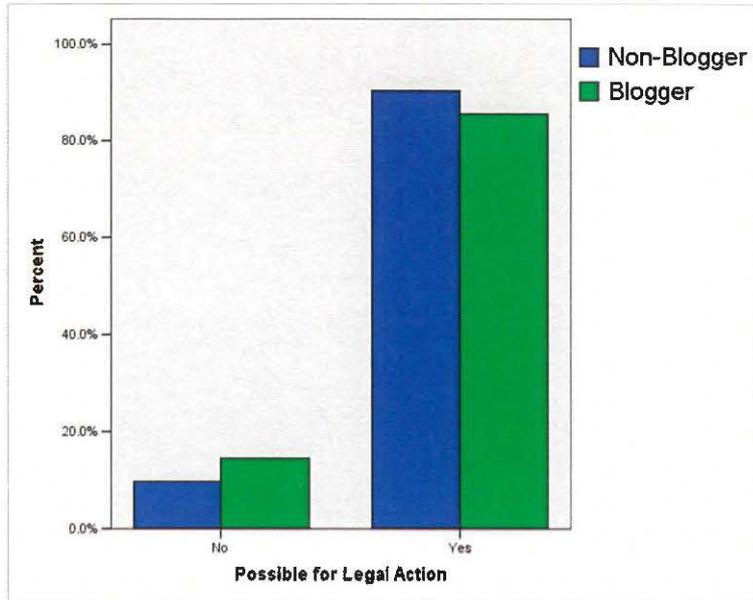


Figure 9.1 – Possibility of legal action against bloggers, across groups.

4.5.3 Liability

Figure 10 describes how liable bloggers consider themselves for content posted to their blogs, by both themselves and users whom leave comments. 7.39% indicated that they thought they were not at all liable, 36.52% indicated that they were slightly liable and 56.09% indicated that they believed themselves to be completely liable.

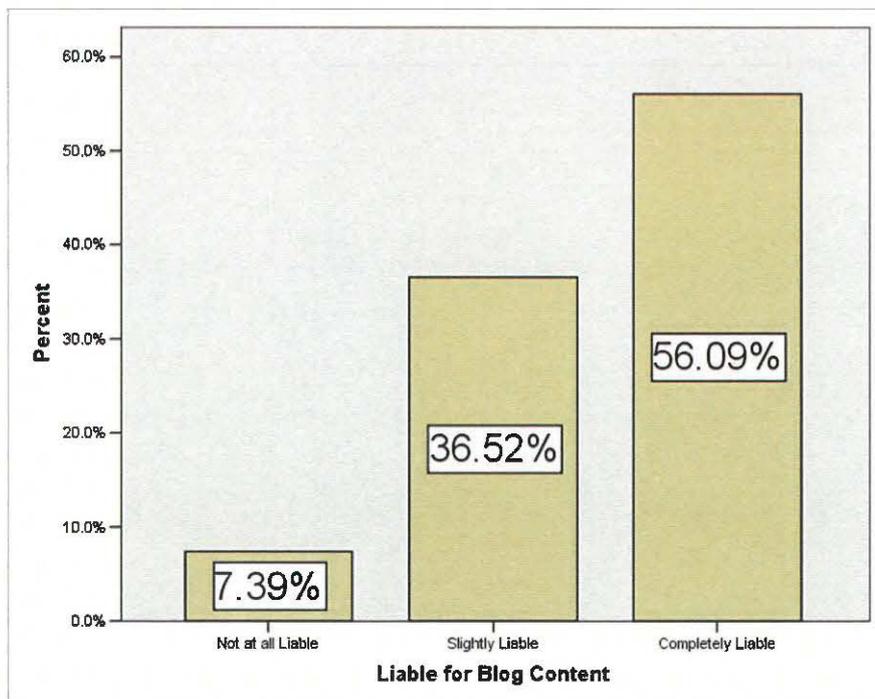


Figure 10 – Liable for blog content.

4.5.4 Popularity

Table 6.0 and Table 6.1 describe how both Bloggers and Non-Bloggers rated the popularity of blogging as slightly higher in other countries. Out of a maximum score of 5 Non-Bloggers rated the popularity of blogging in Ireland as 3.47 (sd = .824) and in other countries at 4.05. Bloggers rated popularity in Ireland at 3.45 (sd = .894) and at 4.01 (sd = .754) in other countries.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Non-Bloggers	178	3.47	.824	.062
Bloggers	244	3.45	.894	.057

Table 6.0 – Popularity scores of blogging in Ireland.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Non-Bloggers	178	4.05	.794	.060
Bloggers	244	4.01	.754	.048

Table 6.1 – Popularity scores of blogging in other countries.

4.5.5 Privacy and Permanence

The overall mean score (max = 5) of rates of concern with regard to privacy online was 3.66. (sd = .969, n = 421). 48.93% of the total participant sample indicated they were “concerned” and 16.87% indicated that they were “very concerned” about online privacy. The mean score (max = 5) of rates of concern with regards to privacy issues online in the Non-Bloggers group was 3.69 (sd = 0.069) and in the Bloggers group the mean score was 3.64 (sd = 0.064). Figure 11.0 describes the 55.06% of Non-Bloggers and 44% of Bloggers that indicated that they were “concerned”, 14.61% of Non-Bloggers and 18.52% of Bloggers that indicated they were “very concerned”.

The overall mean score for the persistent nature of the Internet was 3.39 (n = 422). 40.52% of the total participant sample indicated they were “concerned” and 11.85% indicated that they were “very concerned” about the online permanence. The mean score of rates of concern with regard to the persistent nature of the Internet in the Non-Bloggers group was 3.54 (sd = .957) and in the Bloggers group this was 3.28 (sd = 1.056). Figure 11.1 describes the 46.07% of Non-Bloggers and 36.48% of Bloggers that indicated they were “concerned” and 13.48% of Non-Bloggers and 10.66% of Non-Bloggers that indicated they were “very concerned”.

Bloggers were also asked how concerned they are with the possible misuse of information on their blogs. The mean score (max = 5) was 3.34 (sd = 1.010, n = 230). 38.26% of Bloggers indicated they were “concerned” and 10% indicated they were “very concerned.”.

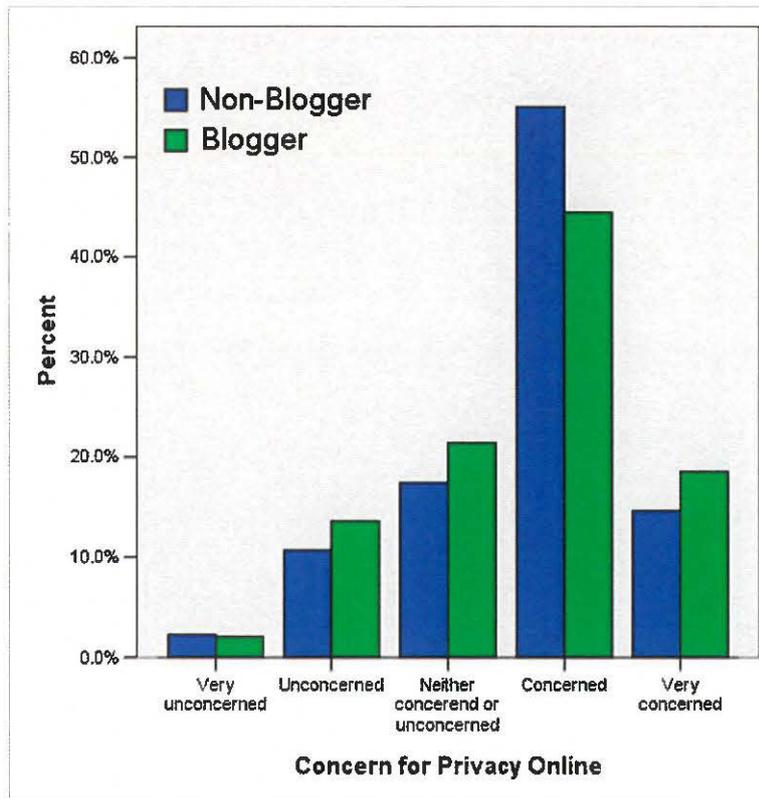


Figure 11.0 – Privacy Online, across groups.

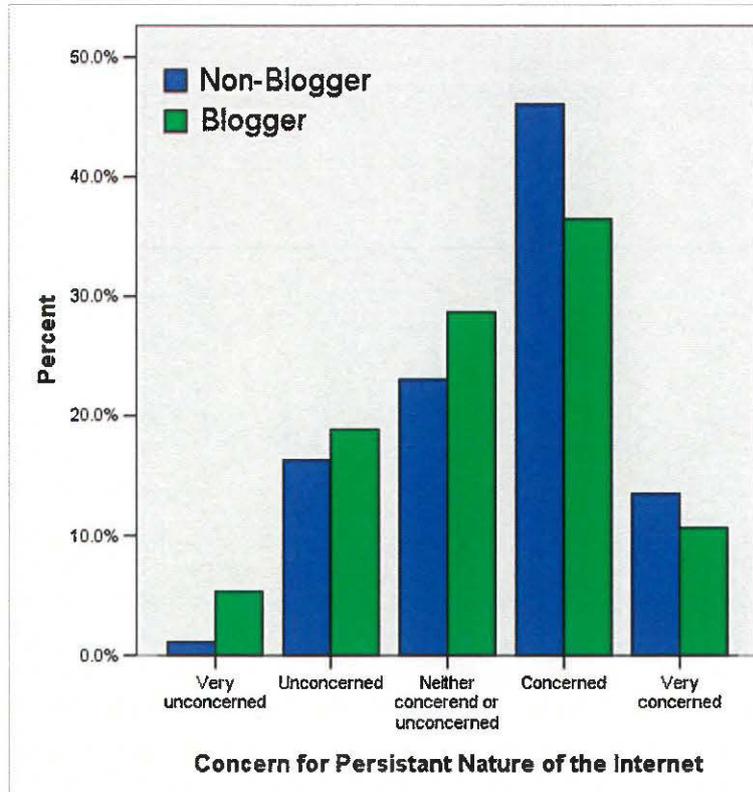


Figure 11.1 – Persistent nature of the Internet, across groups.

4.6 Motivations for Blog Writing

4.6.1 Primary Motivation

The Bloggers group were asked to indicate their primary motivation for blogging. Figure 12.0 illustrates the 10.43% that indicated “To document my life”, 1.3% choose “To express deeply felt emotions”, 5.65% said “To meet and connect with likeminded people” - these options were coded as personally orientated motivations, and figure 12.1 describes the 21.78% of the Bloggers that choose from this category (n = 230). Figure 12.0 illustrates the 21.74% of Bloggers that choose “To provide commentary and opinions”, 1.74% that chose “To share my knowledge and experience”, 36.96% that choose “To articulate ideas through writing”, 8.26% choose “To promote myself online” - these options were coded as professionally orientated motivation (n = 230). Figure 12.1 describes the 78.22% of Bloggers that chose from the professional category. The 13.91% that chose “other” motivations were able to describe their own, and these were later coded as either professional or personal.

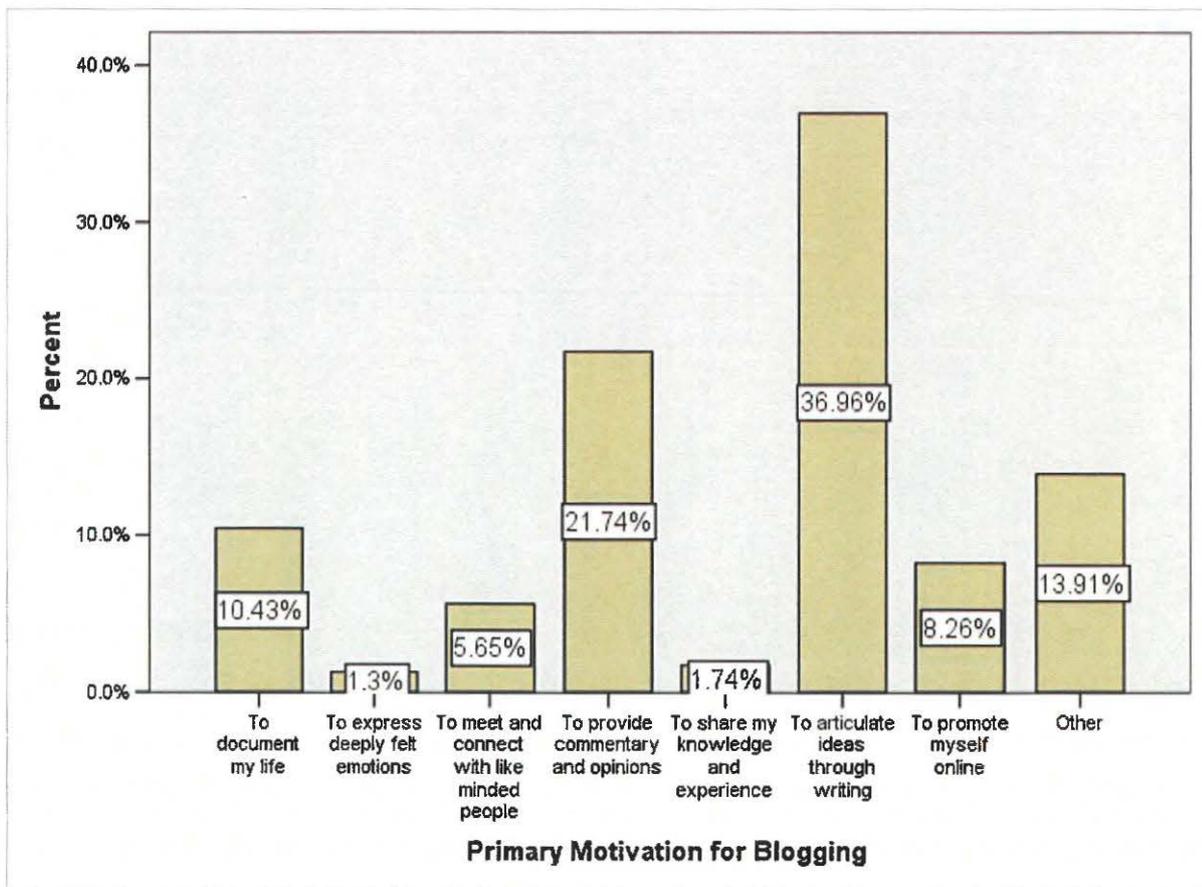


Figure 12.0 – Primary motivation for blogging.

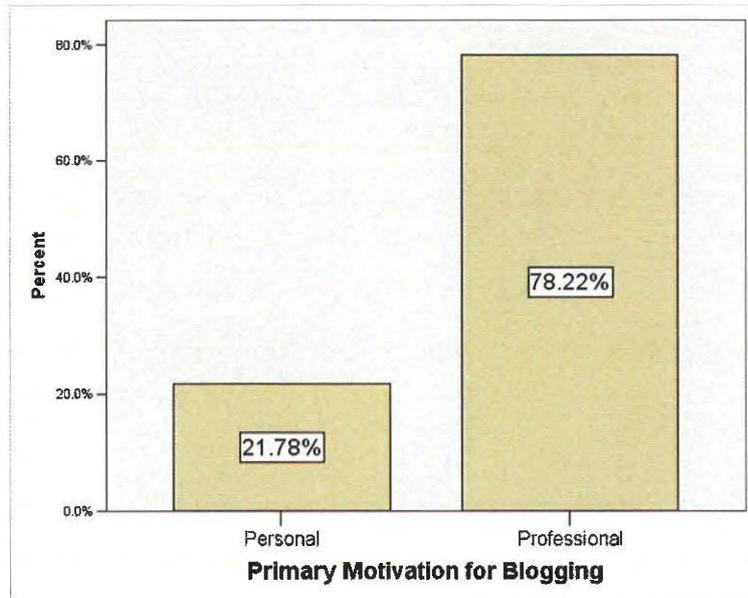


Figure 12.1 Primary motivation for blogging, personal or professional.

4.6.2 Other Motivations

In a multiple choice question Bloggers were asked to indicate their other motivations for Blogging. 24.7 % indicated that “To document my life” was one of their motivations for blogging, 16.9% chose “To express deeply felt emotions”, 43.4% “To meet and connect with likeminded people”, 50% “To provide commentary and opinions”, 52.8% “To share my knowledge and experience”, 48.5% “To articulate ideas through writing” and 31.2% “To promote myself online” (n = 230).

4.7 Effects of Blogging

4.7.1 Social

Bloggers were asked what impact blog writing had on their social lives, the mean score of which was 3.745 (max = 5, n = 231), and the 95% confidence interval for the estimated mean difference was between 3.64 and 3.85. Figure 3.0 describes how 81.3% of Bloggers have made online friends because of their blogging, Figure 3.1 describes 62.07% of Bloggers have met people in real life because of their blogging and Figure 3.2 describes how 28.45% of bloggers have made close friends because of their blogging. Figure 13 describes the 0.87% indicating it had negative effect, 43.72% indicated it had no effect, 35.5% that indicated blogging has had a positive effect, and 19.9% indicated it had a very positive effect.

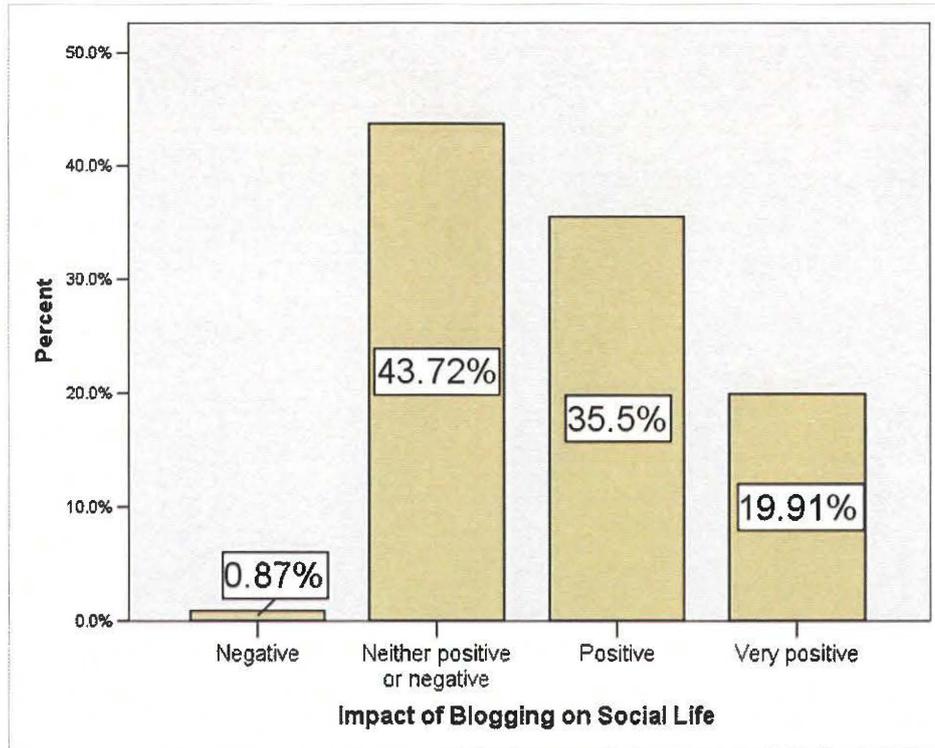


Figure 13 – Impact of blogging on social life.

4.7.2 Academic

Bloggers were asked what impact blog writing had on their academic lives, the mean score of which was 3.59 (max = 5, n = 228) and the 95% confidence interval for the estimated mean difference was between 3.48 and 3.69. Figure 13.1 describes 0.44% that indicated it had very negative effect, 2.19% indicated it had negative effect, 51.32% indicated it had no effect, 30.26% that indicated positive effect, and 15.79% indicated it had a very positive effect.

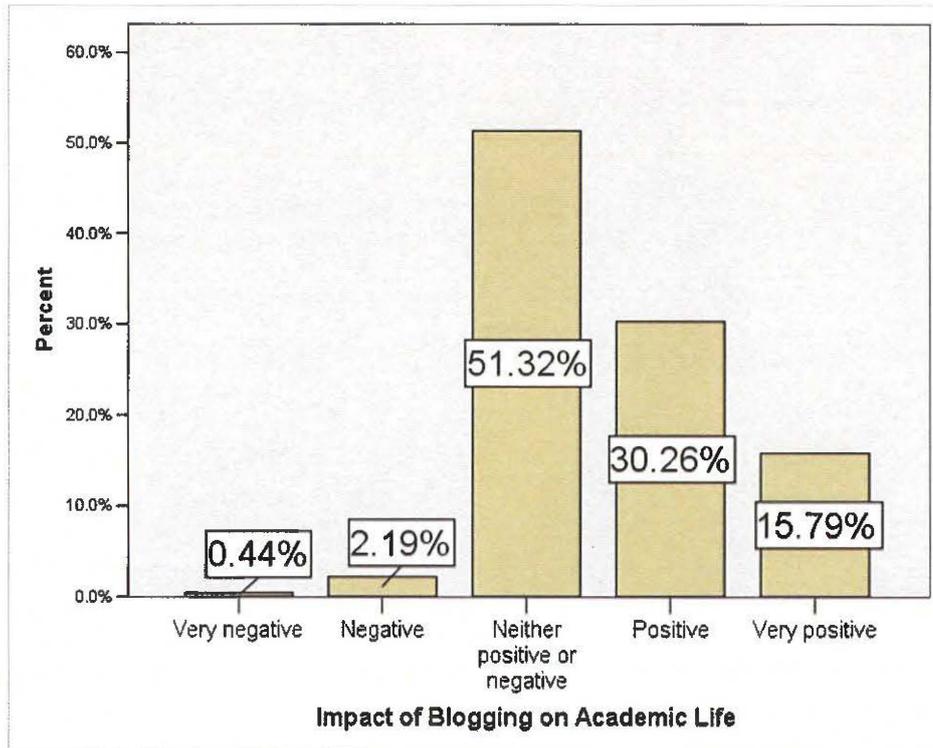


Figure 13.1 – Impact of blogging on academic life.

4.7.3 Professional

Bloggers were asked what impact blog writing had on their professional lives, the mean score of which was 3.79 (max = 5, n = 227) and the 95% confidence interval for the estimated mean difference was between 3.68 and 3.90. Figure 13.2 describes 0.88% indicated it had very negative effect, 2.64% indicated negative effect, 37% indicated it had no effect, 35.68% indicated it had positive effect, and 33.79% indicated it had very positive effect.

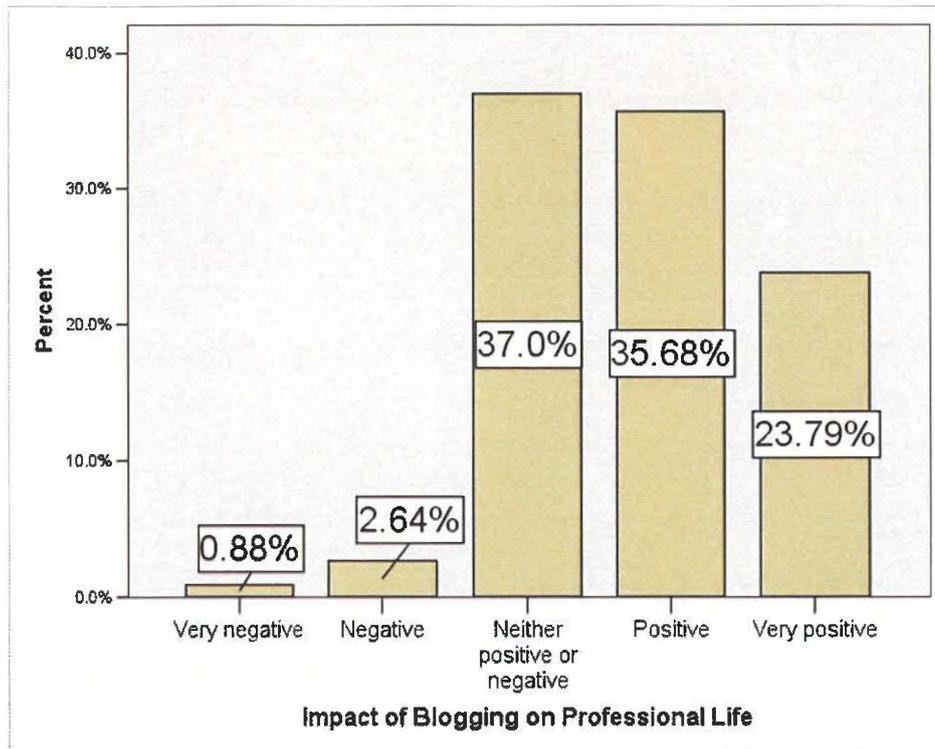


Figure 13.2 – Impact of blogging on professional life.

4.7.4 Negative Effects

Legal and Personal

Figure 14 describes 20% of Bloggers have experienced personal or legal issues because of their blogging.

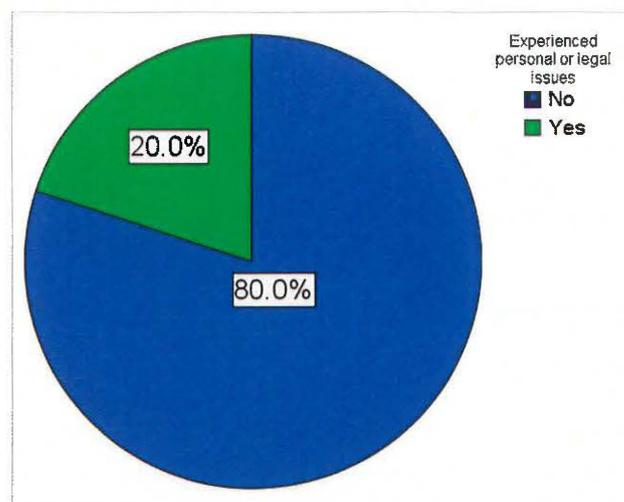


Figure 14 – Experienced personal or legal issues.

Figure 14.1 describes 17.39% of the issues experienced by bloggers were personal, 39.13% were related to flaming, 15.22% were in the form of legal threats, 19.57% were issues regarding

companies or organisations and 8.7% were other issues.

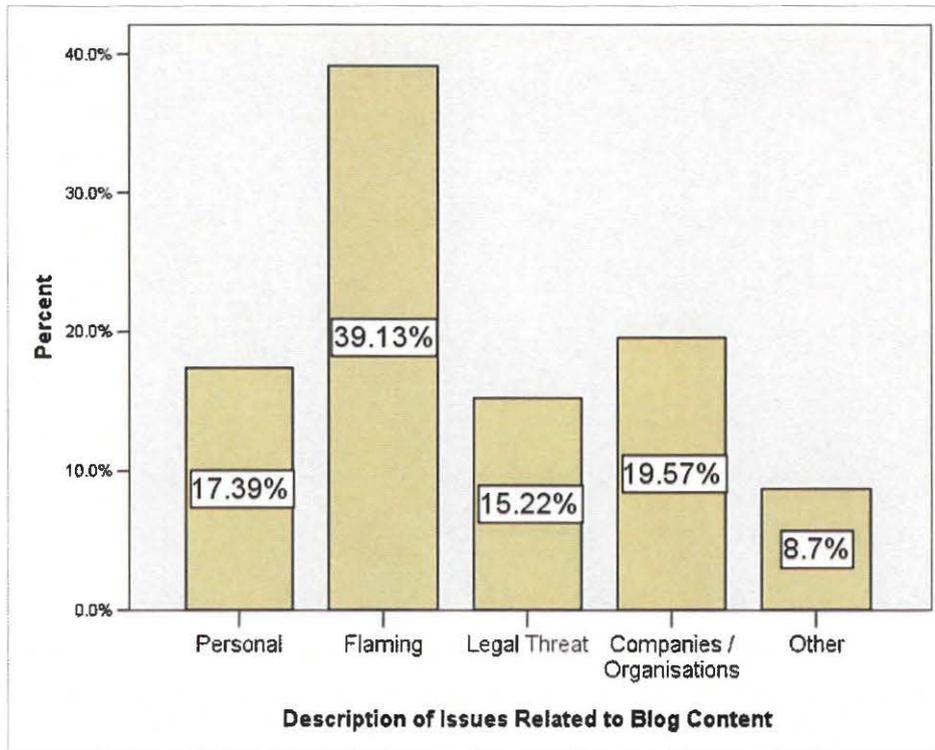


Figure 14.1 – Description of issues related to blog content.

Stolen Content

Figure 15 describes 10.92% of blogger have had their blog content illegitimately sourced by the traditional media. Figure 15.1 describes 29.17% of this content was photos or images, 58.33% was written content and 12.5% was other materials.

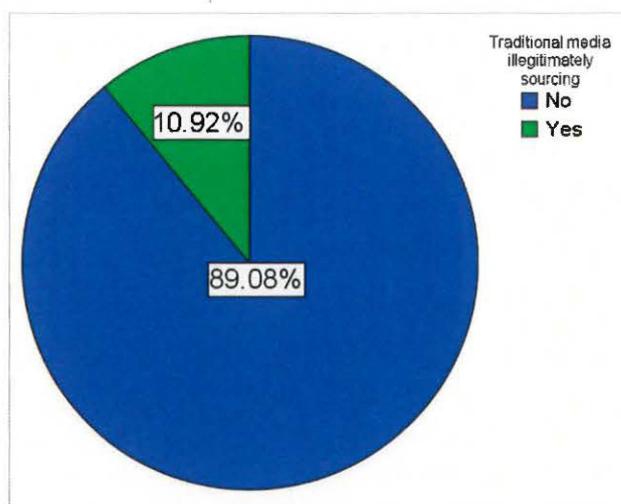


Figure 15 – Traditional media illegitimately sourcing.

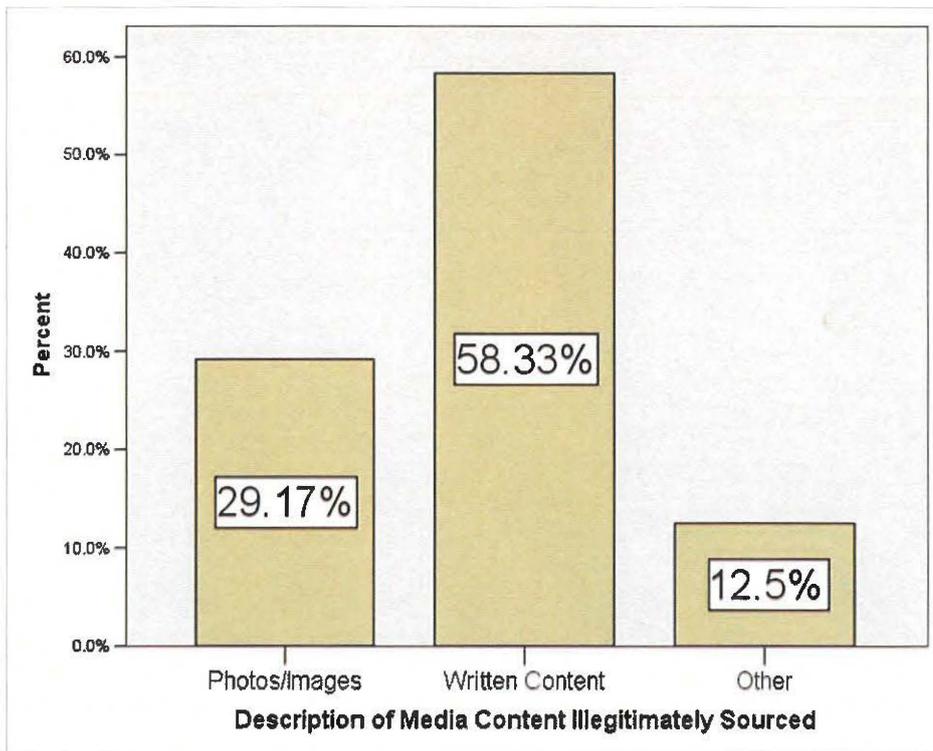


Figure 15.1 – Description of illegitimately sourced content.

Chapter 5. Discussion

5. Discussion

5.1 Aims and Hypotheses

This research focused on Irish bloggers and their Irish readers, the overall aim of which was to investigate a number of issues related directly to blogging including attitudes, perceptions and behaviours. The aims of this study were succeeded through 422 online questionnaire responses and a number of hypotheses explored based on the results.

The first hypothesis "*Irish bloggers have lower levels of concern with regard to issues of privacy and the persistent nature of the internet in comparison to non-blogging Irish internet users.*" sought to investigate if there was a positive correlation between blog writing and low levels of concern with regard to privacy online and the persistent nature of the internet. There was no significant difference found in levels of concern for privacy. However, there was a difference with regard to online permanence, out of a maximum score of 5 the non-bloggers scored a mean of 3.54 and the bloggers scored a slightly lower mean of 3.28. The difference between groups was found to be significant and thus the hypothesis was partially supported.

The second hypothesis " *Blogging has had a positive impact on the social lives of Irish Bloggers*" queried if blogging has had a positive impact on the lives of bloggers. Out of maximum score of 5, the mean rating for positive effect on social life was 3.745, indicating a slightly positive effect. Subsequent questions querying social activities as a by-product of blogging indicated that 81.3% had established online relationships (weak tie relationships), 62.07% had met individuals in real life and 28.45% had established strong tie relationships. Thus the hypothesis was supported.

The third hypothesis "*Non blogging Irish internet users rate blogs based in other countries as more credible as sources of information.*" inquired if Irish individuals that read blogs, but do not write a blog, rate blogs based in other countries as more credible as sources of information. Out of a maximum score of 20 the non-bloggers rated Irish blogs with a mean of 13.02 and non-Irish blogs with a slightly lower mean of 12.64. Therefore the hypothesis was not supported.

The fourth and final hypothesis "*Bloggers that use their real name will be more likely to cite professional reasons as their primary motivation for blogging.*" was interested in investigating if Irish bloggers that use their real name were more likely to cite professional reasons as their primary motivation for blogging. 77.7% of Bloggers who blog using their real name cited professional

reasons as their primary motivation for blogging, thus the hypothesis was supported.

5.2 Key Findings

5.2.1 Privacy & Permanence

It was assumed that the non-bloggers group would have higher levels of concern with regard to issues of online privacy and the persistent nature of the Internet, in comparison to the bloggers group. Under 49% of the overall sample indicated that they were concerned about issues of online privacy, and fewer than 17% said they were “very concerned”. Approx. 40% indicated they were concerned about the persistent nature of the Internet, and just under 12% said they were “very concerned”. Out of a maximum score of 5, the mean score for the non-blogger's rate of concern for online privacy was 3.69 and for the bloggers this was 3.64, indicating both groups were slightly concerned with issues of online privacy, and there was no significant difference found between scores. Both bloggers and non-bloggers were therefore found to have similar levels of concern about online privacy. With regard to online permanence the non-bloggers mean score was 3.54, but the bloggers scored slightly lower with a mean of 3.28, this difference between group scores was found to be significant. Bloggers are not overly concerned about their published materials remaining online indefinitely and these results are similar to those found by Viégas (2005).

5.2.2 Socialisation

It was assumed that blog writing had a positive effect on the social lives of Irish bloggers and out of maximum score of 5, the mean rating for positive effect on social life was 3.745, indicating a slightly positive effect. 35.5% of bloggers believed blogging had a positive effect on their social lives, with 19.9% saying it had a “very positive” effect. Less than 1% indicated that it had any negative effect, and less than 44% indicated that it had no effect. Additional questions revealed that blogging has had an especially positive effect on the development of weak tie relationships with 81.3% of bloggers indicating that they have made friends that they communicate with online because of blogging. However, strong tie relationships can and do initiate online and can successfully move offline (Whitty & Joinson, 2008) as demonstrated by the 28.45% of Irish bloggers who have developed close friendships because of their blogging, additionally 62.07% of Irish bloggers have met people in real life as a result of their blogging. Despite socialisation not being a popular primary motivation for blogging, it is seemingly a by-product of writing a blog. This suggests blogging has the potential to positively affect the social lives of bloggers, especially

with regard to weak ties which are psychologically (Ando & Sakamoto, 2008) and intellectually beneficial (Wellman & Gulia, 1999).

5.2.3 Credibility

Participants were asked to regard two categories of blog – Irish blogs and non-Irish blogs. They were then asked to consider them as a form of media and assign them a credibility rating, based on their believability, fairness, accuracy, and depth of information. It was assumed that non-bloggers would rate blogs based outside of Ireland as more credible than Irish blogs. However, out of a maximum score of 20 the non-bloggers rated Irish blogs with a mean score of 13.02 and non-Irish blogs with 12.64. The mean rating of the credibility of Irish blogs was actually slightly higher, though not significantly so. Neither the bloggers nor non-bloggers rated either category as significantly higher in credibility than the other. However, the bloggers did rate the credibility of both categories of blogs slightly higher than the non-bloggers did. Bloggers rated Irish blogs with a mean score of 14.01 and non-Irish blogs slightly lower at 13.38. A significant difference was found between the two groups, indicating that bloggers consider blogs as more credible as forms of media in comparison to the non-bloggers.

Incidentally, without a comparison to credibility scores of the traditional forms of Irish media this rating can only be used to compare the two categories investigated – Irish blogs and non-Irish blogs. However, in the Johnson, Kaye, Bichard, & Wong (2007) study on blog credibility participants rated blogs with a mean score of 12.2, suggesting the credibility of blogs as a form of media could be increasing, and in this study blog readers also rated traditional forms of media - all of which were rated lower than blogs for their credibility.

5.2.4 Online Identity

Out of a maximum score of 5 the non-bloggers rated the importance of knowing the identity of the blog author with a mean of 3.28 and the non-bloggers scored a mean of 3.25. Therefore, both bloggers and non-bloggers rate the importance of knowing the identity of the blog author as moderately important to them. It was assumed that bloggers that do use their real name with which to publish their blog would be more likely to cite professional reasons as their primary motivation for blogging and a majority, 77.7%, did cite professional reasons as their primary motivation for blogging. However, it was also found that bloggers who are motivated by personal reasons were overall quite unrepresented in the sample.

Over 60% of bloggers indicated that they used their real name online. Interestingly of the

approx. 40% that blog using a pseudonym, 23% of this group also blogged using their real name. This suggests that some bloggers are taking advantage of both the benefits of blogging as themselves and also anonymously somewhere else. However, over 90% of Irish bloggers did indicate that they do advertise on their blogs that they are Irish or that their blog originates from Ireland, thus 100% complete anonymity doesn't appear to appeal. This could indicate that anonymity is perceived as being achieved simply by using a pseudonym. However, 13% of bloggers indicated that they had at least once lied on their blog, with the majority describing maintaining their anonymity as the reason for doing so. Interestingly, bloggers whom used a pseudonym did not differ in their levels of concern for privacy or permanence online in comparison to those that blogged using their real name.

5.3 Additional Findings

5.3.1 Demographic Details

There has been a significant shift in the demographic profile of a prototypical Irish blogger, when compared to that made by Loftus in 2006. There are far more female bloggers, in the 2006 survey only 14% of respondents were female, in this study over 35% of respondents were female and over 50% of females surveyed were bloggers. Also, the age range was found to be far more diverse. Incidentally this research found that there was no relationship between gender, or age, and participation in writing a blog.

Although the majority of the sample had 10 years or more experience online, both bloggers and non-bloggers had very similar levels of experience – indicating that online experience is not a key indicator for participation in writing a blog, but is more likely to be an indicator of awareness of the medium. Correspondingly, computer skill levels were found to be similar in both bloggers and non-bloggers. It was found that Bloggers are no longer primarily based in the Information Technology sector (as was the case in 2006) with less than 30% of bloggers coming from IT, almost 17% coming from the Media sector, 9% from the Education sector, and the remaining 56% coming from a variety of different areas e.g. Retail, Government, and Arts/Design etc. Additionally only 20% of the non-bloggers were based in IT. This suggests that exposure to the medium is not reliant on an individual being involved with IT.

5.3.2 Perceptions

This particular sample displayed high readership levels of blogs, with over 60% indicating that they

read them more than once a day, and over 16% once a day. Bloggers did of course have a significantly higher frequency of reading than the non-bloggers. Over 72% of bloggers are reading blogs more than once a day and 44% of non-bloggers same. The non-bloggers were more likely to read them once a day or a few times per week or month. Approximately 50% of both groups said that they read a mixture of both Irish and non-Irish blogs, and approx. 35% said that they primarily read Irish blogs. Both the bloggers and non-bloggers indicated that they believed that blogging was more popular in other countries, and both groups thought that the medium was popular, but not “very popular” worldwide.

5.3.3 Attitudes & Behaviour

The majority of both bloggers and non-bloggers indicated that they had at least once attempted to double check information found on both Irish and non-Irish blogs, with only approx. 15% having never done this. This doesn't necessarily indicate low levels of trust in the medium, but does perhaps point toward an awareness of the fact that blog publishing is unregulated. However, over 86% of the bloggers indicated that they actively attempt to verify information before posting it on their blog, and 87% indicated that they had never published a lie on their blog. Of the small number of bloggers that had posted a lie, the majority done so to either to maintain their anonymity or for the purposes of fiction/satire or to embellish a story.

A large majority of both the bloggers and non-bloggers believed it was possible for legal action to be taken against a blogger because of what they had published online. When queried about how liable bloggers considered themselves for content posted to their blogs, by both themselves and users who left comments, only approx 7% thought they were not liable, over 36% said they were only slightly liable and 56% believed that they were completely liable. Correspondently, less than 3% of Irish bloggers have faced legal threats because of content they've posted online, and less than 4% have had take-down requests from companies or organisations.

5.3.4 The Blogosphere

Over 65% of bloggers indicated that they were listed on an Irish planet aggregator, and almost 64% consider themselves a member of the Irish blogosphere. The remaining bloggers indicated that they were not listed and did not consider themselves part of the Irish blogosphere. This highlights the 35% of bloggers unconnected from the Irish blogosphere, this could suggest that the approximate number of Irish bloggers is incorrect and that there could be between 1,000 and 1,400 more Irish people writing blogs. Of course, being a part of the Irish blogosphere doesn't necessarily mean that

this is the blogosphere that bloggers most identified with i.e. commonality with other members. Almost 62% of bloggers described their blogosphere most identified with as being based around their personal interests, whereas only approx. 15% said it was a geographical blogosphere they most identified with. Almost 8% indicated that their blogosphere was one based around social groups and friendships and almost 12% said that they did not identify with any blogosphere at all.

5.3.5 Motivations

Almost 47% of bloggers listed “To articulate ideas through writing” as their primary motivation for blogging, and almost 22% chose “To provide commentary and opinions”. This suggests that the major appeals of blogging to Irish users are: the process of improving their writing skills and self expression through sharing their points of view. These two most popular motivations were categorised as professionally orientated, distinguishing them from personally orientated motivations such as “To document my life” and “To express deeply felt emotions” - self documenting motivations often highly associated with blogging and bloggers. Over 78% of Irish bloggers indicated professionally orientated motivations for blogging. Only approx. 22% of Irish bloggers listed personally orientated motivations as their primary motivation for blogging, suggesting Irish bloggers are far more interested in writing and publishing, rather than discussing their personal lives and self expression through sharing emotions.

However, although only approx. 6% of bloggers indicated that socialising was a primary motivation, almost 44% listed it as an additional motivation. The other motivations in the personal category were not as popular as additional motivations, with less than 25% indicating that documenting their life was in any way motivational, and less than 17% indicating that the ability to express emotion was any kind of motivation for blogging. Less than 2% of bloggers indicated that knowledge sharing was a primary motivation, however almost 53% listed it as an additional motivation. Approx. 8% of bloggers chose self promotion as a primary motivation and over 31% listed this medium appeal as an additional motivation.

5.3.6 Positive Effects of Blogging

Less than 3% of bloggers indicated that blogging had any negative effects upon their academic or professional lives. Over 50% said it had no effect on academic, however over 30% said it had a positive effect and over 15% said it had a “very positive” effect. 37% said it had no effect on their professional lives, however over 34% indicated it had a positive effect, and over 33% said it had a “very positive” effect. The positive social effects discussed above, combined with the academic and

professional positive effects of blogging suggest that blogging can increase social capital, and Irish bloggers are clearly benefiting from this.

5.3.7 Negative Experiences

20% of Irish bloggers have experienced minor personal or minor legal issues because of their blogging. The majority of the personal issues were related to flaming, with almost 40% of this group having experienced this at some point during their blogging. 18% of this group have experienced personal disagreements, approx. 15% have had legal threats and almost 20% have had issues with regard to companies or organisations, usually in the form of take-down requests. However, overall less than 3% of Irish bloggers have faced legal threats and less than 4% have had take-down requests, just fewer than 8% have experienced flaming and under 4% have had personal issues arise. These results differ slightly from the Viégas (2005) study that found that more than 35% of bloggers reported getting into some kind of trouble as a result of their blogging.

Almost 52% of Irish bloggers consider their blogging as a form of journalism, with over 58% of this group blogging using the real name. However, over 10% of bloggers described incidents where content was illegitimately sourced from their blogs by the traditional media. Over 58% of this content was written work and almost 30% was in the form of either photographs or photo-shopped images. Despite this, only approx. 38% of bloggers indicated that they were concerned about the possible misuse of information published on their blogs, and only 10% were “very concerned”.

5.4 Strengths of the Present Study

Though the study was interested predominately in quantitative data, the online survey was designed to be flexible to allow for qualitative input which was then coded for quantitative analysis. This brought forward information the researcher initially may not have considered to query, for example the rates of blogging both with a pseudonym as well as with a real name. In addition, the self report questionnaire design differentiates this study from the numerous content analysis studies on blogs where motivations etc., are categorized by coders rather than self-reported by the bloggers themselves. The major strength of this study lies in the large sample size ($n = 422$) generated.

5.4.1 Internet Research Methods

Initially 557 participants commenced the online survey. However, respondents under the age of 18

or identified as non-Irish or not living in Ireland, or those who did not at least 95% complete the questionnaire were deleted from the dataset, leaving 422 participants. This relatively high response rate was related to a number of contributing factors:

- There was a moderate incentive (entry to a prize draw) for participation. There was also a secondary incentive (another prize draw) for the participants that forwarded or re-published a link to the survey. Consequently approximately 50 participants published a link to the survey on their own blog or on the micro-blogging service Twitter – this highlights the benefits of using modern tools of online communication to locate and interact with possible research participants.
- Participants were notified that the completed research document would be widely and freely available online and were given the option of submitting their email address to a mailing list, so they would be notified when the documents were available.
- There was a strong privacy policy, and anonymity/confidentiality was both ensured and highlighted. This was achieved by notifying the participants that their IP addresses were not being recorded, and providing a separate form, unrelated to the survey, where they could input their email address for either prize draw entry or to sign up to the mailing list.
- The intended audience was directly targeted and interacted with through a wide variety of online activities. This included Irish message-boards, Irish blogs and the micro-blogging service Twitter.
- The questionnaire design itself was rigorous. Members of the Irish blogging community were consulted during the process and a pilot study was conducted with both of the intended participant groups, with feedback being utilised to and changes made to the questionnaire.
- The usability of the actual online survey system was taken into account, a variety of input methods (radio buttons, drop down menus, text input boxes etc.) were employed to ensure the user would complete the survey rather than become disinterested and exit early. In some questions users were given the option to enter as much or as little information as they wanted, thus providing both quantitative and qualitative data and providing flexibility within the questionnaire itself.

5.5 Limitations of the Present Study

Though the research questionnaire was twice piloted and past research regarding blogging was employed to guide its creation, its overall validity and reliability could be questioned having never been applied to a large sample group, previous to this particular study. A number of the

questionnaire responses were optional as open-ended questions and though care was taken to interpret this qualitative data and code it for quantitative analysis, as with all qualitative data it can be misinterpreted. However, based on the qualitative data gathered the survey could be improved upon for a future study.

Cluster sampling was applied to gather participants and a snowball technique was employed that allowed respondents to forward the survey, these techniques are often used to generate results that are representative of a subset of user and are not necessarily representative of the larger population. While random sampling would have been ideal, the Internet does not offer tools for random sampling of the entire population, or for Irish users in particular, thus non-probability sampling is an appropriate technique for posting an online survey.

Research has shown that gender is no longer a major differentiator with regards to internet usage in Ireland (Amarach, 2008). However over two thirds of the overall sample surveyed were male. This could suggest that more males than females are interacting with the medium, or possibly that there is more awareness of the medium in males. The overall sample were also highly educated with over 50% having completed third level and over 20% having completed a post graduate program. However, this could be attributed to the social class divide, with 90% of those in the higher socio-economic classes using the web compared with 25% of those in lower socio-economic classes (Amarach, 2008). An examination of awareness and perceptions of the medium in a broader group of Internet users may have been beneficial to draw additional conclusions.

5.6 Practical Implications of the Present Study

This research is the first to investigating the psychological areas of interest surrounding blogging applied to an Irish audience, and is the first in-depth study of Irish blog authors; additionally it is the first study of Irish blog readers. The results constitute an additional step toward understanding Irish bloggers, and suggests only slight differences between those who blog and those who read blogs but do not blog themselves. Based on the results gathered additional studies with regard to any cultural differences between Irish bloggers and international ones could be ascertained.

5.7 Theoretical Implications of the Present Study

The category of blog with which the author writes was not a variable investigated; instead motivations for writing were considered a more important indicator as to why bloggers actually write blogs. Most previous research with regard to blogging has focused on the concept of “personal blogs” often comparing them to keeping a journal or diary (Baker & Moore, 2008).

However, this research found that bloggers were not driven by personally orientated motivations to blog. Also, the concept of “personal blogs” by bloggers is dissimilar to the one assigned by researchers for example, personal blogs are described as “blog about topics of personal interest not associated with your work” (Technorati.com, 2008; p2). This differs from the traditional concepts of personal blogs having characteristics in common with conventional diaries and that they are actually much more topical in nature. This suggests that researchers should perhaps consider motivations over categorisation as a way to investigate blogging behaviour.

5.8 Suggestions for Future Research

In the current research, country was a distinguishing element of the research, a similar study applied to an international participant group would be interesting to investigate any differences between Irish internet users and the larger online population. A detailed case study is needed to determine the sources of online behaviours, such as the initial reasons for wanting to write a blog or not wanting to write a blog. Cultural variables such as individualism vs. collectivism may impact online behaviours and should be accounted for (Hofstede, 1984). An additional study with an equal gender participant group would be interesting to draw tangible comparisons of motivations and an examination of awareness and perceptions of the medium in a broader group of Internet users would be beneficial. Non-bloggers rated blogs as slightly less credible than the bloggers did, this could suggest that a higher level of interaction with the medium increases perceptions of its credibility. However, a longitudinal study would reveal if this was the case, or if those whom perceive it as more credible are more likely to start a blog. With almost 52% of Irish bloggers considering their blogging as a form of journalism; it would be interesting to query Irish perceptions of the credibility of traditional forms of Irish media in order to compare them to Irish blogs.

5.9 General Conclusion

The overall aims of this research were accomplished and a number of interesting observations were made about Irish bloggers and non-blogging Irish internet users that read blogs. This research found that in comparison to 2006 there are far more female bloggers and that the majority of bloggers are no longer based within the IT industry. Non-Bloggers were found to be more concerned about the persistent nature of the Internet than Bloggers, but both had similar concern for issues of online privacy. Results found that Irish internet users have no preference for reading blogs based outside of Ireland and that the majority read a mixture of both Irish and international blogs, and did not rate either as more credible than the other. It was found that Irish internet users do not perceive it as

highly important to know the identity of a blog author, but that over 60% of Irish bloggers publish online using their real name. The primary motivation for Irish bloggers is the ability to articulate their ideas through writing and almost 52% consider their blogging as a form of journalism. The majority of Bloggers indicated that they have never lied on their blogs and that they actively attempt to verify information before posting an article. It was found that 35% of Irish bloggers do not feel connected to the Irish blogosphere, and that the most common blogosphere identified with was based around the author's interests rather than geography. Most importantly, it was found that the impact of blogging on blogger's lives was in no way negative and very positive in some respects.

This research is the first to investigate the psychological areas of interest surrounding blogging applied to an Irish audience, and though estimates have suggested only 1% of the Irish online population are blogging, this is steadily increasing. 35% of the Non-Bloggers surveyed indicated they had plans to blog in the future and blogging is definitely becoming increasingly more popular in Ireland, as demonstrated by the 40% increase in blogs registered at Irishblogs.ie between July 2008 and February 2009. An increase in blogging in Ireland would be welcome due to its predominantly positive effects, such as increasing our shared intellectual capital, and, as this research indicates, blogging can in fact increase social capital too. Furthermore, most previous research with regard to blogging has focused on personal journal style blogging, and it could be assumed that bloggers who are motivated by personal reasons were unrepresented in the sample that participated in this research. However, this could also suggest that Irish bloggers are actually less inclined to write what is considered a traditional form of blog – the diary style journal. This could indicate a cultural difference between Irish and non-Irish bloggers, or, a categorisation issue with regard to previous blog research.

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Appendices

Appendix A

1. Introduction - Consent Form

This survey will assess the attitudes and behaviour of Irish bloggers and Irish blog readers. It is being carried out by Sinéad Cochrane of Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Ireland.

The survey takes approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. The majority of the questions are multiple choice and for any of the text-entry based questions you can write as little or as much as you like.

There are no right or wrong answers. The best answer to choose is the one that you most identify with.

Answer honestly. As much as possible, avoid the temptation to choose answers simply because they sound most desirable. Your anonymity is guaranteed and your IP address will not be stored.

This survey is voluntary and you are free to skip a question or leave the survey at any point if you wish. Data gathered in the study will be anonymous, confidential and for research purposes only. The findings of the research may be published online and in the form of journal articles and conference proceedings in print, but your individual data will not be identifiable in any of the published accounts. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

If you are 18 or over, understand the statements above and freely consent to participate in this study then click on the "I agree to take part in the study" button to begin the study.

I have read and understand the information provided by the researcher. I hereby acknowledge the above information and give my voluntary consent to participate in this study. I understand that I may revoke my consent from the study at any time.

- I agree to take part in the study.
- I do not agree to take part in the study.

2. Demographic Information

1. Please enter the name of the Irish county you are from, or living in.
2. Are you male or female?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
3. What age are you?
4. Please describe the level of education you have reached e.g. completed leaving certificate, studying at third level, etc.,
5. Please describe the sector you are currently working in e.g. education, health etc., or if you are a student please indicate the course you are attending, or if you are currently not working please describe the sector you last worked in.
6. How many years have you been using the Internet for?
7. How would you describe your level of computer skill?
 - a. Beginner
 - b. Intermediate
 - c. Advanced

3. All about blogs (distributed to both groups)

1. How often do you read blogs?
 - a. More than once a day.
 - b. Once a day.
 - c. A few times a week.
 - d. Once a week.
 - e. A few times a month.
 - f. Once a month.
 - g. A few times a year.
 - h. Once a year.
 - i. Never
2. Where are the majority of the blogs that you read based?
 - a. Ireland
 - b. Other countries.
 - c. A mixture of both.
 - d. Do not know.
3. When considering blogs as a form of media, on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being the lowest, and 5 being the highest) how highly would you rate Irish blogs for the following qualities:
 - a. Believability 1 2 3 4 5
 - b. Fairness 1 2 3 4 5
 - c. Accuracy 1 2 3 4 5
 - d. Depth of information 1 2 3 4 5
4. When considering blogs as a form of media, on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being the lowest, and 5 being the highest) how highly would you rate blogs based outside of Ireland for the following qualities:
 - a. Believability 1 2 3 4 5
 - b. Fairness 1 2 3 4 5
 - c. Accuracy 1 2 3 4 5
 - d. Depth of information 1 2 3 4 5
5. How important is it to you to know the identity/name of the blog author when reading a blog?
 - a. Very unimportant
 - b. Not important
 - c. Neither important or unimportant

- d. Important
 - e. Very Important
6. How concerned are you with issues of privacy online?
- a. Very unconcerned
 - b. Unconcerned
 - c. Neither concerned or unconcerned
 - d. Concerned
 - e. Very concerned
7. How concerned are you with the persistent nature of the Internet? (E.g. Any information you put online being available online, in one way or another, indefinitely.)
- a. Very unconcerned
 - b. Unconcerned
 - c. Neither concerned or unconcerned
 - d. Concerned
 - e. Very concerned
8. Do you think it is possible for legal action to be taken because of what a blogger has published online?
9. Have you ever attempted to double check information that you have read on...
- a. An Irish blog
 - i. Yes
 - ii. No
 - b. A non-Irish blog
 - i. Yes
 - ii. No
10. How popular do you rate blogging...
- a. In Ireland:
 - i. Very Unpopular
 - ii. Unpopular
 - iii. Neither popular or unpopular
 - iv. Popular
 - v. Very Popular
 - b. In other countries:
 - i. Very Unpopular
 - ii. Unpopular
 - iii. Neither popular or unpopular

iv. Popular

v. Very Popular

11. Do you currently write a blog?

a. Yes

b. No

4. Blog Writers

1. Do you identify your blog as originating from Ireland (or that you are Irish)?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. Are you listed on an Irish blogs aggregator such as Irishblogs.ie?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
3. Can you give a brief description of the blogosphere (the community of blogs and bloggers) you most identify with online (if any)?
4. Would you consider yourself a member of the Irish blogosphere?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
5. As a result of your blogging have you made friends that you communicate with online but have never met in person?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
6. Have you ever met anyone in real life that you know because of your blogging?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
7. As a result of your blogging have you made any friends that you would consider "close friends"?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
8. What impact has blog writing had on your social, academic and professional life?
 - a. Social
 - i. Very negative
 - ii. Negative
 - iii. Neither positive or negative
 - iv. Positive
 - v. Very positive
 - b. Academic
 - i. Very negative
 - ii. Negative
 - iii. Neither positive or negative

- iv. Positive
 - v. Very positive
- c. Professional
- i. Very negative
 - ii. Negative
 - iii. Neither positive or negative
 - iv. Positive
 - v. Very positive
9. What is your primary motivation for blogging? What is the number one reason why you blog?
- a. To document my life
 - b. To provide commentary and opinions
 - c. To share my knowledge and experience
 - d. To express deeply felt emotions
 - e. To articulate ideas through writing
 - f. To promote myself online
 - g. To meet and connect with likeminded people
 - h. Other (please enter one reason, only)
10. What are your other motivations for blogging? You may choose more than one answer from the list below.
- a. To document my life
 - b. To provide commentary and opinions
 - c. To share my knowledge and experience
 - d. To express deeply felt emotions
 - e. To articulate ideas through writing
 - f. To promote myself online
 - g. To meet and connect with likeminded people
 - h. Other (please specify)
11. How liable (responsible) do you rate yourself for the content posted on your blog? This includes your own blog posts and comments left by your readers.
- a. Not at all Liable
 - b. Slightly Liable
 - c. Completely Liable
12. How concerned are you with misuse of the information contained on your blog? e.g. your content being republished without your permission etc.,

- a. Very unconcerned
 - b. Unconcerned
 - c. Neither concerned or unconcerned
 - d. Concerned
 - e. Very concerned
13. Would you consider your blog writing a form of journalism?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
14. Do you blog under a pseudonym (fake name) or do you use your real name? Please briefly describe why.
15. Do you actively attempt to verify information before posting it on your blog?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
16. Have you ever lied on your blog?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. It's complicated (please specify)
17. Have you ever gotten into any trouble over content posted on your blog? For example has legal action ever been threatened, or has a disagreement become personal.
- a. No
 - b. If the answer is yes, please briefly describe the incident.
18. Has content from your blog ever been illegitimately sourced by the traditional media? (This could include anything e.g. photos, ideas etc.,).
- a. No
 - b. If the answer is yes, please briefly describe the incident:

5. Blog Readers

1. Have you ever blogged in the past and stopped?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. Are you planning on starting a blog in the future?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

6. Debrief – No Consent Given

Dear Participant,

You have been taken to this page as you have not agreed to participate in this study, the aim of which is to investigate Irish attitudes and behaviour regarding blogging. If you have any questions about this study please feel free to contact the researchers at the contact details below.

A copy of the research project will be available upon request at the end of March, 2009.

Yours sincerely,

Sinéad Cochrane.

Primary Researcher: Sinéad Cochrane

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Website: sineadcochrane.com

Phone: 087 9392962

Supervisor: Hannah Barton

Email: hannah.barton@iadt.ie

Website: IADT.ie

Phone: 01 2144756

6. Debrief Form – Survey Complete

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study, the aim of which is to investigate Irish attitudes and behaviour regarding blogging. If you have any questions about this study or your involvement in it, please feel free to contact the researchers at the contact details below. The researchers would like to ensure you that your involvement in this study is strictly confidential and anonymity is guaranteed. It is also still possible to withdraw your consent for participating in this study and to have the data you have provided destroyed. If you have any hesitations please contact the researchers. A copy of the research project will be available upon request at the end of March, 2009. Once again, thank you for participating in this study.

Yours sincerely,

Sinéad Cochrane.

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Supervisor: Hannah Barton

Email: hannah.barton@iadt.ie

Website: IADT.ie

Phone: 01 2144756

As reward for filling out this survey you can enter a prize draw for either a €50 Amazon voucher or a €50 Ticketmaster voucher - if you win, you can choose either prize. To ensure that your email address is not associated with your survey answers, please input your email address on the separate form, which can be found here.

Appendix B

1. Supplementary Demographic Information

1.1 Online Experience

Table A describes the participants' years experience online which ranged from 1 to 22 years, the mean was 11.42 years (sd = 3.183). In the Non-Bloggers group the mean was 11.10 years (sd = 3.187), in the Bloggers group it was 11.65 years (sd = 3.166). An independent t-test showed that difference between groups and number of years online was not significant ($t = -1.1746$, $df = 420$, $p = 0.082$).

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Non-Blogger	11.10	178	3.187	1	20
Blogger	11.65	244	3.166	2	22
Total	11.42	422	3.183	1	22

Table A – Years of experience online.

1.2 Level of Computer Skill

Table B and Figure A describe the level of computer skill of participants, broken down into each group. 1.7% of Non-Bloggers were beginners ($n=3$), 39.9% were intermediate users ($n=71$), and 58.4% were advanced users ($n=104$). .9% of Bloggers were beginners ($n=1$) 36.6% were intermediate ($n=82$) and 66% were advanced ($n=161$). A Pearson's chi-square found that there was no relationship found between level of computer skill and writing a blog: ($n = 422$) = 3.822, exact $p = 0.146$. The analysis showed that 2 cells had expected count less than 5, so an exact significance test was selected for Pearson's chi-square.

	Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced	Total
Non-Blogger	3	3	104	178
%	1.7%	1.7%	58.4%	100%
Non-Blogger	1	82	61	178
%	.4%	33.6%	66.0%	100%
Non-Blogger	4	153	265	422
%	.9%	36.3%	62.8%	100%

Table B – Level of computer skill across groups.

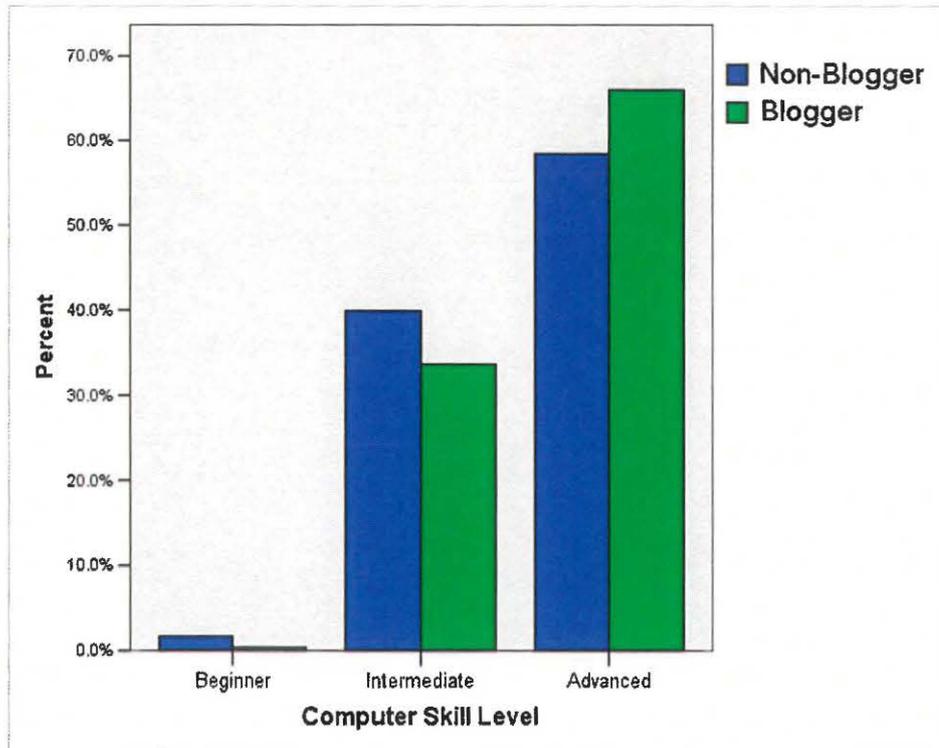


Figure A – Level of Computer Skill, across groups.

1.3 Education

The highest level of education of the overall participant group was, .5% reached junior certificate, 10.4% reached leaving certificate, 7.8% were attending third level, 47.4% had completed third level, 21.6% were attending a post-graduate course, 1.9% were PhD students, 2.4% had completed a PhD and 5.5% had obtained another qualification. Figure B describes the highest level of education reached across groups.

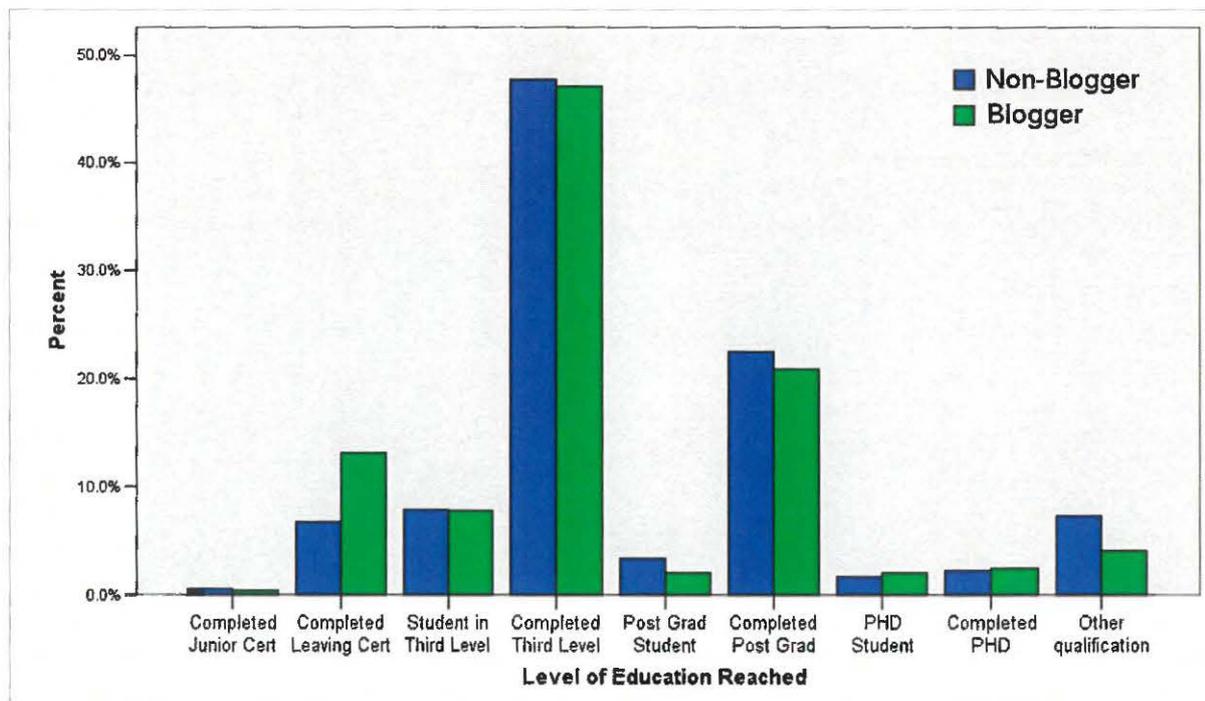


Figure B – Education in Non-Bloggers and Bloggers.

6.7% of Non-Bloggers and 13.1% of Bloggers reached leaving certificate. 7.9% of Non-Bloggers and 7.8% of Bloggers were third level students. 47.8% of Non-Bloggers and 47.1% of Bloggers had completed third level. 3.4% of Non-Bloggers and 2.0% of Bloggers were post graduate students. 22.5% of Non-Bloggers and 20.9% of Bloggers had completed a post graduate program. 1.7% of Non-Bloggers and 2.0% of Bloggers were PhD students. 2.2% of Non-Bloggers were and 2.5% of Bloggers had completed a PhD. 7.3% of Non-Bloggers and 4.1% of Bloggers had another qualification.

1.4 Industry

26% of the overall participants that were involved in the Information Technology industry, 9.5% in Education, 3.8% in Retail, 12.3% in Media, 3.3% in Finance, 6.2% in Government, 3.1% in Healthcare, 4.5% in Arts/Design and 31.04% in Other (administration, advertising, business, construction, environmental, law, manufacturing, marketing, non-profit, public relations, recruitment and telecoms). Figure C describes industry across groups. 21.9% of Non-Bloggers and 29.5% of Bloggers were involved in the Information Technology industry. 10.1% of Non-Bloggers and 9.0% of Bloggers were involved in Education. 6.7% of Non-Bloggers and 16.4% of Bloggers were in Media.

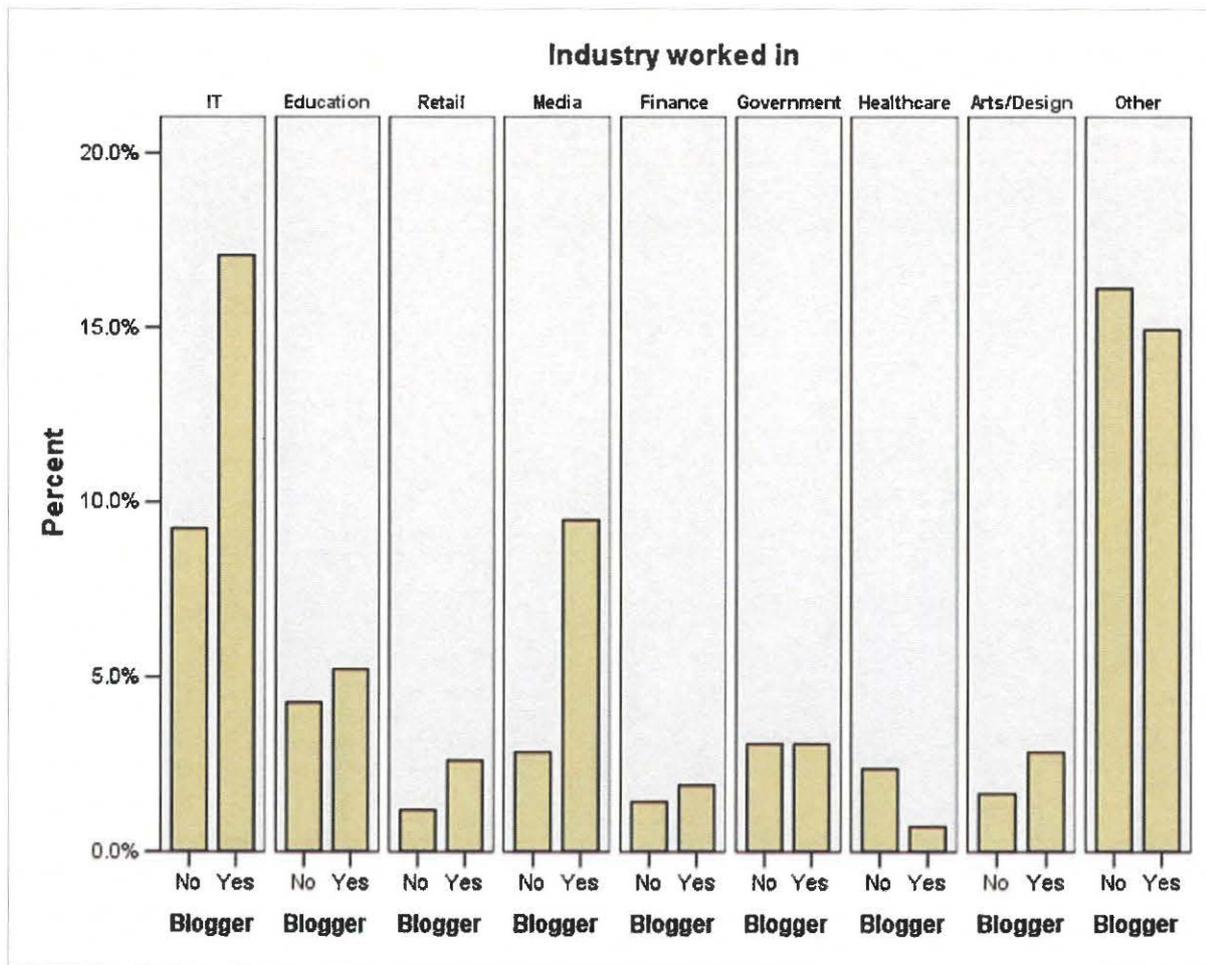


Figure C – Industry worked (or studied) across groups.