HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS' LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY OF BLOG USE

by

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ABSTRACT

In the 21st century, higher education is under increasing pressure to take advantage of new technologies. Recently, the blog has emerged as an online publishing tool increasingly being used by students and staff within education for communicating and sharing information. Since 2002, although a growing number of studies have been conducted into this phenomenon, there is an urgent need for further research in this area, particularly from the students' point of view, to conceptualise the new generation web-based learning and sharing. This research study therefore is not about blog technology itself but to explore the nature of blogging, and how blogging and reading blogs would facilitate individual learning and knowledge sharing practice in a network environment.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher adopted a user-oriented, process-based, exploratory and grounded theory study. In particular, the research questions were developed over the conceptualisation process by using theoretical sampling, in-depth interviewing, and three-step coding, constant comparison data analysis methods to generate a theory towards interpreting the studied phenomenon. Forty eight higher education students who had blog use experience were interviewed.

The emerged theory is illuminated by interpreting key findings about what elements (drives), how (contextual conditions, strategies), and why (consequences) students use blogs. It sheds light on the role of experiential learning theory and narcissism theory in this field and adds to our understanding of the ways in which learning is conceptualised, tacit knowledge can be made explicit, communicated and shared within different contexts of using blogs (e.g., self-therapy, interpersonal skills development, and intellectual abilities development). Furthermore, this thesis summarises the implications and limitations of the study, and suggests some further work. It provides an important step towards providing educators and educational organisations with real data that defines good practice in the use of blog technology.

I dedicate this thesis to my affectionate parents who ever provide love, understanding, support, and inspiration.

谨以此文献给我亲爱的父母.感谢您们无尽的爱,支持和理解.

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I also owe many thanks to the participants who had voluntarily shared their experiences and perspectives with me in the interviews for this study.

Many people have contributed in diverse ways to my studies that lead to the completion of this work, including the staff and colleagues in the Department of Information Studies, given their time to listen my puzzles, shared their experience, reviewed my writing and provided significant suggestions. I must mention the following people in particular: Dr Andrew Cox, Dr Andrew Madden, Dr Genevieve Gorrell, Peter Stordy, Dr Yazdan Mansourian, and Dr Zapopan Muela Meza whose questions have helped to clarify many of the issues in this research study. Also, Nora Agustero, Phussadee Dokphrom, Nipon Parinyavuttichai, Lucia Li, Alex Peng, Nick Zhou, Innam Idrees, Maram Alajamy, Maryam Nazari, and Salim AI-Mamari, who inspired my ideas when we talked, laughed, had meals, exchanged views and culture in the common room and the office 224.

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Please accept my gratitude, now and always.

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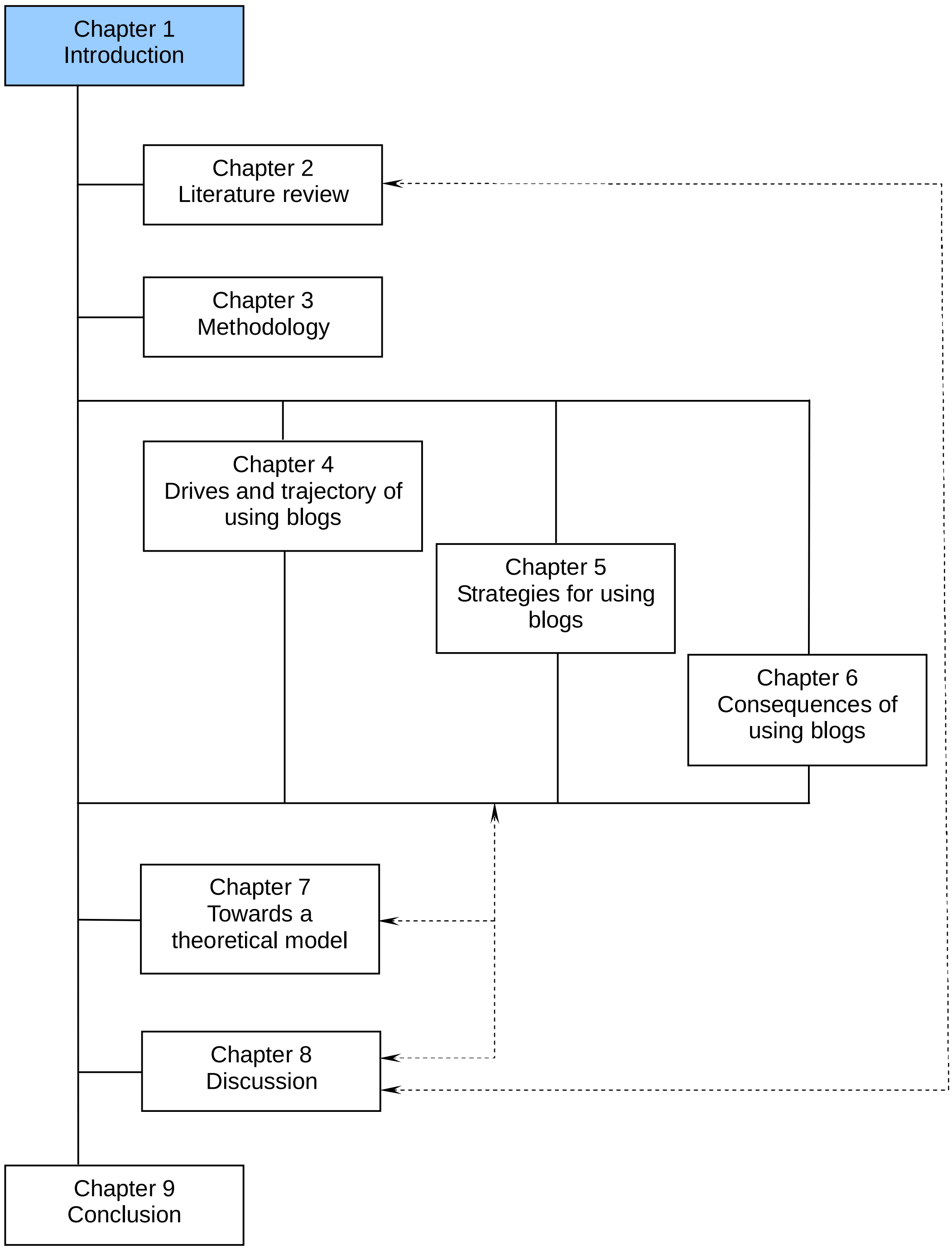
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BBS	Bulletin Board System
CAQDAS	Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software
CiCS	The Corporate Information and Computing Services
CMC	Computer mediated communication
ELT	Experiential learning theory
GT	Grounded theory
HE	Higher education
HTML	HyperText Markup Language
ICTs	Information communication technologies
IP address	Internet Protocol address
IT	Information technology
LIS	Library and Information Science
KM	Knowledge management
QDA	Qualitative data analysis
RSS	Really Simple Syndication or Rich Site Summary
SECI	Four modes of knowledge conversion: Socialisation, Externalisation, Combination, and Internalisation
S-R	Stimulus-Response
URL	Uniform Resource Locator
XML	Extensible Markup Language



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step." – Lao-tzu (604BC-531BC)

1.1 Introduction

This thesis presents a detailed research study into the nature of higher education (HE) students' learning and sharing in a social network environment by exploring their blog using behaviours and the role of blogs in facilitating their knowledge transfer and informal learning at an individual level. This thesis indicates the purpose of the study, the research questions, the methodology adopted and its actual implementing procedure. With illustrating the conditions, strategies and consequences of the observed phenomenon, it shows the conceptualisation process of a substantive theory, which explains the usage of blogs in facilitating HE students' learning and sharing as well as its implications for better understanding students' behaviours of using online information and improving HE.

This chapter seeks to give an account of the research ideas and the nature of the thesis. It briefly reviews the research conducted in recent decades on patterns in students' learning, mostly in HE, to address the focus and importance of the study. Moreover, it clarifies the terminology that will be used in this thesis. More specifically, it provides a framework to elaborate the process of the empirical research leading to an emergent theory with developed stage research questions. This chapter ends with a description of the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Background to study

With the rapid information technological revolution, HE is under increasing pressure to take advantage of it. The past decades have seen the growing body of literature on developing HE by investigating new technology applications, from computer mediated communication (CMC), distance learning, e-learning, virtual learning to learning content management, social software, current Web 2.0 and Learning 2.0. Educators have been seeking to use diverse ways to value, not only the intellect of the learner, but as a whole person.

It is noteworthy that since 1999, "weblog", "blog" for short, as "a kind of web-based system that uses a variety of tools to facilitate self-description and interaction with others" (Miura and Yamashita, 2007: 1453), is increasing by double its size about every 5-6 months, according to an investigation by David Sifry (the founder and CEO of Technorati) (2005; 2006). Its rapid usage thereby becomes one of the growing areas of interest in recent educational research and theory, in particular, about the two layers of information on blogs: content and relationships.

On one hand, an increasingly body of evidence indicates the blog usage in HE positively. For example, Brooks-Young (2005) stated that blogs bridge the communication gap in cyberspace by suggesting a four-step approach for teachers to use blogs in class; Clyde (2005: 44) concluded that “blogging provides students with a venue to publish online for an audience and to engage in collaborative activities (if the weblog is set up as a group blog)”; through investigating a pedagogical application, a blog-based dynamic learning map, Wang et al. (2008) laid stress on using blogs for problem-based learning. They mentioned that blogs “lead learners to gain useful supplementary materials, shorten the learning time and offering expanded alternative viewpoints to use in the solution of assigned problems” (Wang *et al.*, 2008: 1). Based on different perspectives, such as genre theory (e.g., Oravec, 2002), Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) (e.g., Mortensen and Walker, 2002), and learning management environment (e.g., Williams and Jacobs, 2004), a growing amount of publications have supported that the blog is a useful part of the intellectual and cultural fabric of HE.

On the other hand, knowledge management (KM) has been the main drive of core competence for organisations. The notion that knowledge needs to be shared rather than hoarded has been increasingly and practically emphasised. According to Ras et al. (2005: 396), “the best way to ensure knowledge sharing is often understood to be the acquisition and storage of knowledge in knowledge bases, following by countless and costless sharing”. A considerable body of literature has also shown its usage in encouraging knowledge sharing, for instance, Ojala (2005) explained that blogs can be of great benefit to enterprises through capturing and disseminating product information and knowledge in a collaborative cross-cultural work environment. Kent (2008: 38) addressed that blogs tend to be more interactive comparing with the mainstream media’s news sites, and critically pointed out that using blogs in an organisation needs someone who is trained in effective dialogic communication and built a trust with readers to maintain the blog. Lin et al. (2006: 15) proposed that “bloggers are not only noting down their experiences and thoughts, but also trying to reach out to broader audiences, share opinions and to manage their personal knowledge base”. Blogs hence, have a place in knowledge sharing practice, because they provide people a virtual space for expressing personal opinions, experiences, stories and moods; as well as offer opportunities to exchange ideas, experiences, and interests as well as help people transfer knowledge.

Nevertheless, only looking at one side of blog usage is having a serious bias on understanding the motivation, value and consequences of using blogs, especially in facilitating HE students’ learning and sharing. There is an urgent need for further research into this new form of online behaviour by inquiring: from HE students’ perception, why do they blog?, do they really use blogs for personal learning?, to what extent do they create knowledge repositories through blogs?, and to what extent do they use blogs for learning and sharing?. Thus, to explore these issues, the researcher started seeking into an intersection of personal learning, knowledge sharing practice and blogging. Briefly, the original motivation for undertaking this research study was the desire to make sense of the nature of blogging phenomenon and further explore social software potential for promoting students' interaction between peers, sharing and learning. The choice of the study theme arose from the premise that the student's experience of using blogs outside classrooms and the interactive practice on the web are unplanned or non-scheduled but happens in terms of their interest.

Relating to the study theme, in the literature, four primary facets raise different focuses of studies into blog usage by: e-business and KM perspectives; teaching and learning standpoints; social behaviour investigation; and individual factors exploration (see Figure 1.1). In Figure 1.1, the broken blue line marks the boundary of this study. It stands on investigating blog usage from individual behaviour perspective, covering an intersection of the social behaviour and education aspects. That is, this study does not investigate blog usage from a formal learning or organisational learning point of view, and also not to develop the blog as a technology.

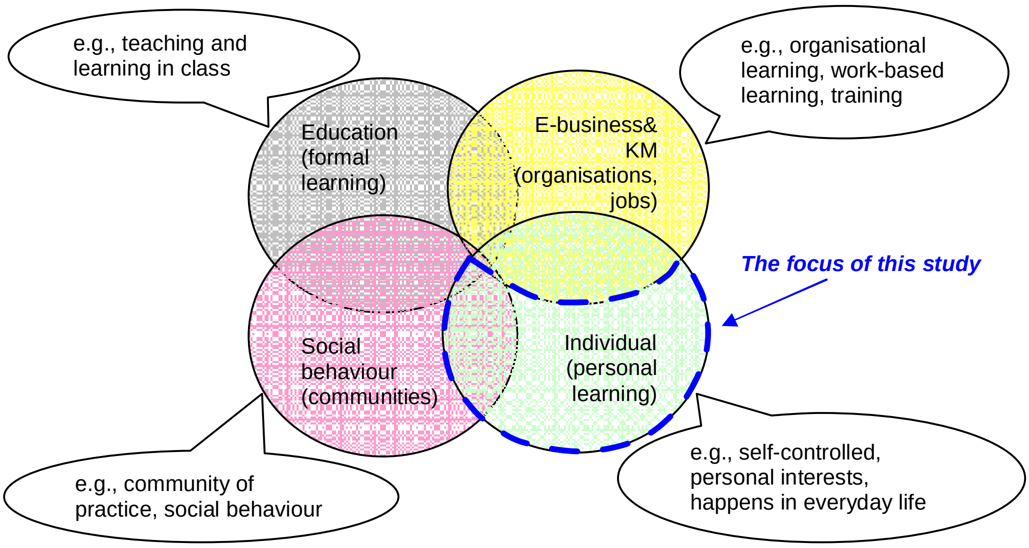


Figure 1.1 A boundary of this research study

Meanwhile, in this study, learning does not refer to studying or training, in the classroom or scheduled, but a subliminal process depending upon the individual desire as well as their environment. Findings of the research were expected to shed light on developing strategies to understand and promote social software usage in facilitating teaching and learning better in HE settings.

1.3 Terminology

There are several terms that the researcher uses in this empirical study. To reduce confusion, they are explained as follows.

"Bloggers" refers to students who have their own blogs and keep updating them on a regular basis. They have at least half a year blogging experience. From the data, it shows that every blogger has posting blog experience as well as reading blog experience.

"Pure blog readers" refers to students who keep reading certain blogs on a continuing basis but do not have their own blogs. In this study, the pure blog readers' reading experience starts from one year and they hardly have blog writing and maintaining experience.

"Blog users" is collectively called, covering students (1) who read certain blogs regularly, (2) who read blogs widely, and regularly or occasionally, (3) who maintain a blog, and (4) who have or had a blog but do not maintain currently. It is apparent that both bloggers and pure blog readers are blog users.

Figure 1.2 shows the relationships between bloggers, pure blog readers, and blog users.

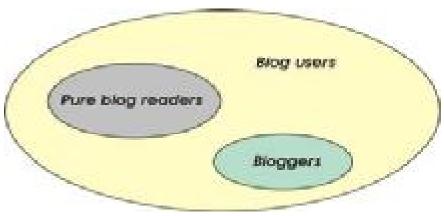


Figure 1.2 Relationships of blog users, bloggers and pure blog readers

"Digital generation" is a term derived from the idea of "Net generation" in the book *Educating the Net Generation* edited by Oblinger and Oblinger (2005a). In the literature, "Net generation" (Tapscott, 1998), "Digital natives" (Prensky, 2001a, 2001b), or "Y generations" similarly stands for people who were born in 1980 to 1994 (McCrindle, 2006), and "are able to intuitively use a variety of IT devices and navigate the Internet", "weave together images, text, and sound in a natural way", fit in with "multitask", "moving quickly from one activity to another", "prefer to learn by doing rather by being told what to do", "to learn by exploring for themselves or with their peers", and are "openness to diversity, differences, and sharing" (Oblinger and Oblinger, 2005b: 2.5-2.7). Nevertheless, there are many critiques of these concepts, such as Kennedy et al. (2006) pointed out that very little empirical research actually investigated HE students' experience with technology. Also, one criticism of much of the literature on the notion of "Net generation" is that before education is urged to reform, it needs to understand the nature of a new generation of students' change and their implications for education (Bennett *et al.*, 2008).

Throughout the thesis, the term "digital generation" is used to draw on the idea of describing young generations who are main users of new digital technologies (e.g., computer, mobile phone, the Internet, virtual games, iPod, etc.) rather than take those assumptions of the generation's attributes directly. The HE students are young and largely apply new network tools; to a great extent, they are important members of digital generations.

This study focuses on the HE students and investigates those who are bloggers or pure blog readers, and their blogging and reading blog experiences. Both blogging experience and reading blog experience belong to blog use experience.

1.4 Research journey

This study was set up in July 2005. The researcher defined eight stages of the study and uses a diagram (Figure 1.3) to describe the whole research process.

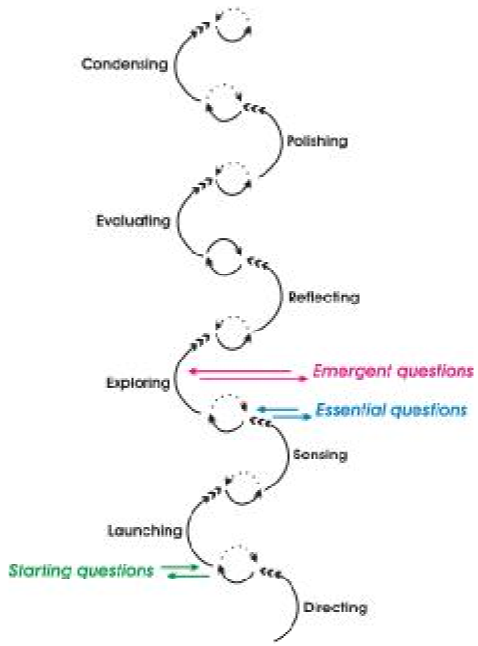


Figure 1.3 The research journey

The researcher started with an interest in knowledge sharing and personal learning. This was based on her previous study into individual intervening in knowledge sharing, work experience and academic interests. She started ***directing*** her interests into a feasible study. After two months broad reviewing literature, the study was located on exploring HE students' learning and sharing by investigating the emergent blogging phenomenon. In the next three months, she defined research gaps in the literature (see Chapter 2), centralised the focus of the study, and specified the research aim as well as questions (see section 1.5). She started considering who were the important informants, how to collect data, and what research methods could be adopted.

Taking into account that the study was to inquire the HE students' perceptions of using blogs, the researcher compared different research approaches and believed that an inductive logic and qualitative approach were suitable for this study. With further literature reviewing and suggestion by experienced researchers, she decided to use grounded theory (GT) as a research approach (see Chapter 3, section 3.2 and 3.3). From January to June 2006, started interviewing students at the Department of Information Studies, the researcher conducted a pilot study to rectify research questions, test the method selected, and discover concepts and conceptual categories of the phenomenon she has studied. This stage is named as "***Launching***". This stage also corresponds to the "Pilot phase", shown in Chapter 3, Figure 3.2.

During the data collection process at the launching stage, the researcher concurrently analysed data using constant comparative method. She was ***sensing*** the important concepts that were emergent through analysing 11 interviews. She created five tentative theoretical models to explain the nature of the phenomenon she investigated, also generated two hypotheses for further investigation. At the same time, she chose the School of English and the Department of Education as a theoretical sample to recruit key informants (see Chapter 3, section 3.5). This stage covers the steps 7, 8 and 9, shown in Chapter 3, Figure 3.2.

Exploring is a crucial part in this study. It ranged from December 2006 to June 2007, corresponding to the stages from "Anchoring" to "Forming" (until activities 22), presented in Chapter 3, Figure 3.2. In this phase, bore in mind the tentative models and hypotheses developed in previous stages, the researcher evolved research questions (see section 1.5) and categories by adopting constant comparative method in an intertwined data collection and analysis procedure. She kept developing theoretical sampling, interviewing, transcribing, conceptualising, defining categories in terms of their properties and dimensions. Also, she kept putting forward assumptions about those categories, and relating categories through hypotheses of relationships to ensure that a category has been developed, until she had a sense that all generated major categories were saturated. Thirty seven interviews were conducted in this phase.

Reflecting refers to the analysis process undertaken from July to October 2007. The researcher further refined the emergent concepts by considering the data set (48 interviews) as a whole. She checked the categories, their relationships, and emergent models for linking categories, and decided not to sample onwards because in a broad sense, this process confirmed that no new category varied in terms of its properties and dimension. This process will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3, Figure 3.2, corresponding to the activities 23 to 25.

Over the period of time from November to December 2007, the researcher continued analysing data, which was similar to the work in the reflecting phase. However, largely, she started ***evaluating*** the study by deliberating the validity and reliability. She realised that different criteria had been suggested in the literature to guarantee the quality of qualitative research. To establish trustworthiness and reduce the risk of avoidable errors, she reviewed the strategies used, such as audit trail, member checking, peer debriefing, triangulation, and reflexivity (more will be said about this in Chapter 3, section 3.6).

Then the researcher realised that she did not strictly follow Strauss and Corbin's techniques for developing a theory because she had not used an analytic paradigm device as well as the conditional/consequential matrix in data analysis. Therefore, over the time from January to March 2008, she started reading transcriptions again and checking each generated code, category, their properties, and linking the relationships at a more abstract level of properties and dimensions. The researcher called this process as "***Polishing***" because it helped her to remedy a few of non-well-developed codes as well as categories, facilitate identification of the central category, and verify the theoretical saturation.

Condensing refers to the phase that the findings were integrated into a theoretical model to interpret an understandable substantive theory of the blogging phenomenon. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), a generated theory is an ever-developing entity rather than a perfected product. The form in the substantive theory is presented based on a series of earlier analytic procedures. From the present investigation, a confirmable theory model about learning and sharing in HE students' blog use experience was developed (see Chapter 7) and will be demonstrated from three key aspects: conditions (see Chapter 4); strategies (see Chapter 5); and consequences of using blogs (see Chapter 6). In addition, it is essential to clarify that the "reflecting", "polishing" and "condensing" processes are all covered under the "Consolidating" stage, presented in Chapter 3, Figure 3.2.

1.5 Aim and research questions

As mentioned earlier, this research is not about studying in the classroom nor the blog technology itself but focuses on exploring the blogs usage for facilitating personal learning and knowledge sharing practice in a network environment. Its primary aim is to explore the nature of blogging phenomenon and its potential impact on personal learning and knowledge sharing by investigating HE students' perceptions and subjective experiences of blogging as well as reading blogs.

Based on this purpose, the core research problem was condensed into: how do blogs impact on HE students' learning and facilitate knowledge sharing. In order to explore the problem better, the researcher created a series of research questions as a foothold. This is in relation to "Starting questions" in Figure 1.3.

Starting questions (for bloggers):

- What are the motivations for blogging?
- How do bloggers think of their own blogs?

- What are bloggers' learning needs when they blog?
- What is worthy of blogging?
- What have they learned through blogging?
- What are the attitudes of bloggers to comments?
- What are the constraints for blogging in helping learning?

Starting questions (for pure blog readers):

- What are the motivations for reading blogs?
- What are pure blog readers' learning needs when they read blogs?
- What is worthy of reading blogs?
- What have they learned by reading blogs?
- How do pure blog readers think about blogs?
- What are the attitudes of pure blog readers to comments?
- What are the constraints for reading blogs in helping learning?

In accordance with the starting questions, the researcher conducted a pilot study and interviewed 11 HE students who had blog use experience. She found that there were different orientations of using blogs and most participants separated blogging with study clearly (details see 3.5). It seemed that the blog is a substitute for entertainment and personal. This denoted that the researcher could investigate what are the differences and similarities amongst different usage orientations, such as leisure purpose. Also, it implied that students have their own understanding of learning and personalisation. Therefore, the researcher refined the research questions based on the findings of the pilot stage by addressing (1) what are the meanings of learning conceptualised by the informants themselves, (2) what are the notable characteristics of the informant that affect his or her attitudes to blogs, and (3) what are the distinctive perceptions of learning and sharing in different blog use orientations (e.g., blog for sharing and communication, blog for self, and social use). With the essential questions shown below, the researcher started a main study to further explore the phenomenon (see Figure 1.3). Considering ethics, each participant is under an alias in this thesis.

Essential questions (for bloggers):

- What are the motivations for blogging?
- How do bloggers think of their own blogs for helping learning?
- What are bloggers' learning needs when they blog?
- What is worthy of blogging?
- What have they learned through blogging?
- What are the attitudes of bloggers to comments?
- What are the constraints for blogging in helping learning?

- How do bloggers think of their own blogs for sharing knowledge?
- What is the blogger's blogs use orientation?
- What is the blogger's concept of learning?
- What are the blogger's opinions of using blogs in a HE setting?

Essential questions (for pure blog readers):

- What are the motivations for reading blogs?
- What are pure blog readers' learning needs when they read blogs?
- What is worthy of reading blogs?
- What have they learned by reading blogs?
- What are the attitudes of pure blog readers to comments?
- What are the constraints for reading blogs in helping learning?
- What does learning mean for the pure blog reader?
- How do pure blog readers think about blogs for helping learning?
- How do pure blog readers think about blogs for knowledge sharing?
- What are the pure blog reader's opinions of using blogs in a HE setting?

Over the main study, the research started to further understand the lived experience of using blogs and seek an emerging theory of it. As mentioned in the last section, the researcher constantly compared the new data to previously collected data, analysed the differences and similarities between them, and distilled emerging categories and relationships. She realised that most pure blog readers regarded the blog as an information source, whereas bloggers used them for acquiring benefits according to different use orientations. In addition, it emerged concerns for privacy and individualised judgement of using blogs as information sources in relation to the relationships between the blogger and the reader. In that case, new research questions were emergent (see below). These emergent questions directed the researcher to inquire into the phenomenon with specific focus in a next theoretical sample and further helped her to determine how a category varies in terms of its properties and dimensions by comparing different incidents and happenings, and to gain category saturation.

Emergent questions:

- What is the participant's entire lived experience of using blogs?
- What are effects of using blogs as information sources?
- To what extent the participant use blogs as information sources for learning?
- What are the participant's strategies in achieving certain benefits (e.g., self-therapy, professional development) according to their primary blog use orientation (e.g., for social use)?

Compared with the initial starting questions, namely to gain understanding of the impact perceived by blog users themselves on their learning and sharing, the present generated theory illuminates the motivations of using blogs and how they constructed learning and sharing during applying blogs. Despite that it does not directly interpret the impact, it still follows the two objectives of this research: (1) to better understand the HE students' learning and sharing behaviour by investigating blog usage, and (2) to generate a theory to explain the phenomenon of HE students' using blogs within an online social environment.

1.6 An overview of contents

This thesis is organised in nine chapters as follows.

Chapter 1: Introduction. This chapter provides a comprehensive picture of the research study, including its background, the origin of the research topic, the procedure of the study, the research aim, research questions, and the content in this thesis.

Chapter 2: Literature review. This chapter firstly defines the scope of the literature area. It critically reviews the literature on blogs usage, learning theories, and knowledge sharing, in particular those studies relating to the impact of blogs on personal learning and its role in facilitating knowledge sharing, within a web-based environment at an individual level. It emphasises the core theoretical ideas and current relevant research into blogs in HE settings, especially the research gap and the importance of the study. It is noteworthy that this chapter includes two emergent literature areas after the researcher finished data collection and analysis: Carl Rogers' experiential learning theory and narcissism theories in psychological motivation studies. These two areas were not focused on at the beginning of the study, but found very relevant to the findings. It was reviewed to confirm, extend, and validate the findings at very late stages of the study, in Figure 1.3, Polishing and Condensing stages.

Chapter 3: Methodology. This chapter is devoted to the consideration of choosing the methodology and conducting process. It explains the rationale of adopting GT as an approach and how grounded theory as a process was used in this study. It described the data collection and analysis procedures in detail, and also presents how the researcher established trustworthiness for this research study.

Chapter 4: Drives and locus of using blogs. This chapter sets forth the conditions of using blogs. It firstly analyses the attributes of blogs and blog users emerged from the data. Primarily, it indicates the elements that affect HE students to use blogs, such as reading blogs, maintaining blogs, or stopping blogging. Meanwhile, it provides a contextual condition for explaining the blogging phenomenon in later chapters as well as identifies a generic trajectory of using blogs.

Chapter 5: Strategies for using blogs. The focus of this chapter is to discuss the core strategies for using blogs by bloggers and pure blog readers. Comparing the two groups, it develops a strategic model of using blogs to present the key concepts and their relationships. Especially, up to the point of regarding blogs as information resources, it illuminates three major aspects through a framework towards the issues in the use of blogs as a channel of acquiring information.

Chapter 6: Consequences of using blogs. This chapter moves towards thinking about the consequences of using blogs, that is, the nature of blogging. It concludes three core concepts: Self-therapy; Interpersonal skills; and Intellectual abilities, which root the usage of blogs. Also, it elaborates five types of learning in blog use and discusses knowledge sharing actions linking to the emergent concept of "moderate narcissism". Further, it provides an analysis of the constraints of using blogs in formal learning.

Chapter 7: Theoretical model. This short chapter begins by laying out an integrated theoretical model of using blogs in facilitating learning and knowledge sharing. By adopting storyline technique in GT, it shows how the theoretical model was generated and a central category "a channel of ambivalent self-image assurance" was emerged and its link with the existing literature.

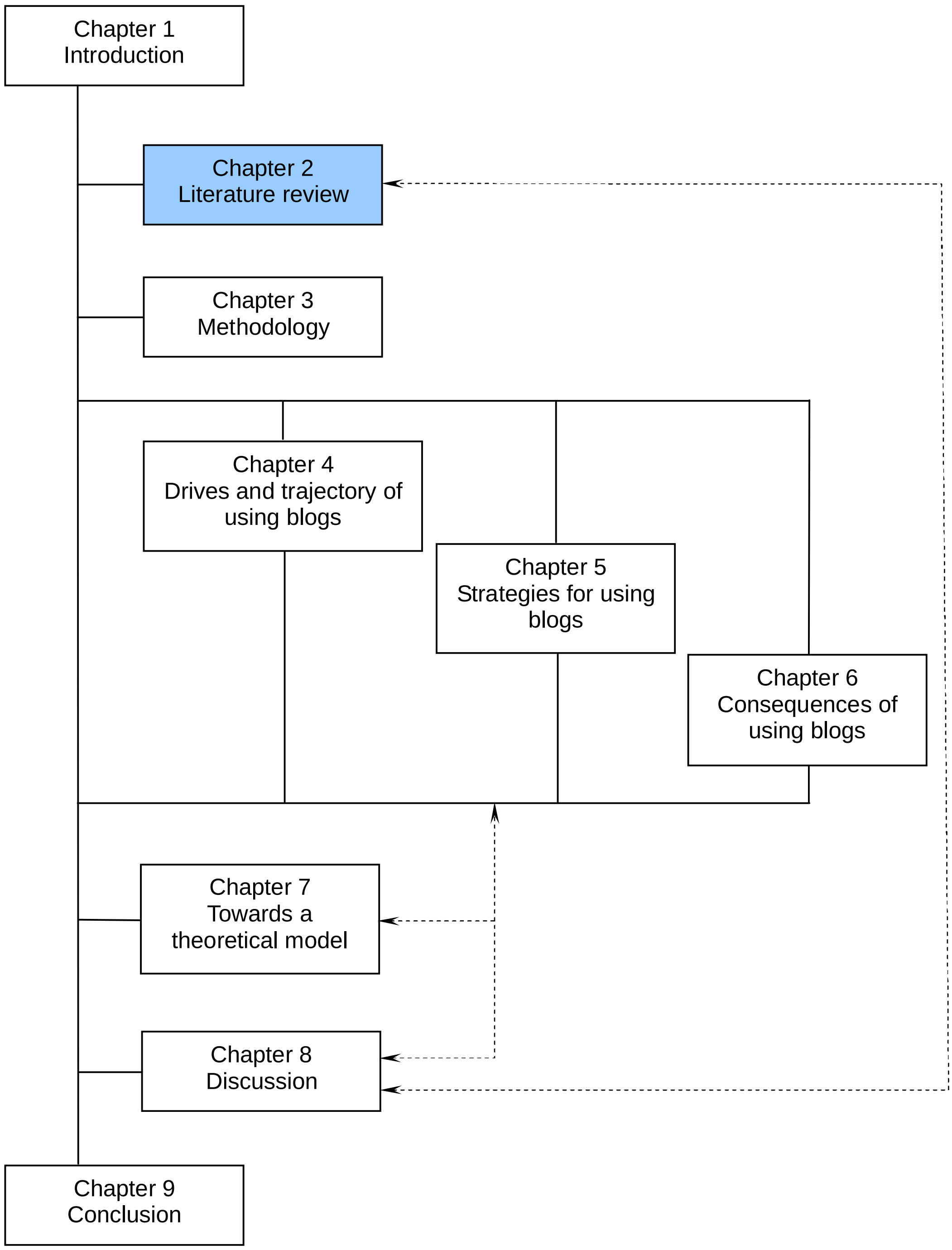
Chapter 8: Discussion. This chapter indicates the contributions of this study by analysing the findings with relation to motivations theories, learning theories, knowledge sharing in practice, and narcissism studies. Meanwhile, it provides in-depth information regarding the implications and the limits of the study. Six possible suggestions for further research are given considering the weaknesses of this study to date.

Chapter 9: Conclusion. This chapter concludes this research study by reflecting on the whole thesis. It summarises the study to date; its process; findings and theory generation; research design; the contribution to knowledge; and an impact on further research work.

In summary, Chapters 4 to 7 indicate the findings of this study. Chapter 7 particularly shows the final theoretical model. Chapter 8 provides a revision of the whole study and proposes further studies.

1.7 Summary

This chapter provides an overall picture of the study. At first, it introduces the background of the study, the motivations for undertaking the research and its purpose. It explains key terms that will be used in this thesis and also presents a process map of the study. With the aim of the study, the researcher states that this is an individual-oriented, process-based, exploratory, qualitative and empirical study. In particular, it addresses that the research questions were developed/emerged over the conceptualisation process. By adopting a GT approach, it generates a theory towards interpreting the nature of blogging phenomenon and its potential usage in facilitating HE students' learning and knowledge sharing. Lastly, it briefly describes the structure of the thesis.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CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

> *“Words differently arranged have a different meaning and meanings differently arranged have a different effect.” - Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)*

2.1 Introduction

In the 21st century, HE is under increasing pressure to take advantage of new technologies. Using technologies to enhance learning as well as understanding and sharing knowledge in different ways become key challenges for individuals, organisations and educators. As described in Chapter 1, this study concentrates on the notion that the individual is at the heart of learning, sharing and using blogs. “Learning” in this study does not refer to formal study or training, in the classroom or scheduled. It is an ongoing, everyday, lifelong and ultimate survival skill, taking place in numerous diverse ways such as communication, reading and writing. In this sense, it is informal, including “incidental learning” (Marsick and Watkins, 2001) and everyday learning. “Sharing” means to exchange to achieve cognisance or potential consensus in a social meaning. This does not only refer to give or get pieces of information, but also lead to exchange opinions, feelings and experiences, or converse perspectives. The researcher reviewed the major works of literature in three wide areas: literature on blog usage; literature on learning theories; particularly on informal learning; and literature on knowledge sharing (see Figure 2.1).

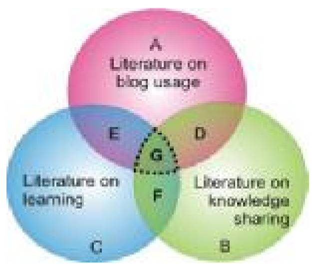


Figure 2.1 A boundary of the literature

Based on the context of HE, the researcher specifically narrowed down her review into D, E, F, and G areas (Figure 2.1), where she attempted to develop the primary research questions (see section 1.5 and section 2.6). As May (1986: 149) said, “the literature review in a grounded theory project neither provides key concepts nor suggests hypotheses as it does in hypothetic-deductive research”. The literature is used alone and in combination “to generate theory effectively through comparative analysis" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 163). In this chapter, the researcher presents a context of the study. It firstly provides an overview of blogs, including its development, its key features and the studies which investigated its effects on learning and sharing in educational settings (A, especially D, E areas in Figure 2.1). A large and growing body of literature has contributed to learning theories; the researcher focuses on informal learning and discusses its place in this study (C, especially E, F areas in Figure 2.1). Knowledge sharing has been increasingly studied in KM field and brings new concepts to HE, thus, the researcher reviews knowledge theories and particularly discusses sharing tacit knowledge (a type of knowledge) into practice (B, especially F areas in Figure 2.1). Moreover, the wide studies on knowledge sharing, learning and blog usage are discussed (G area in Figure 2.1). Based on the review, the gaps in the literature and the research primary questions are presented in section 2.6 (also shown in section 1.5).

In addition, as the most relevant theories emerged in this study, the idea of "true self" in experiential learning theory and motivation theory of narcissism are briefly mentioned in section 2.3.5, and will be illuminated in detail in section 2.4 and 2.5. These bodies of literature were not reviewed and realised by the researcher at the beginning of the study, but during the main study. They were found as supplementary sources to help validate, refine and negate to the findings. According to Strauss and Corbin's (1998) suggestion, literature in GT is perceived as a source of data, to stimulate theoretical sensitivity, to direct theoretical sample, or to formulate questions and so forth, it is possible to review literature relating to concepts emerged from the data at a late stage, and to confirm, refine or extend knowledge in the field.

2.2 Blogs

2.2.1 An overview of blogs

With network technology developing, each emerged new online phenomenon draws people's attention, induces hot arguments of its pros and cons, and emerges studies on its impact on the user. The blog is no exception. From the late 1990s, the blog has been on an unprecedented increase. As an influential web-based tool, it brings people into a new concept of online communication. Figure 2.2 (data from Wikipedia[1]) shows the most frequently mentioned online communication tools. It is not based on the precise statistical data, but reflects a tendency that the emerging new technologies (e.g., blogs, wikis, instant messaging) have a shorter popularity period than those (e.g., email, mailing-list) emerged in the past twenty years. This might be explained by Moore's Law[2] of an important trend of computer hardware, yet, the law does not explain the meaning and motivations behind the trend (Milne, 2004).

[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page The development of each technology is based on the data from Wikipedia website. It does not show accurate statistic data, but to provide a general picture.

[2] In 1965, Gordon E. Moore, a cofounder of Intel Corp, quantified the growth formula of silicon: the number of transistors per integrated circuit would double every 18 months. It is Moore's Law.

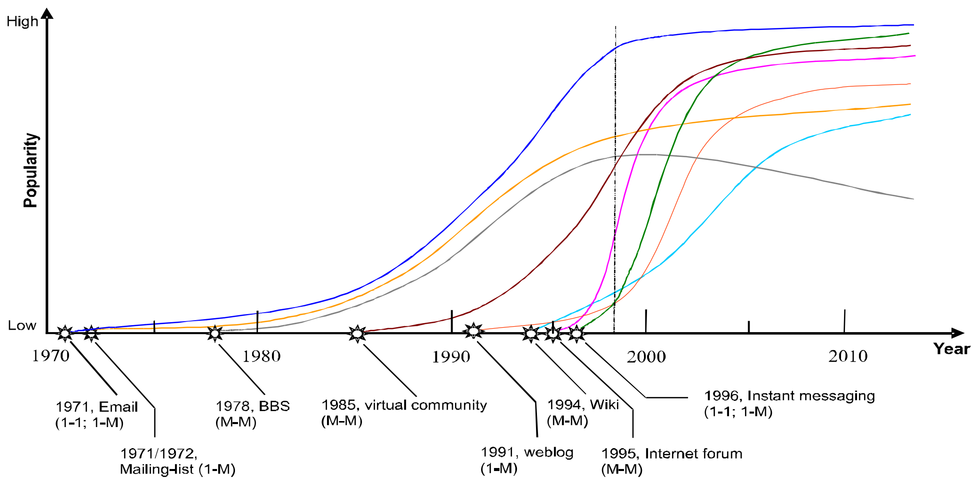


Figure 2.2 Timeline of the major online communication tools

NB: 1:1 refers to communication may be understood to be correspondence between two persons; 1:M refers to communication may be understood to be correspondence from one person to two or more persons; M:M refers to communication may be understood to be public/open correspondence among a group of individuals.

The term "weblog" derives from "computer log file", and was coined by Jorn Barger in 1997 (Aïmeur *et al.*, 2003), while "blog" was a short term, originated a syntax change from "web log" to "we blog" and named by Peter Merholz in 1999 (Herring *et al.*, 2004). Since then, blogs have increased rapidly, for instance, BBC News (2005) reported that almost every second one blog is created. There is no consensus on the definition for blogs. For example, Blood (2002b: 12) defined a blog as "a website that is up-dated frequently, with new material posted at the top of the page". Pomerantz and Stutzman (2006: 201) said that "a blog is a web-based tool that allows an author (the blogger) the ability to post information for consumption by others". Miura and Yamashita (2007: 1453) stated that "a blog is a kind of web-based system that uses a variety of tools to facilitate self-description and interaction with others". Sauers (2006) pointed out three important elements in definitions of blogs: web application; reverse chronological order; and accessibility. Actually, there is also no consensus on the types of blogs. For example, Blood (2002a) classified filters (A-list), personal journal, and notebooks as three basic types of blogs. Krishnamurthy (2002) distinguished blogs by two attributes: personal vs. topical (focus of the space) and individual vs. community (focus of the organisational structure). Sauers (2006) proposed three classifications of blogs: individual; subject; and organisational. Ernst (2003) categorised blogs into three forms: microjournal blogs; notebook blogs; and filter blogs, and argued that the challenges for a blogger are not technology but time management, content and audience. Seeing blogs as a genre, Herring et al. (2004) identified different types of blogs by comparing the authors, purposes, structure, and updating frequency.

Blogs become, not only a new phenomenon, but also an unforced artefact of the web (Kumar *et al.*, 2004). Its distinct features include (Aïmeur *et al.*, 2005; de Moor and Efimova, 2004; Gill, 2004; Lankshear and Knobel, 2003; van House, 2004):

- Personal editorship (a blogger edits the content of a blog by personal preferences)
- High publicity and openness (a blog is usually accessible on the web)
- Easy use and publication (little technology needed, easy operation)
- High but limited interactivity (a blog is often open to people on the web, but the interactions between the blogger and readers are limited by many factors, such as common interests)
- Frequent updating (a blogger often updates new information on a blog)
- Reverse chronological order (the latest entry is shown on the top)
- Hyperlinked post structure (each entry has an URL address and easily links to other online resources)
- Archived, date-stamped entries (blog services archive all entries by a posted date)
- Ease of syndication through RSS and XML feed (blog services support RSS and XML feed functions so that a reader is able to read the new updates of a blog easily)
- Links to related blogs and forming blogroll (a blogger links a list of favourite blogs or online resources on the blog)

Enterprises first noticed that blogs provide powerful opportunities, for instance, using blogs in the market as a communicative platform with customers (Debaty et al., 2004), a journalism tool (Regan, 2003), or a collaborative environment for knowledge sharing (Ojala, 2004). The use of blogs in the educational setting emerged late compared with its use in the business area. In the academic area, people largely use blogs to exchange information among themselves, such as elearnspace[3], which was created in 2002 and aims to explore elearning, KM, networks, technology, and community; and Heyjude[4] was developed by Judy O'Connell to share interests in educational services, learning and social networking since May 2006, and won the best library and librarian blog of 2006 EduBlog Awards. Studies on blogs in HE settings will be further discussed in section 2.5. Next, the researcher will provide a brief context of current blogs usage.

2.2.2 Context: Web 2.0

More recently, Web 2.0 becomes one of the most popular buzzwords in social software discussion. The original notion of Web 2.0 was proposed by Tim O'Reilly (2005a) as follows:

> "Web 2.0 is the network as platform, spanning all connected devices; Web 2.0 applications are those that make the most of the intrinsic advantages of that platform: delivering software as a continually-updated service that gets better the more people use it, consuming and remixing data from multiple sources, including individual users, while providing their own data and services in a form that allows remixing by others, creating

[3] http://www.elearnspace.org/blog

[4] http://heyjude.wordpress.com/

> network effects through an 'architecture of participation,' and going beyond the page metaphor of Web 1.0 to deliver rich user experiences."

Web 1.0 was coined when Web 2.0 was emergent. According to Mr Spivack[5], Web 1.0 "was about the development of the basic platform of the internet and the ability to make huge amounts of information widely accessible" (Richards, 2007). Web 1.0 focuses on the web's basic platform, its link structure and navigation system, whereas Web 2.0 largely focuses on users and usability, clean-looking sites, and making connections between people (Richards, 2007). As O'Reilly (2005b) pointed out, there is no hard boundary between them, but a transformation of user experience by encompassing a diverse set of independent yet interlocking applications (Craig, 2007). Figure 2.3 provides typical instances between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0.

Web 1.0		**Web 2.0**	Evolution of the concept
DoubleClick	-->	Google AdSense	
Ofoto	-->	Flickr	
Akamai	-->	BitTorrent	Evolution of the product
mp3.com	-->	Napster	
Britannica Online	-->	Wikipedia	
personal websites	-->	blogs	
evite	-->	upcoming.org and EVDB	
domain name speculation	-->	search engine optimization	
page views	-->	cost per click	
screen scraping	-->	web services	
Web browser	-->	browser, RSS readers, mobile devices, etc.	
content management systems	-->	Wikis	Evolution of the application
directories (taxonomy)	-->	tagging ("folksonomy")	
stickiness	-->	syndication	
publishing	-->	participation	
reading	-->	writing and contribution	
static	-->	dynamic	
by website users	-->	by every online user	

Figure 2.3 The shift from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0
(Adapted from Curran *et al.*, 2007; O'Reilly, 2005b)

Web 2.0 is not a software application or a network technology, but a concept, a platform and an attitude. Recently, the discussion about Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 is mainly based on commerce, marketing, and web technology perspectives, and rapidly spreads to new buzzwords such as Web 3.0, Web 4.0 and Web N.0 in newspaper, company websites, blogs and personal websites (e.g., Giustini, 2007; Godin, 2007; Waters, 2008). This discussion draws people's attention on the current web application, its usage and its future.

Similarly, in educational area, new concepts such as Library 2.0, Learning 2.0, E-Learning 2.0, and Education 2.0 occur consequently. For example, Miller (2005) concluded the principles of Web 2.0 as participative, work for the user, about sharing, communication and facilitating community, remixing, builting up trust, and opening up the long tail. He suggested the libraries,

[5] Jonathan Richards cited Mr Spivack's saying (Mr Spivack is the founder of Radar Networks, a leading Web 3.0 company).

library systems vendors, publishers, standards bodies, government agencies and more should associate together to promote Library 2.0 (Miller, 2005). According to Curran et al. (2007: 288), "Library 1.0 is a one-directional service that takes people to the information that they require", whereas Library 2.0 is now more commonly addressed two-directional action, which takes "the information to the people by bringing the library service to the internet and getting the users more involved by encouraging feedback participation". Ebner (2007) analysed three important applications of Web 2.0 for fostering learning: blogs, wikis and podcast; he addressed the learner factors and a formula e-Learning 2.0 = f (e-Learning 1.0, Web 2.0, human factor). Alexander (2006) noted that Web 2.0 does not supplant Web 1.0, rather, it reveals new innovation of network information ecology. Meanwhile, Stephen Downes (2004b), a senior researcher, pointed out that "…the emergence of the Web 2.0 is not a technological revolution, it is a social revolution".

Clearly, Web 2.0 application includes social software: E-mail and Listserves, Instant messaging and Chat room, Blogs, Wikis, Discussion Boards, Forums, Content Management Systems, and so on (O'Reilly, 2005b). This concept not just emphasises learning and sharing technologies, but also conveys a new generation idea that integrates valuable online sources, such as discovering opportunities to learn, learning networks and communities, creating, sharing and remixing, collaborating and new web applications. Meanwhile, it brings a sense of benefiting the individual's lifelong learning (Blackey, 2006). Nevertheless, undoubtedly, the Web 2.0 concept in educational settings is still at an early stage. No adequate reliable academic sources are found in the literature on how to migrate to and manage Education 2.0 or Learning 2.0. Web-based applications such as blogs, wikis, or online forums were born before Web 2.0 and now are embedded in it. Studies on these applications are continuing to increase but all contribute to part of the philosophy of Web 2.0 (or Web N.0 or something else in the future). As one of the most rapidly popular phenomena, the blog therefore called the researcher's interest in fostering informal learning by using blogs at an individual level. She attempted to explore the blogging phenomenon in-depth, investigate the use and usefulness of blogs based on HE students' point of view, and further to develop a substantive theory for understanding the role of blogs in HE students' informal learning and sharing.

2.3 Learning theories

There is no doubt that there are various theories of learning. This variety is probably because "different theories of learning have resulted from various investigators approaching the phenomenon of learning from different directions and armed with different initial 'hunches'" (Phillips and Soltis, 1998: 5). In this section, the researcher gives a short discussion about learning theories from the fundamental dimensions: behavioural, cognitive, and constructive theories. As Marton and Booth (1996: 538) said, "if we want to understand more about learning, then it is the subject pole of experience – the learner – that we must focus on". The researcher viewed the arguments and new considerations in recent literature; she suggested that today in order to better understand learning, researchers need to start with the learner's experience, rather than the content or the learning task.

2.3.1 Behavioural-associationist theories

Relating to the classical learning theories in behaviourists' view, five theorists are the most frequently mentioned in the literature on learning. They are Edward L. Thorndike (1874-1949), Ivan P. Pavlov (1849-1936), John B. Watson (1878-1958), Clark L. Hull (1884-1952), and Burrhus F. Skinner (1904-1990).

Thorndike's experimental studies of animal learning provided the assumption that human learning involves the formation of S(stimulus)-R(response) connections. His contribution on learning theory lays in "his belief in motivation through the agency of rewards rather than punishment as an efficient means of establishing good learning habits" (Child, 2004: 125) and particularly the law of effect.

> "The law of effect maintains that learning consists of the strengthening of a connection between a stimulus situation and a response and that this connection will be strengthened (or, as we would say, reinforced) if the response has the effect of producing satisfaction to the animal, or weakened if the response has the effect of producing discomfort or an annoying state of affairs." (Bolles, 1979: 9-10)

Pavlov "had discovered conditioned reflexes" through "his research on the physiology of the digestive system" (Bolles, 1979: 20). His contribution on learning theory lays in the concern that behaviour modification is due to the mechanisms of classical conditioning, that is, human being's reaction occurs because of many conditioned responses in the course of their lives (Gagné, 1985). Although his idea hardly explains the voluntary learning and unconditioned stimuli now, Pavlov is nonetheless one of the great innovators of finding out learning (Bolles, 1979).

Watson had a short career, but had enormous impact upon psychology. He pointed out that behaviour firmly based in the nervous system and "our behavior, our personalities, our emotional dispositions are all learned behaviors" (Bolles, 1979: 53). To a certain extent, Watson considered "millions of conditionings", including personalities and the intellectual capacities during early childhood experience in upbringing and education (Walker, 1984). His conclusion that the frequency and recency of successful responses affect an S-R bond was undoubtedly contributed on "trial and error" learning (Child, 2004).

Hull was well-known of his deductive systemic model of learning. He postulated that drive and habit multiply together to determine the strength of behaviour. In his theory, the different needs can be regarded as different sources of drive, which he called primary and secondary drives. This view of the intervening happenings in the organism provided an explanation of the S-R connection (Child, 2004). As Bolles (1979: 112) indicated, "most of Hull's specific conjectures have now been shown to be wrong. But that is not important; what is important is that, because of Hull, we now know a great deal more than we used to”.

Like other early behaviourists, Skinner believed in S-R bonds. In Skinner’s theory, he used the term “reinforcement” “to identify the events that Thorndike called the law of effect” (Gagné, 1985: 7). “To Skinner, reinforcement means a particular arrangement of stimulus and response conditions that bring about the learning of a new association” (Gagné, 1985: 9). In his study, the distinctive difference of operant conditioning (or instrumental conditioning) from Pavlovian conditioning was that the organism could emit responses rather than only elicit response using existing reflex action (Child, 2004). This had greatly influenced educational practices, such as considering schedules of reinforcement and their effects on establishing and maintaining practical self-management behaviour (Bolles, 1979).

As Child (2004: 123) mentioned, “the behaviourist similarly is chiefly concerned with stimulus (S) and response (R) connections”. They believe that human and animal behaviour can be directly studied by observing the manipulations of certain responses to given stimuli in the behaviour. They “claim that it is the observable behaviour that indicates whether or not the learner has learned something, and not what is going on in the learner’s head” (Yang, 2004). Yet, from another philosophical view, people tend to understand learning by providing a cognitive explanation; they argue learning process is not only the mechanical repetition of S-R bonds, and emphasise the organism’s perception of a situation as a basis for responding to stimulation (Child, 2004).

2.3.2 Cognitive approaches

In psychology, cognitivists attempt to develop theories about the processes and mechanisms of selecting, storing, organising, retrieving and recalling information that are common to all individuals. Köhler, Wertheimer, Koffka, Lewin and other psychologists founded the school known as Gestalt psychology, which concentrated on studies of perception for understanding human learning, such as through an act of insight, response to meanings, and intellectual connections (Phillips and Soltis, 1998). Different to behaviourists, cognitive theorists regard learning as an internal thinking process and claim that learning involves the capacity of memory, motivation, thinking, intellectual development, cognitive structures and depth of cognitive process. In the 20th century, Jean Piaget (1896-1980) and Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) were the leading and most influential cognitive theorists (Yang, 2004).

Piaget is best known by his studies of the evolution of children’s thinking. He discovered that children think and reason differently at different periods in their lives. To him, the ability to learn any cognitive content is always related to these stages of intellectual development (Gagné, 1985). Child (2004: 67) put a high value on Piaget’s cognitive developmental theory by three central components: (1) it is a generic one that the higher processes are seen to evolve from biological mechanisms which are rooted in the development of an individual’s nervous system

(2) it is a maturational one, because he believes that the processes of concept formation follow an invariant sequence of four qualitatively distinct stages which emerge during specific age ranges, and (3) it is a hierarchical one, in that the stages he proposes must be experienced and passed through in a given order before any subsequent stages of development are possible.

Like other theories, Piaget's theory in practice also has been critiqued. For example, Bruner (1996) emphasised the influence of surroundings and culture on learning, and noted that the consistency of the stages proposed by Piaget is a function of the regularity of a child's learning pattern. Nevertheless, contemporarily Piaget's cumulative learning theory is still of service in education, for instance, considering property of learning, "transfer of learning" by his words:

> "Actually, in order to know objects, the subject must act upon them, and therefore transform them: he must displace, correct, combine, take part, and reassemble them. From the most elementary sensorimotor actions (such as pushing and pulling) to the most sophisticated intellectual operations, which are interiorized actions, carried out mentally (e.g., joining together, putting in order, putting into one-to-one correspondence), knowledge is constantly linked with actions or operations, that is, with transformations." (Piaget, 1970: 704)

Different from Piaget, who focused on the individual as a starting point, another notable psychologist, Vygotsky, placed emphasis on socio-culturally orientated approach to learning, which sometimes called social constructivism. He regarded tools such as, language, number, signs, and art as the means by which a culture would conceptualise, organise and transmit thinking, and focused on development of understanding and skills in using these cultural tools (Child, 2004; Rogoff, 1999). The significant contribution of Vygotsky's theory on education was that he pointed out the potential ability of a young person to learn takes place in social settings by imitating from adults or older peers (Phillips and Soltis, 1998). His notion of imitation has been developed later, particularly, by Albert Bandura in "social learning theory". According to Bandura (1977), social learning theory explains human behaviour by the continuous reciprocal interaction amongst cognitive, behavioural, and environmental determinants. Bandura proposed that two types of learning can be observed: (1) imitation, and (2) vicarious learning, which is either an increase in a learner's behaviour after they observe others' similar behavior to be reinforced or a decrease in a learner's behaviour after they observe others receive punishment (Masia and Chase, 1997).

From an educator's point of view, both cognitive and behavioural theories have provided practical use to education, for instance, problem solving (e.g., the Gestalt approach), a rewarding activity (e.g., stimulation, conditionings), cognitive strategies, and intellectual skills (e.g., computer as a learner and S-R bonds). According to Eysenck and Piper (1987: 214),

> "Typically, a Behaviourist psychologist asked 'how much is remembered?' rather than 'what are the qualities of what is remembered?' So, when applied to education, Behaviourism has led to theories of instruction rather than theories of learning: learning is better when feedback is given, rewards and punishment discriminate desirable from

> undesirable behaviours, and so forth… By contrast, cognitive models describe types of knowledge and so can be used to analyse subject matter".

Also, Eysenck and Piper (1987) stated that the major difference between cognitive psychologists and educationists was the former rarely considered motivational and emotional factors. They put it, cognitive psychologists' "failure to manipulate motivational and emotional states means that they do not know whether cognitive performance is affected by motivation and emotion" (Eysenck and Piper, 1987: 215). In the field of educational theory, there is an increasing school, constructivists who suggest that knowledge is constructed and reconstructed by the learner based on their prior knowledge and interests, usually within some social setting, but not merely transmitted verbally; therefore, learning is "built up" or accumulated (Kelly, 2000).

2.3.3 Constructive approaches

Constructivism is a theory of human learning that is rooted in both philosophy and psychology, emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as interest waned in behaviourist and information-processing perspectives (Liu and Matthews, 2005). The researcher mentioned Piaget and Vygotsky from cognitive perspective above, actually, both of them had contributions on constructivist approach to learning and teaching too, because "cognitive theories tell us that learning occurs not by recording information but by interpreting it" (Resnick, 1989: 2). The following quotation indicates the constructivist view by Piaget (1980: 23):

> "Fifty years of experience have taught us that knowledge does not result from a mere recording of observations without a structuring activity on the part of the subject. Nor do any a priori or innate cognitive structures exist in man; the functioning of intelligence alone is hereditary and creates structures only through an organization of successive actions performed on objects. Consequently, an epistemology conforming to the data of psychogenesis could be neither empiricist nor preformationist, but could consist only of a constructivism, with a continual elaboration of new operations and structures."

Constructivist theorists claim that the learner interprets information and world by making sense of his/her personal reality, that is, "they learn by observation, processing and interpretation, and then personalize the information into personal knowledge" (Yang, 2004). According to Liu and Matthews (2005), there are two branches of constructivism. One is cognitive (or personal, or radical) constructivism, based on the work of Piaget, along with followers such as Bruner, Ausubel, and von Glaserfeld; it emphasises learner-centred and discovery-oriented learning processes. The other is social (or realist) constructivism, stemmed from Vygotsky's work and theorists, e.g., Kuhn, Green and Brown. It addresses the central role of the social environment in learning and considers learning as a largely situation-specific and context-bound activity. In 1995, Phillips observed the educational literature on constructivism and proposed three dimensions of categorising constructivism: (1) there are the two poles of considering the construction of human knowledge: in an individual learner's own cognitive apparatus or in general, (2) knowledge is constructed in mind/cognitive apparatus of the individual learner or made/discovered in a public discipline, (3) the construction activity can be described in terms of individual cognition or in terms of social and political processes, or in terms of both. While from Perkins' (2006) view, he regarded these categories as three distinct learner roles in constructivism: the social learner; the creative learner; and the active learner. From cognitive constructivists' standpoint, Resnick (1989: 1) attempted to explain learning as follows,

> "First, learning is process of knowledge construction, not of knowledge recording or absorption. Second, learning is knowledge-dependent; people use current knowledge to construct new knowledge. Third, learning is highly tuned to the situation in which it takes place".

Moon (2004: 17) further commented,

> "In the constructivist view of learning, there are two important developments beyond the notion of an 'accumulation'. First, there is the notion that the cognitive structure is flexible with the potential always to change, sometimes without the addition of new material of learning from outside the person. Second, the state of the cognitive structure at a given time facilitates the selection and assimilation of new material of learning. In other words, it guides what we choose to pay attention to, what we choose to learn and how we make meanings of the material of learning or how we modify what we know or feel already. The process of learning is not, therefore, about the accumulation of material of learning, but about the process of changing conceptions".

Along with Eysenck and Piper's view mentioned above, Papert and Harel (1991)[6] attempted to identify the differences between instructionism and constructionism, the two strategies for education, and also two ways of thinking about the transmission of knowledge by putting it,

> "But behind this there is a split that goes beyond the acquisition of knowledge to touch on the *nature of knowledge* and the *nature of knowing.* There is a huge difference in status between these two splits. The first is, in itself, a technical matter that belongs in an educational school course on 'methods.' The second is what ought properly to be called 'epistemological'; It is close to fundamental issues that philosophers think of as their own".

Although in education, it has emphasised depth of understanding and meaningful learning, to constructivists, it is difficult to lead to a comprehensive and coherent reform of educational practice. Recently, criticisms of constructivism have been voiced. For example, McLoughlin and Oliver (1998) argued that the constructivist view of learning puts emphasis on individual development through the use of resources and accommodation of new experiences to existing understanding, but not fully takes into account social processes, such as peer interaction and collaboration. Liu and Matthews (2005: 387) criticised both behaviourist and constructivist approaches, "failed to reflect either the active role of the learning agent or the influence of the social interactive contexts in everyday educational settings". Masani (2001) put forward criticism on constructivism as anti-scientific approach that supports a morally rootless diversity that downplays learning. Yet, from the researcher's view, constructivism has an important place

[6] The researcher did not read the whole book. This chapter is an online source and has no page number.

in informal learning that occurs in people's everyday life. As Weigel (2002: 3) suggested, "the best place to see constructivist thinking at work is not in the classroom but in those high-tech firms that encourage playfulness to induce creativity".

All in all, according to Ally (2004), behaviourist, cognitivist, and constructivist schools of opinion can be used as a taxonomy for learning.

> "Behaviourist' strategies can be used to teach the 'what' (facts), cognitive strategies can be used to teach 'how' (processes and principles), and constructivist strategies can be used to teach 'why' (higher level thinking that promotes personal meaning and situated and contextual learning)." (Ally, 2004: 7)

2.3.4 Current concerns

Compared to traditional learning theories, current studies into learning have been facing new challenges due to the social evolution as well as the impact of information technology (e.g., computers, mobile devices and the Internet). It starts emphasising the social nature of learning processes at an individual level, such as learners' needs, intentions, motivations, perceptions, and experiences, and adopting more reflexive, experiential, and pragmatic practices (Jarvis *et al.*, 2003; Jonassen *et al.*, 1998). As Åkerlind and Trevitt (1999: 96) stated,

> "Increasing student autonomy is a core concept in many of the non-traditional approaches to teaching and learning achieving popularity over the last two to three decades, including peer-assisted and collaborative learning, experiential and active learning, problem-based learning, as well as computer-assisted learning".

In the literature, the postmodernist thinkers' attentions on learning and teaching have changed in three major aspects. First and foremost, web-based learning which addresses technology and environment has increasingly been studied in educational settings. Largely from constructivist perspective, they see the information technology as learning tools that students learn with, but not from; they emphasise the interaction between the technology and the learner (Jonassen *et al.*, 1998). Computer mediated communication (CMC) is one of the important areas that has developed based on socio-cultural views and communication theories (e.g., studies conducted by Kraut *et al.*, 2001; Mann, 2005; Warschauer, 1997). In particular, its emphasis on interaction online and offline environment results in an amount of studies into online community (e.g., Dennen, 2006; Haughey, 2002; Tang and Yang, 2006). The web-based environment offers learners not only benefits such as fast speed, economical cost, and the accessible wide range of reading sources but also a way of individually driven learning (Devedžić, 2003; Fiedler and Sharma, 2005). For example, Shih and Gamon (2001) addressed the importance of the learner's motivation in web-based learning, comparing with three key factors: attitudes, learning styles, and selected demographics. Anderson (2004) proposed a model towards a theory of online learning and pointed out the challenge of constructing a content, community and assessment centred learning environment simultaneously.

Second, informal learning calls academics' growing interest. Initially, "informal learning" was from the school of non-formal learning proposed by Coombs and Ahmed in 1974 and then was developed in the organisational learning area with the core viewpoint that learning is an unofficial, unscheduled and impromptu process (Cross, 2004). Recent evidences have been suggested by Livingstone's (2001) collective informal learning, Marsick and Watkins' (2001) informal and incidental learning, and Conner's (2004) informal accidental learning. According to McGivney (1999: 1), "there is no single definition of informal learning… It is difficult to make a clear distinction between formal and informal learning as there is often a crossover between the two". Eraut (2000) strongly suggested the term "non-formal" rather than "informal" because informal learning may take place in formal environments and formal learning may occur in an informal local setting. In Table 2.1, the researcher distinguishes the key differences between formal learning and informal learning in education.

Table 2.1 Distinctive features of formal learning and informal learning
(Adapted from Colley *et al.*, 2002; Malcolm *et al.*, 2003: 314-315; Wellington, 1990: 248)

Clusters	Informal learning	Formal learning
Purpose	▪ Not-assessed, non-certificated ▪ Unplanned ▪ Undirected, not legislated for ▪ Learning is either secondary or implicit	▪ Assessed, certificated ▪ Planned ▪ Legislated and directed ▪ Learning is the main explicit purpose
Setting	▪ Outside of formal settings ▪ Located in familiar surroundings ▪ Shared background and experience	▪ Classroom and institution based ▪ Located in institutional settings ▪ Social distance
Process	▪ No teacher involved ▪ Open-ended engagement ▪ Voluntary ▪ Haphazard, unstructured, un-sequenced ▪ Learning mediated by learner democracy	▪ Teacher as authority ▪ Closed and fixed time frame ▪ Compulsory ▪ Structured and sequenced ▪ Learning mediated by agents of authority
Content	▪ Learner-led ▪ Learner-centred ▪ Social aspect central	▪ Teacher-led ▪ Teacher-centred ▪ Social aspect less central
Outcome	▪ Many unintended outcomes ▪ Difficult to track	▪ Fewer unintended outcomes ▪ Monitored on specific criteria

Informal learning, as Harri-Augstein and Thomas (1991: 5) depicted, "is messy… You cannot fully know what you are going to learn until you have learnt it… learning is open-ended and unpredictable". This body of studies largely stresses culture and everyday activities. For example, Cross (2004) and Jackson (2004) share the idea that learning is optimising connections and networks. Jackson (2004) expressed it in his metalearning study, "my learning process was about developing relationships with people who I had never met and acquiring new knowledge about the people who were helping me in the process". Plainly, informal learning theory provides new conceptions of learning for formal education.

Third, the new generation learner's factors are widely researched, especially in psychology and sociology areas. As Du and Wagner (2005) and Cross (2004) noted, learning is a voluntary self-discovery process; people learn over the process: try, fail, succeed, and try again. Oblinger and Oblinger (2005b) distinguished the new generation learner and their predecessors by characters: (1) ability to read visual images (2) visual-spatial skills (3) inductive discovery (4) attentional development, and (5) fast response. Up to this point, there has been an increasing body of literature on the learner's thinking styles, personality, online perceptions and experiences (e.g., Heinström, 2003; Lazzaro, 2004; Shin, 2006). In particular, the affective/emotional dimension comes along as a noticeable factor in these studies. For instance, based on the thought that emotion is a comprising cognitive and dispositional element, Ingleton (1999) proposed a model to illustrate the role of emotion in establishing and maintaining identity and self-esteem in learning situations. Latterly, Sharpe and Benfield (2005) concluded that both the e-learner and teacher have an emotionally charged experience that influences e-learning. Jones and Issroff (2005) investigated affective issues (e.g., curiosity, confidence, control and challenge) in collaborative learning and suggested that affective aspects have their roles in studies into cognitive learning. Moreover, Illeris (2005: 87) illustrated human learning as follows,

> "The understanding presented is based on two fundamental assumptions: first: that all learning includes two essentially different types of process, namely an external interaction process between the learner and his or her social, cultural an material environment, and an internal psychological process of acquisition and elaboration in which new impulses are connected with the results of prior learning. Second, that all learning includes three dimensions, namely the cognitive dimension of knowledge and skills, the emotional dimension of feelings and motivation, and the social dimension of communication and cooperation – all of which are embedded in a societally situated context".

Therefore, it appears that textual socio-emotional communication has become a crucial element in the online learning, involving sharing, interaction and collaboration (Garrison and Anderson, 2003).

Meanwhile, a considerable amount of literature has been published on the conceptions of learning, approaches to learning, strategies of learning, outcomes of learning and models of learning. Säljö (1979) first reported five different conceptions (the understanding) of learning based on analysing interviews with adult students and later Marton et al. (1993) developed the sixth conception as follows:

- Learning as a quantitative increase in knowledge;
- Learning as memorising and reproducing;
- Learning as acquiring of facts, skills, methods that can be retained and used as necessary;
- Learning as abstracting of meaning or making sense;
- Learning as an interpretative process aimed at understanding reality;
- Learning as increasing one's knowledge for changing as a person.

As Wickett (2005: 158) mentioned, "the three theories that have gained prominence in recent decades with respect to the learning of adults are referred to as experiential learning, self-directed learning, and transformative learning". In this study, the data largely support those conceptions of HE students' learning by investigating their experience of using blogs. In particular, at the late stage of the study, the experiential learning theory, especially Carl Rogers' (1967; 1969; Rogers and Freiberg, 1994) humanistic approach, and the motivation theory of narcissism in daily activities appear as the most relevant ones to the theory built in this research study. The researcher will discuss experiential learning from a generic view in next section, and then elaborate Carl Rogers' experiential learning theory and narcissism in psychology studies.

2.3.5 Experiential learning

Experiential learning theory (ELT) is developed based on insights into understanding how adults learn and develop. In ELT, using Kolb's (1984: 41) definition, learning is "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience". Generally speaking, it demonstrates "how individuals are always thinking and devising new practical knowledge for themselves in daily life" (Yang, 2004: 3). According to Jarvis et al. (2003: 55), ELT treats the learner as a whole person. They (Jarvis *et al.*, 2003: 67) noted that,

> "Human learning occurs when individuals, as whole persons (cognitive, physical, emotional and spiritual), are consciously aware of a situation and respond, or try to respond, meaningfully to what they experience and then seek to reproduce or transform it and integrate the outcomes into their own biographies. In this instance, biography is the totality of our experience, which is an integrated combination of the cognitive, emotive and physical, and learning is the process through which individuals grow and develop".

Recently, Moon (2004) pointed out the problem of defining experiential learning. She (Moon, 2004: 113) illustrated some typical definitions of experiential learning in the educational settings and summarised four boundaries of experiential learning:

- Experiential learning takes effort;
- Learning can occur from some experiences more effectively than from others;
- 'Unlearning' from experience can be more important than learning more ('unlearning' means flexibility and openness to the possibility of mistake or error);
- Experiential learning should explicitly recognize the subjective nature of experience.

There is hardly any doubt that ELT presents that learning is unstructured, begins with experience and more personal or individualised (Moon, 2004). In the school of this perspective, David Kolb and his learning cycle has significant contribution. Based on Kolb's (1984) empirical research into how adults learn, Kolb et al. (2001: 227) further explained that "the theory is called 'Experiential Learning' to emphasize the central role that experience plays in the learning process". Three reasons of using the term "experiential" in ELT are: first, it is used to separate from cognitive learning theories, which tend to emphasise cognition over affect; second, it is used to distinguish from behavioural learning theories that deny any role for subjective experience in the learning process; third, it originates from the experiential studies of Dewey's philosophical pragmatism, Lewin's social psychology, and Piaget's cognitive-developmental genetic epistemology (Kolb *et al.*, 2001).

Kolb (1984) described the nature of experiential learning in his "experiential learning cycle", which begins with concrete experience (feeling) that serves as the basis for reflective observation (watching). The reflection and observation are assimilated into abstract conceptualisation (thinking) from new implications. The abstraction and generalisation can be actively converged into active experimentation (doing). The new situation and test hypotheses then accommodate and serve as guides in creating new experiences (Yang, 2004). This model is based on the notion that the best learning is achieved through involvement of reflection and action.

Kolb' learning cycle implies that the learning process is a cycle and has sequences and phases. Kolb's theory has been widely applied and developed as a means of describing learning, for example, Jarvis et al. (2003) restructured Kolb's model by ten phases and indicated the complexity of the processes by different forms of learning: non-learning; non-learning or incidental self-learning; non-reflective learning; and reflective learning. Because experience itself has many dimensions, they (Jarvis *et al.*, 2003) pointed out that all forms of experiential learning can be behavioural, action-based, cognitive or social, simultaneously or asynchronously.

Yet, Kolb's ELT has been debated from many perspectives, for instance, from management education aspect, Kayes (2002) proposed a post-structuralist ELT approach to personal and social knowledge, and argued that Kolb's ELT does not analyse the role of language in constructing experience. From lifelong education aspect, Miettinen (2000: 54) doubted the generalisability of ELT and criticised that "Kolb gives an inadequate interpretation of Dewey's thought". Moreover, from its hypothesis construct validity aspect, Webb (2003) concluded that ELT integrates incompatible domain assumptions and used "fallacious and erroneous first principles as starting premise", therefore, its result "is inherent inconsistency and contradiction". According to Kolb and Kolb (2005), most of the critique in the ELT literature has changed focus from on the psychometric properties of the Learning Style Inventory results to on the theory by viewing the ELT as individualistic, cognitivist, and technological. Furthermore, Moon (2004: 13) mentioned that Kolb's learning cycle "is more often used as a model of the management and facilitation of learning – a teacher rather than a learning model", and suggested to use the cycle as a system based on either a sequence of learning activities or a facilitation of learning. She abbreviated the connotations of experiential learning as follows (Moon, 2004: 122):

- Experiential learning is not usually mediated.
- The material of learning is usually direct experience.

- There is often a sense that it is a specially good form of learning.
- Reflection is usually involved.
- There is usually an 'active' phase of the learning.
- There is usually some mechanism of feedback present.
- There is usually an intention to learn.

Nevertheless, in practice, beyond Kolb's theory, ELT helps people understand the process of knowledge creation and transformation, the process of reflection, and the process of knowing how and knowing why (Yang, 2004).

2.4 Carl Rogers' experiential learning theory

This section focuses on Carl Rogers' experiential learning theory. As said earlier, over the spiral data collection and analysis process, the researcher found that the early conceptions in Carl Rogers' theory, such as "true-self", "continuing openness to change", and "positive self-regard", provide an important source for confirming and validating the findings.

As an American psychologist, Carl Rogers (1902-1987) is well-known by his ideas in humanistic psychology according to his counselling and clinical experience. Rogers' humanistic psychology, originally coined "client-centered approach", is different from psychoanalysis and behaviourism on three major points. First, it addresses the individual's phenomenal field rather than diagnosing from the outside. Second, it focuses on the fully functioning person rather than just remediation of psychological problems. Third, it is centred on humanistic concerns, such as will, choices, values, freedom and so on (Kirschenbaum, 2004). Rogers had articulated and extended his ideas to a variety of areas, for instance, education, work and family. Especially, his theory of learning originates from his views about psychotherapy and the humanistic approach to psychology has influenced in the field of humanistic education widely. He (Rogers, 1969: 5) defined learning as follows:

> "*It has a quality of personal involvement* – the whole person in both his feeling and cognitive aspects being in the learning event. It is *self-initiated*. Even when the impetus or stimulus comes from the outside, the sense of discovery, of reaching out, of grasping and comprehending, comes from within. *It is pervasive*. It makes a difference in the behavior, the attitudes, perhaps even the personality of the learner. *It is evaluated by the learner*. He knows whether it is meeting his need, whether it leads toward what he *wants* to know, whether it illuminates the dark area of ignorance he is experiencing. The locus of evaluation, we might say, resides definitely in the learner. *Its essence is meaning*. When such learning takes place, the element of meaning to the learner is built into the whole experience."

To Rogers, all human beings have a natural propensity to learn, and learning is equivalent to personal change, forward moving, and growth. Therefore, he advocated that the role of the teacher is to facilitate such learning (Patterson, 1973). In his view, gaining knowledge such as learning vocabulary or statistics data is cognitive, whereas acquiring knowledge such as learning about engines in order to repair a car is experiential. Cognitive learning emphasises cognition, whereas experiential learning addresses the needs and wants of the learner (Rogers, 1969). In his book ***Freedom to Learn***, Rogers (1969: 157-164) proposed ten principles of facilitating learning:

(1) Human beings have a natural potentiality for learning.

(2) Significant learning takes place when the subject matter is perceived by the student as having relevance for his own purposes.

(3) Learning which involves a change in self organization – in the perception of oneself – is threatening and tends to be resisted.

(4) Those learnings which are threatening to the self are more easily perceived and assimilated when external threats are at a minimum.

(5) When threat to the self is low, experience can be perceived in differentiated fashion and learning can proceed.

(6) Much significant learning is acquired through doing.

(7) Learning is facilitated when the student participates responsibly in the learning process.

(8) Self-initiated learning which involves the whole person of the learner – feelings as well as intellect – is the most lasting and pervasive.

(9) Independence, creativity, and self-reliance are all facilitated when self-criticism and self-evaluation are basic and evaluation by others is of secondary importance.

(10) The most socially useful learning in the modern world is the learning of the process of learning, a continuing openness to experience and incorporation into oneself of the process of change.

According to several authors' suggestions, such as Leplege et al. (2007), Kirschenbaum (2004), and Underhill (1989), the common ground of Rogers' theory of experiential learning is outlined by four core factors.

Firstly, it stressed that learning involves the whole person rather than just the intellect. Learning is not staged, but a life-long process. As Rogers' statements below, learning is not determined by the external elements (or "threat", named by Rogers), rather, the individual's holistic properties, such as inner emotions and feelings severely inhibit learning of all kinds.

> "Learning becomes life, and a very vital life at that. The student is on his way, sometimes excitedly, sometimes reluctantly, to becoming a learning, changing, being… When threat to the self is minimized, the individual makes use of opportunities to learn in order to enhance himself." (Rogers, 1969: 115, 162)

> "Significant learning combines the logical and the intuitive, the intellect and the feelings, the concept and the experience, the idea and the meaning. When we learn in that way, we are whole." (Rogers, 1983: 20)

This idea has been supported by many educators from the 1960s onwards. For example, Brew (1993: 96) stated,

> "When we talk of learning something, we refer to grasping or getting hold of or possessing something we did not preciously have, or changing an aspect of our view of the world. But inner knowings, as I have described them, in that they are tied to our being, are in us all the time. They are a part of who and what we are".

Secondly, each individual possesses a desire of high-level health and well-being. In particular, in education, the young people are intrinsically motivated to a high grade. According to Rogers (1969), everyone is a learner; he/she is curious and eager to discover, know, and solve problems. When the person strives "to make the very best of their existence" (Boeree, 2006), he/she learns for him/herself and is in a process of becoming.

> "They become scientists themselves, on a simple level, seeking answers to real questions, discovering for themselves the pitfalls and the joys of the scientist's search. They may not learn as many scientific 'facts', but they develop a real appreciation of science as a never-ending search, a recognition that there is no closure in any real science." (Rogers, 1969: 136)

Thirdly, Rogers laid stress on the importance of learning to learn and a continuing openness to change. He believed that learning is experiential and it is a process of changing. For example, Rogers (1969: 104-105) noted this process as follows.

> "We are, in any view, faced with an entirely new situation in education where the goal; of education, if we are to survive, is the facilitation of change and learning, The only man who is educated is the man who has learned how to learn; the man who has learned how to adapt and change; the man who has realized that no knowledge is secure, that only the process of seeking knowledge gives a basis for security. Changingness, a reliance on process rather than upon static knowledge, is the only thing that makes any sense as a goal for education in the modern world. … To free curiosity; to permit individuals to go charging off in new directions dictated by their own interests; to unleash the sense of inquiry; to open everything to questioning and exploration; to recognize that everything is in process of change – here is an experience I can never forget."

Fourthly, Rogers (1969) proposed that it is important to respect an individual's subjective experience. He stressed that learning is a personal experience; it is person-centred and individual participated. He (Rogers, 1969: 120) noted a concept of "significant learning":

> "…the significant learnings are the more personal ones – independence; self-initiated and responsible learning; release of creativity; a tendency to become more of a person."

Rogers believed that learning is meaningful when the learner motivates towards self-realisation, self-structured, self-discovered, self-appropriated and self-empowerment (also called self-directed or self-orientated). Rogers argued Skinner's control of human behaviour and spelt out three concepts of control (1) external control (2) the influence of B on A (e.g., A giving some degree of consent to these conditions B), and (3) internal control. He explained his view on the second control concept which had been put under external control by Skinner in his theory of behaviourism (Rogers and Skinner, 1962). Affirming his faith in both free, valuing, growing, creative, becoming, self-actualising persons and self-direction are better than direction by any external planners, Rogers (1969: 282) advocated that the individual "would be open to his own experience", "defends himself against any treat of alternation in the concept of self", and takes the responsibility for setting his/her own criteria for evaluating what goals he/she has been trying to achieve.

> "…he would be free to live a feeling subjectively, as well as be aware of it… the self and personality would emerge from experience, rather than experience being translated or twisted to fit a preconceived self-structure." (Rogers, 1969: 284-285)

Two decades later, this concept stressed by several authors, for instance, Sherry Turkle (1997) in her study into interactive computer use and virtual reality pointed out that "people tend to learn best when they learn in their own styles" (Turkle, 1997: 46). Her view of inner conceptions of self to some extent is what so-called "true self" by Rogers (1951). Bargh et al. (2002) stressed self-expression, in particular expression of the "true self", will bring about consequences for establishing linking, rapport, and bonds of understanding with other people, and further these psychological self-processes are likely to play a central role in the social life of the Internet. Based on a study into relationships on the Internet, McKenna et al. (2002) proposed a concept of "Real Me", which is derived from Carl Rogers' (1951) therapeutic notion of "true self". Their findings manifested that the greater expression of one's true self on the Internet encourages the person to incorporate virtual relationships into his/her "true self" in real life (McKenna *et al.*, 2002). More recently, by exploring constructive understanding, Fyrnius et al. (2007) proposed four approaches to understanding: sifting; building; holding; and moving. This result specifically reflects holding - "an intention to reach a final goal" and moving - "continuously striving for a change in perspectives" (Fyrnius *et al.*, 2007: 149, 156) are deep-level learning approaches. These approaches seem to be particularly reflected in Rogers' (1969) concepts of "self-initiated" and "self-actualised".

In addition, Rogers (1969: 304) also proposed that the focus of education is "not upon teaching but on facilitating of self-directed learning". Education is a lifelong process and educators should be openly and flexibly involved in this process (Rogers, 1969). The aim of education is to "develop individuals who are open to change" and "to develop a society in which people can live more comfortably with change than rigidity" (Rogers, 1969: 304). These ideas were also presented in Patterson's (1973: 21) discussion of humanistic education:

> "Education must not only provide a knowledge and understanding of the past, and of the present, but prepare people for the future – a future in lager part unknown, except that it will involve continuing change."

Unquestionably, there are common arguments against Rogers' ideas. According to Kirschenbaum (2004) and Nye (2000), a lot of early criticism of his theory can be seen with reference to seven aspects. First, client-centred therapy is superficial because it is extremely difficult for a person to express and understand "real" feeling or thought, and Rogers, as the listener, may have subjective bias of discovering the most basic determinants of human functioning. People doubted the reliability and validity of his data. Second, Rogers' view of basic human nature is unrealistically optimistic. He has underestimated human evil and overemphasised the "better side" and this may be relevant to his experience and surroundings. Third, humanistic psychology has fostered widespread selfishness, narcissism, and moral permissiveness because of emphasising self-actualisation. Fourth, Rogers is accused of providing little attention to unconscious processes by psychoanalysts as "psychoanalysis holds that certain portions of the personality will always remain at the unconscious level" (Nye, 2000: 154). Fifth, behaviourists pointed out that "Rogers fooled himself into thinking that his clients developed freedom of choice as therapy progressed" (Nye, 2000: 154) by arguing unspecified contingencies of reinforcement. In addition, certain concepts in his theory are not explained precisely and too general, such as "self-concept" and "organismic experiencing". Furthermore, Salmon (1989) and Claxton (1984) drew people's attention that learning as personal and experiential is empowering, but also difficult and risky. As Calxton (1984: 165) criticised, "The kind of learning that involves possible change to the content of identity is all the more risky because there is a chance not just of objective failure but of subjective annihilation".

Nevertheless, although Rogers has been criticised as overly optimistic, his ideas about human nature are fairly simple and helpful in the understanding of human behaviour. The influences of his approaches still contribute to humanistic education, counselling and psychotherapy today. As Rogers (1995: 21) stated,

> "I do not have a Pollyanna view of human nature. I am quite aware that out of defensiveness and inner fear, individuals can and do behave in ways which are horribly destructive, immature, regressive, antisocial, hurtful. Yet, one of the most refreshing and invigorating parts of my experience is to work with such individuals and to discover the strongly positive directional tendencies which exist in them, as in all of us, at the deepest levels".

Patterson (1973) further clarified that to develop self-actualising persons does not mean to encourage selfish and self-centred behaviour. The self-actualising person, or fully functioning person called by Rogers (Rogers and Freiberg, 1994) lives in a society composed of other individuals and will become more mature and realistically socialised. It is not only the goal of education, but also the goal of the individual. It is the single, basic, common motivation of the individual as well as the natural process of learning in the individual. In addition, Nye (2000), who leaned toward a behaviourist's notion that behaviours are reinforced, even agreed that Rogers' suggestions such as "trustworthy", "congruence", "attitudinal conditions" can be very beneficial effects on the thoughts about ourselves as human beings. Rogers' ideas are useful today as it was 40 years ago. For example, in Ronald Barnett's book, *A Will to Learn* (2007), he stressed a concept of "will", which is to some degree similar to Rogers' "true self" and ELT.

> "If students are to develop the wherewithal not just to survive in, but to make an effective contribution to this challenging world, this world of the twenty-first century,

> they will need just such a 'will to learn', a will to learn not just while on their course – and so pursue their engagement with their programme of study – but also to go on learning throughout their lives. However, even to say that is slightly to skew things; for what is in question here are forms of human disposition, a readiness to keep going, a willingness to open oneself to new experiences, and a propensity critically to be honest with oneself and critically to interrogate oneself." (Barnett, 2007: 7)

Yet, people's understanding of learning has advanced along with the extraordinary speed of technology change, so that the researcher realised that there are no right or wrong ways of approaching life and learning. Human learning is a lifelong, combining both being and becoming (Jarvis, 2005). In later chapters, it shows that the data in this study support that students search self-appropriated approaches to gain benefits from using blogs. These approaches are self-oriented and self-evaluated, which they felt, help them to achieve psychological health, develop expertise, see their changes and learn more about themselves.

2.5 Narcissism in psychology studies

This section reviews psychological literature about narcissism as a form of motivation. Like Rogers' theory, this theme drew the researcher's attention at a late stage of the circular data collection and analysis process. The findings of this study manifest that "narcissism" today may have a different sense from its original common definition. In a respect, it can be found in everyone in certain situations.

According to Jonassen and Grabowski (1993: 381), "motivation, more broadly described, is what energizes us to action and includes needs, values, attitudes, interests, aspirations, and incentives", while Child (2004: 176) defined that motivation "consists of internal processes and external incentives which spur us on to satisfy some need". Smith and Spurling (2001: 3) attempted to clarify some common misconceptions of motivation as follows:

- People who have stronger motivation than others have it, because they are more emotional than the others.
- Some people have stronger motivation than others, because they have bigger appetites than others.
- Some people by their nature have stronger motivation than others, just as some can run faster than others.
- Some people have good reasons for doing some learning, so they must be motivated.
- Motivation is the process of applying sticks and carrots to others to get them to act as you want them to.

In cognitive psychology, motivation is "a question of working out what the learner wishes to achieve and setting an action plan for getting there…", so that learning "becomes a study of each stage of the mental process from perception to problem solving and long-term memory" (Cotton, 1995: 51, 64). In social psychology, motivation is "primarily concerned with how behavior is activated and maintained" (Bandura, 1977: 160), so that learning becomes a study of exploring social behaviour process. But the conventional framework in educational psychology is dominated by a mixture of neo-behavioural and cognitive information-processing psychology, including memory, intellectual abilities, development, personality, motivation, and cognitive styles. Motivation therefore becomes one component of developing self-regulatory processes for learning (Cunningham, 1992; Entwistle, 1988; Zhang and Sternberg, 2005).

Narcissism offers an important psychology perspective on motivation theories. Narcissism has been defined in Oxford English Dictionary [7] in two ways, first, "self-love or vanity; self-admiration, self-centredness", and second, in the field of psychology,

> "the condition of gaining emotional or erotic gratification from self-contemplation, sometimes regarded as a stage in the normal psychological development of children which may be reverted to in adulthood during mental illness".

In a common sense, narcissism is a contradictory term. To avoid terminological and conceptual confusion, the researcher uses "moderate narcissism" to represent the desire/feeling of trying to be good. It is a normal personality trait that everyone has, for instance, the person stands in front of mirror, telling him/herself: "I'm the best", or "be myself". It is a normal primitive feeling, rather than pathologic imaginations.

In a large amount of literature on psychology, studies into narcissism would be classified into: (1) with respect to psychopathology and diagnostic mental disorders, (2) philosophical view of self and ego, and (3) self-esteem and psychological health. The first body of literature is not relevant to this study. Another two groups of literature were reviewed and will be discussed from the pros and cons of narcissism.

On one hand, a great deal of research showed that narcissism affects an individual negatively. In terms of Goren's (1995: 329) definition, "narcissism involves an alienation of the reflected self from the inner self, which leads to a particular set of dynamics to regulate self-esteem", Morf and Rhodewalt (2001: 178) argued that,

> "… although narcissistic strategic efforts generally help maintain self-esteem and affect short term, they negatively influence their inter-personal relationships and in the long run ironically undermine the self they are trying to build".

Morf and Rhodewalt (2001) also defined that narcissism is a grandiose self-concept, and a narcissist's repeated self-regulatory thoughts, feelings, and behaviour aim at obtaining validation for the grandiose self. They proposed a self-regulatory processing framework (Figure 2.4) to explain the study of personality dispositions. In this model, they (Morf and Rhodewalt, 2001: 180) stressed that,

[7] Oxford University Press, http://www.oed.com/

> "It assumes that narcissists have certain identity goals that they pursue with more or less success through their social interactions. The main focus of the model is on the inter- and intrapersonal dynamic self-regulatory processes through which narcissists actively (although not necessarily consciously) operate on their social environments to create and maintain their self-knowledge".

Andersen et al. (2001) criticised that Morf and Rhodewalt's model only concerned that a narcissist maintains a grandiose self by seeking admiration and affirmation of their inflated self-views, but ignored that the narcissist seeks approval or real social feedback too. They advocated a concept of "self-with-significant-other" to explain the importance of human connection in bringing attention or acceptance of narcissists (Andersen *et al.*, 2001).

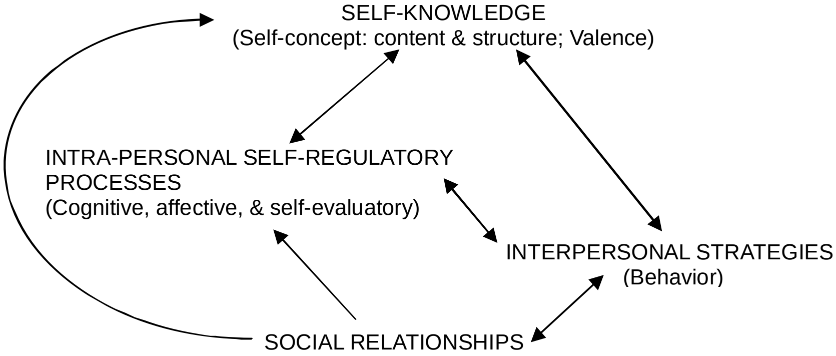


Figure 2.4 A dynamic self-regulatory processing model of narcissism
(Morf and Rhodewalt, 2001: 180)

In addition, some studies on narcissism relate to the younger generation's increased violence and aggression. For example, Baumeister (2000) proposed that narcissism and unstable self-esteem are key factors of predicting aggression. Lowen (1985) mentioned that a narcissist is often unable to empathise with others and even is destructive to other people. Relating to web technologies, Young (1997) pointed out that cyberspace provides a possibility for people to use network excessively and develop manipulated self-presentations. The manipulated self-presentations are negative self-concepts, which lead to potential psychological problems including depression and anxiety. Traditionally, a narcissistic person is seen as self-absorbed, fragile, empty and interpersonally dismissive (Elliot and Thrash, 2001).

On the other hand, a growing body of literature has investigated positive effects of narcissistic traits on people's life. Based on Narcissistic Personality Inventory data, Trzesniewski et al. (2008) argued that it lacks evidence to claim that there is an increasing trend of today's young people in narcissism, comparing with previous generations in 1980s. Linked to Freud's original conception of narcissistic personality – "embodiments of the survival instinct and praised for their efforts at self-preservation", Campbell (2001: 215) suggested seeing it from a more positive view of the construction. He (Campbell, 2001: 215) proposed that normal "narcissism may be a functional and healthy strategy for dealing with the modern world". Sedikides et al. (2004: 401) also reported that narcissism benefits psychological health when it is associated with high self-esteem, according to their findings that narcissism is:

(1) inversely related to daily sadness and dispositional depression,
(2) inversely related to daily and dispositional loneliness,
(3) positively related to daily and dispositional subjective well-being as well as couple well-being,
(4) inversely related to daily anxiety, and
(5) inversely related to dispositional neuroticism.

More importantly, according to narcissistic styles in psychology, Sturman (2000) stated three motives of narcissism in daily activities: (1) needs for power (people highly in the need for power are concerned about interpersonal influence, having impact, and shaping their surroundings), (2) affiliation (a heightened concern about establishing and maintaining close interpersonal relationships), and (3) achievement (a desire to meet stands of excellence, to accomplish tasks more efficiently and effectively). He (Sturman, 2000) measured three narcissistic styles: adaptive, maladaptive and covert narcissism, and concluded that adaptive narcissism is associated with dominance and affiliation motives, maladaptive narcissism is related to high dominance and low affiliation motivation, and covert narcissism was inversely associated with both dominance and affiliation, and there were no significant differences between men and women on measures of narcissism, motives and behaviours.

More recently, Campbell and Foster (2007) stated their views of narcissism studies neutrally by elaborating an extended agency model that accounts for both interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of narcissistic self-regulation. They (Campbell and Foster, 2007: 11, 18) noted:

> "It is not surprising that the narcissistic self is perhaps most usefully conceptualized as a self regulatory system: It is an interactive group of traits, abilities, beliefs, strategies, behavior, and emotions that mutually predict and reinforce each other… we think the 'goodness' or 'badness' of narcissism depends on the contexts and outcomes being measured. In certain social contexts (e.g., initiating social relationships, emerging as a leader) and with certain outcome variables (e.g., feeling good about oneself and one's abilities) narcissism is helpful. In other contexts (e.g., maintaining long term relationships, long term decision making) and with other outcomes variables (e.g., accurate self knowledge) narcissism is harmful."

Nevertheless, narcissism is a neglected and useful concept in educational psychology studies into learning. Here, by this study, narcissism occurs as moderate and positive self-image by a person, but not morbid. It confirms the three motives of narcissism presented in Sturman's (2000) study. Meanwhile, according to Rogers' (1969) idea that learning is a process of self-discovery, self-acceptance, and self-structured, narcissism in a sense, manifests a facet of the search to become the person he/she most uniquely is. As Rogers and Freigerg (1994: 52) said,

> "…we are, perhaps all of us, engaged in a struggle to discover our identity, the person we are and choose to be. This is a very pervasive search; it involves our clothes, our hair,

> out appearance. At a more significant level, it involves our choice of values, our stance in relation to parents and others, the relationship we choose to have to society, our whole philosophy of life."

Not merely in educational psychology, but also in educational informatics area, narcissism becomes a remarkable variable which provides a newer perspective for researchers to investigate the younger generation's online behaviours and web-based learning.

2.6 Knowledge sharing studies

"Knowledge" has been a controversial concept since the Ancient Greeks first began the study of human knowledge. Typically, the familiar slogan "knowledge is power", which comes from Francis Bacon (1561-1626), has been argued since the early 1990s. This is because knowledge, on one hand, is a complex, ambiguous and controversial concept. It "can mean different things to different people" (Kluge *et al.*, 2001: 64) and it resides in people's mind rather than in machines or documents (Hildreth and Kimble, 2002). On the other hand, a key feature of knowledge is hoarding which brings on the phenomenon of "information isolated island" (Al-Hawamdeh, 2003: 83). People realise these issues and explore the nature of knowledge in many disciplines such as sociology, economics, psychology and philosophy. Based on the notion of conversing tacit knowledge and at an individual level, this section discusses the basic knowledge theories and knowledge sharing research which combines tacit knowledge transferring and learning.

2.6.1 Knowledge theory and tacit knowledge

Knowledge is both a thing and a flow, interpreted content, available to people and shifting between different meanings in different contexts (Norris *et al.*, 2003a). The term "knowledge" has been used in a wide range of disciplines, in particular, philosophy and cognitive science.

Plato (427-347 B.C.), the father of epistemology, is "the first philosopher in the Western world to think seriously about the nature of knowledge" (Welbourne, 2001: 1). Plato viewed sense as perception, and reason as knowledge approaches. He argued that all knowing is the knowing of objects, and all knowledge is a priori knowledge (Pojman, 1999). René Descartes (1596-1650), one of the pioneers of modern philosophy, brought an emphatically epistemological perspective to philosophy; he inquired the knowledge of the material world by means of senses (Williams, 2001). The philosophical debate then goes on with Locke, and later Kant, Hegal and Marx until today (Stenmark, 2000).

Modern knowledge theory, a branch of philosophy, tends to give more interpretation to the nature of cognition and its objects (Woozley, 1949), to serve the link between knowledge and understanding, and to give rise to more discussion about the factual attributes of knowledge (Williams, 2001). One of the most significant theories is Polanyi's (1891-1976) (1966: 4) "We can know more than we can tell". Polanyi (1958) first distinguished tacit and explicit dimension of knowledge. According to him (Polanyi, 1958, 1966), tacit knowledge is something that people have unconsciously and most of the time people do not realise its existence, and all knowledge is rooted in tacit knowledge (Al-Hawamdeh, 2003). “Explicit knowledge is precise and codifiable, while tacit knowledge is more intangible and personal” (Sallis and Jones, 2002: 10).

At the same time, Piaget, mentioned above, Swiss biologist and psychologist, developed genetic epistemology. Based on investigating child development and learning, his theory contributes to answering the basic questions about the growth of knowledge and the psychology intelligence development within an educational setting (Kitchener, 1986). According to Piaget, the emergence of human intelligence is from inside, and people’s intellectual experience grows in education, and more “in the creative acts of the mind” (Polanyi, 1958: 395).

Another important contributor in knowledge theory is Sir Karl Popper (1902-1994), who regarded the world as three worlds: “world 1” – the world of physical objects; “world 2” – knowledge, that is, people’s mental (conscious) experiences; and “world 3” – the world of products of the human mind. He proposed the body-mind problem which refers to the relationship between “world 1” and “world 2”. Particularly, from biological and falsification perspectives, he argued that people cannot understand “world 2”, which is inhabited by people’s mental states, “without understanding that its main function is to produce world 3 objects, and to be acted upon by world 3 objects” (Notturno, 1994: 5-7). Then, Popper’s methodological and philosophical suggestions were debated widely in academia (e.g., Svozil, 2003).

Recently, the phrase “tacit knowledge” increasingly appears in the literature on KM. As a branch of KM, sharing tacit knowledge is increasingly addressed to sustain a competitive advantage as well as to gain economical benefits. Many research studies into it are at an organisational level but few at an individual level. For example, Baumard’s (1999) research revealed that, through organisational learning, tacit knowledge can be presented and shared in communities of practice (a community of practice is a group of people who share information, experience, insight, and tools about an area of common interest (Wenger, 1998)); but tacit knowledge is also embedded in organisational culture, in this dimension, it is difficult to be expressed. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) proposed a SECI model of knowledge creation theory, which presents tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge as the two main types of human knowledge and four modes of knowledge conversion between tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge: Socialisation (tacit to tacit knowledge transferring process); Externalisation (tacit to explicit knowledge transferring process); Combination (explicit to explicit knowledge transferring process); and Internalisation (explicit to tacit knowledge transferring process). Their theory provided a critical view of Western philosophy of knowledge epistemology and also appealed to many arguments and research on tacit knowledge. Based on a social cognitive view, Bliss and Säljö (1999: 10) put forward that sharing knowledge is “a symbiotic interaction of individuals, tools, artefacts and social practices”, and becomes very important for “the development of human thinking, learning and reasoning”.

In terms of the original context described by Polanyi, tacit knowledge is highly personal and context specific, and thus deeply depends on the individual knowing, experiences, ideas, values and emotions (Gourlay, 2002; Renzl, 2002). Polanyi claimed that tacit knowledge, as a personal form of knowledge, can only be obtained from experience in a given domain. By contrast, according to Nonaka and Tekeuchi's view, it can be shared and generated through interaction between explicit and tacit knowledge in continuous and spiral manners (Al-Hawamdeh, 2002). Nevertheless, Li and Gao (2003) pointed out that the tacit dimension of knowledge in the context of the Nonaka's SECI model is different from that in Polanyi's original context due to idiosyncratic "implicitness" in Japanese context. Tsoukas (2002) argued that Nonaka and Takeuchi's view of tacit knowledge can be translated into explicit knowledge is erroneous because it ignores the essential ineffability of tacit knowledge. He (Tsoukas, 2002) said that people cannot operationalise tacit knowledge but can find new ways of displaying and manifesting tacit knowledge in social interaction. Stenmark (2000: 8) suggested that "trying to externalise tacit knowledge can lead to serious problems since the nuances and details that are exchanged in physical interactions are lost". Hedesstrom and Whitley (2000) also mentioned that knowledge cannot be formalised by holding the view that the key attribute of knowledge is it exists in people's heads.

There is little doubt that the literature on knowledge sharing is still controversial about what is meant by tacit knowledge and if it is sharable. According to Baumard (1999), two perspectives on tacit knowledge have emerged: one group of researchers (e.g., Haldin-Herrgard, 2000; Polanyi, 1958; 1966; Szulanski, 2000; 2003; Tsoukas, 2002) support the view that tacit knowledge is "sticky", unconscious and ambiguous, and cannot be captured or expressed. Another group of researchers (e.g., Martz and Shepherd, 2003; Nonaka, 1997; Stenmark, 1999; 2000; 2001; Vesiluoma, 2005) believe that tacit knowledge is withheld to increase the individual's power, even though it could be transferred. In this study, the researcher takes the second group's view that tacit knowledge is tacit to the person him/herself; it is hard to convert to explicit knowledge (e.g., formal, systematic language) completely, but it can be converted between people through certain ways (e.g., metaphors, analogies, or images) in certain contexts (e.g., imitation or observation). Relating to the forms of knowledge, the researcher agrees that experience, as a tacit form of knowledge, is possible able to be converted explicitly. This view became an assumptive premise to help the researcher inquire the observed phenomenon, but not a conclusion emerged from the empirical data.

2.6.2 Knowledge sharing and learning

Since the middle of 1990s, as a primary aspect of KM, knowledge sharing has been widely studied. The pivotal value of knowledge sharing is that it encourages people to express, exchange, negotiate, and understand "tacit knowledge" (a predominant form of human knowledge, as mentioned before). Potentially, it encourages learning according to Moon's (2004: 20) opinion,

> "Humans do not learn everything from scratch. Knowledge is accumulated in ways that have been largely agreed through social means (Wilkes, 1997). Even the means of agreement are learned and socially agreed. On this basis, the notion of meaning resides between the locus of social agreement and the individual's efforts to understand, for herself, on a personal level. Having understood something, the individual then contributes to the pool of social meanings by adding her perspective when she represents her learning in some form ..."

Knowledge sharing and learning are not separable; both are highly personal and need specific context (Norris *et al.*, 2003b). Vesiluoma (2005) suggested that knowledge sharing is distributing and absorbing knowledge, that is, it is an action requiring learning. Yet, some people questioned that knowledge sharing is equivalent to learning. Compared to the studies into organisational learning in KM, little was found in the literature on the relationship between knowledge sharing and human learning (Rowley, 2001). The researcher provides three aspects of the relationship that is found in the literature as follows.

Firstly, a large amount of literature provides distinctions between data, information and knowledge; yet, less effort has been put into distinguishing knowledge sharing from information sharing. Sometimes, data, information, and knowledge are used interchangeably, but they are different. Data are a collection of unorganised facts, figures, or a record of signs without meaning in itself (e.g., Bellinger *et al.*, 1997; Norris *et al.*, 2003a). Information is data that has been given meaning, including being collected, organised, processed, or communicated in a way to describe a particular situation or condition (Marchand, 1998; Nonaka, 1994). As Bellinger et al. (1997) noted, information provides answers to Who, What, Where, and When questions. Knowledge is application of data and information that emphasise personal interpreting and understanding. Knowledge answers How and Why questions and is always relevant to a particular context and environmental conditions (Baumard, 1999; Frappaolo, 2002; Kluge *et al.*, 2001). Knowledge differs from information in that it has established meaning and belief to those who use it, that is, "it is always personal" (Marchand, 1998: 255). Up to the transforming of the three concepts, Burton-Jones (1999) defined 1960s-1970s as data management era, 1980s-1995 as information management era, and from 1995 to present as a knowledge management era. Linking to what mentioned in the last section, Al-Hawamdeh (2003) regarded knowledge that can be generally codified into information as explicit knowledge, whereas knowledge that heavily requires different types of trust and ties in the form of social relationships he regarded as tacit knowledge. Meanwhile, Marchand (1998: 255) stressed that although both information and knowledge are context-specific for their meaning, "knowledge depends on context for expressing beliefs and commitments, whereas information depends on context for its use or application"; the two terms relates to different ways of acting. Therefore, to an extent, sharing information and sharing knowledge has different focuses. As Sharratt and Usoro (2005: 189) stated, "the sharing of information covers a broad spectrum of exchanges and does not necessarily lead to the creation of new knowledge", whereas knowledge sharing intrinsically implies the generation of knowledge in the person who use it. This kind of new knowledge generation thus has been seen as learning, which transforms static information into active knowledge. This view is supported by Senge (1998: 11) who wrote:

> "Sharing knowledge is not about giving people something, or getting something from them. That is only valid for information sharing. Sharing knowledge occurs when people are genuinely interested in helping one another develop new capacities for action; it is about creating learning processes."

Secondly, both learning and knowledge sharing can be viewed as social action. Knowledge sharing takes place when knowledge is received, processed, and absorbed by people, and in particular, tacit knowledge can be effectively transferred with communication and collaboration between people (Al-Hawamdeh, 2003). Knowledge sharing is an interactive learning process (Klimkeit, 2005). In this sense, "to learn something can mean to come to know or to have knowledge or it can mean that a person is able to do something. Sometimes this is clarified as 'know that' and 'know how'" (Moon, 2004: 15). "Know that" and "know how" thus far not only means learning from outside teaching or training, but also includes people themselves constructing knowledge by sharing and interaction.

Thirdly, implicit learning is addressed in analysing the relationship between learning and sharing tacit knowledge. Implicit learning, a factor of cognitive psychology is very much related to individual experiences. As Martz and Shepherd (2003) noted, experience is one form of tacit knowledge, and can be transferred in implicit learning processes. Similarly, Raelin (1997) suggested that implicit learning is individual learning acquired through experience that is the foundation for tacit knowledge, which can be studied, understood and shared. Experience, in some respects becomes a predominant threshold of linking learning and knowledge sharing.

Using Rowley's (2001: 227) words, "knowledge and learning are closely intertwined". Knowledge individually feeds into learning process and learning is embedded in knowledge sharing activities as well. People learn through receiving and absorbing knowledge by themselves as well as through exchanging and communicating knowledge among people. It can be seen in the recent fifteen years, research into tacit knowledge and KM has added to a growing body of literature in education.

Gerholm (1990), for example, concluded there are five types of tacit knowledge related to students and graduate study programmes. He pointed out that two forms of them are crucial in academia: one is knowledge that "has grown out of long experience in the discipline", and the other is knowledge generated by students themselves to make sense of what they are experiencing in a programme (Gerholm, 1990: 270-271). Rowley (2000) examined KM applicability in the UK HE institutions with four objectives: to create knowledge repositories; to improve knowledge access; to enhance knowledge environment; and to value knowledge. She pointed out the greater challenge lies in the creation of a knowledge environment and the recognition of knowledge as intellectual capital. Meyer (2003) provided six "knowledge-in-action" theorems and argued professional knowledge (e.g., intuition, experience, or tacit knowledge) is less emphasised than technical knowledge for the preparation of education leaders. More recently, Perkins (2006) categorised five sorts of troublesome knowledge in constructivism learning practice: ritual knowledge; inert knowledge; conceptually difficult knowledge; foreign knowledge; and tacit knowledge, and urged educators to clear the subtle differences and troublesome dimensions of knowledge in learners' articulations of "understanding". Moreover, Sallis and Jones (2002) indicated the role of knowledge management in education by observing "learning to know what we know". They (Sallis and Jones, 2002: 95) addressed the importance of building up learning networks to help share and to make sense of knowledge by writing that,

> "Education may have made people think, but it did not necessarily teach them how to think, or provide thinking skills. Education has often used too narrow a definition of learning, based on a restrictive model of intelligence, concerned largely with academic ability. Consideration has also been given to the synergy between work, innovation and learning. This narrow model of learning filters out some of the most important intelligences and abilities. It ignores that relationship between work and learning, and the relationship between work and learning and change and creativity".

Clearly, unlike information, referring to the processed data that is given meaning by its context, knowledge is non-static, rich, and ambiguous. In today's society, people have more and more realised the important role of knowledge. In particular, tacit knowledge to some extent constitutes the major part of the body of knowledge; therefore, to sustain and exploit tacit knowledge at an individual level is drawing more researchers' attention (Stenmark, 2000). Human knowledge is difficult to conceive, as Baumard (1999) claimed, "what we know" and "what we can express" are still crucial in studies into human learning.

2.6.3 Concerns for sharing knowledge

Knowledge sharing has pitfalls. As Sallis and Jones (2002: 4) mentioned,

> "Knowledge is after all not a tangible product, or a material thing like land, labour and physical capital. Neither is it all of a kind. Some knowledge is very easy to access and cheap to harness, while other knowledge is locked away in people's minds and harder to use effectively".

According to this statement, the researcher sums up three important facets that raise concerns for sharing knowledge. Firstly, as a crucial form of knowledge, tacit knowledge itself is without a clear foundation. Tacit knowledge has been observed from many perspectives, which result in sharing tacit knowledge is without a clear direction and action. Therefore, when people are asked to knowledge share, they often do not know what requires sharing and that generates little enthusiasm. As Perkins (2006) said, different concepts of knowledge used in various disciplines often result in double trouble. Knowledge sharing on the surface is a desirable goal, but in practice often fails due to the troublesome concepts (Robertson, 2004).

Secondly, social barriers such as: language; conflict avoidance; bureaucracy and hierarchy; and incoherent paradigms, are the main barriers from society that affect knowledge sharing (Disterer, 2003; Engström, 2003). For example, Graves et al. (1973) questioned whether tacit knowledge can make sense through different languages for both rationalists and empiricists. There is no convincible answer yet. Renzl (2002) stated that knowledge sharing is based on the process of interaction between the individuals, and it needs cognitive structures, whereas Haldin-Herrgard (2000) argued that knowledge, especially tacit knowledge is held in a non-verbal form so it is hard to provide a useful verbal explanation to another individual. Apparently, knowledge is difficult to share "…than information because it is about relationships rather than data" (Kluge *et al.*, 2001: 191).

Last but not least, individual barriers. Disterer (2003) mentioned individual barriers as: the revelation; uncertainty; unconsciousness; motivation; and viewing knowledge as personal power. In organisations, people often hoard knowledge due to worrying negative influences on their status and reputation; this makes knowledge sharing difficult to put into practice (AI-Hawamdeh, 2003). According to von Krogh et al. (1998), knowledge implies cognition, and cognition implies awareness, which is highly dependent on people's perceptions. Perception, thus, is one of the main difficulties in sharing knowledge. Without doubt, knowledge itself is subjective and experience-based, involving intangible factors such as personal belief, perspective and instinct, which are difficult to express in words, sentences, and formulae (Norris *et al.*, 2003a).

In a nutshell, in KM, at an organisational level, a bulk of research has been undertaken and presents both lessons and successes. To maintain an organisation's performance and competitive benefits, research into knowledge sharing at an individual level thus becomes inevitable as well as important. Without exception, in education, to facilitate students learning better, it also requires studies on how to use knowledge, how to encourage knowledge creation and conversion, how to create knowledge repositories, and how to improve knowledge (e.g., experience-based knowledge) accessibility in HE settings.

2.7 Studies on blogs in HE settings

HE is facing the requirements of imparting knowledge to students as well as fostering their social skills and abilities to develop personal learning strategies. As mentioned earlier, learning is relevant to personal control, self-discovery and playful doing. Blogs, being a fairly new phenomenon, has attracted researchers to investigate what its advantages are and how these advantages can benefit education. In this section, the researcher provides a review of studies into the impact and the usage of blogs in HE settings.

2.7.1 Using blogs in HE

Since 2002, a considerable amount of literature has shown the potential educational value of blogs and wikis as a means to promote deeper learning and integration of learning experiences from both inside and outside the classroom. For example, both Nückles et al. (2004) and Oravec (2003b) used quantitative research methods to investigate blog usage and concluded that a blog can be used as a "middle tool" to foster better retention of the contents to be learnt. Some researchers reported that blogs have a place in encouraging "collaborative learning" (e.g., Du and Wagner, 2005; Huffaker, 2005). Also, there is a growing body of literature investigating the use of blogs based on different perspectives of learning, such as reflective learning (e.g., Chen *et al.*, 2005; Xie and Sharma, 2005), informal learning (e.g., Hammond, 2006), self-organised learning (Fiedler, 2003; 2004), and learning community (e.g., Schroeder, 2003). More recently, more and more blogs have been set up and applied in HE settings. Leeds Elgg[8], University of Glamorgan blogs portal[9], Warwickblogs[10], and Benchmarking of e-Learning in UK Higher Education[11] are typical examples.

Compared with other communication methods such as email, mailing-lists and BBS, a distinctive strong point of blogs is that they provide an opportunity (or environment) for learners to store, track, reflect, deliver and exchange individual ideas and understandings in terms of their preferences (Ferdig and Trammell, 2004). In sequence, the researcher will discuss the literature on blog usage in facilitating learning and teaching from two main facets: platform of collaboration and sharing knowledge; and theoretical basis and arguments.

2.7.1.1 Platform of collaboration and sharing knowledge

Blogs provide a platform of spreading information for practitioners (educators, librarians, students). This is very important for sharing knowledge because the information on blogs may convey codified knowledge. According to Al-Hawamdeh (2003: 12), "Knowledge sharing need to be voluntary and to take place in informal settings", blogs provide such an informal and personalised environment, where people can capture and integrate information, publish thoughts, reflect and converse with others (Röll, 2004). On a day-to-day basis, continual blogging makes it possible to record a person's knowledge building process. Blogging is a learning process and also a knowledge sharing process when bloggers read, comment to and link to each other. Some educators used blogs as online classroom portals which integrate module schedule, learning sources, handouts, collaboration spaces, discussion questions, personal portfolios, etc. together to facilitate e-learning (Coggins, 2004). Also, many educators, librarians and professionals keep their own blogs which filter particular subjects with the resources that they consider the most useful, interesting or the most relevant for their audience from a vast amount of Internet materials (Lamshed *et al.*, 2002; Weller *et al.*, 2005). To a respect, a blog is not merely a source of information, but also a door into the knowledge society. It enables practitioners to keep supporting or disproving their claims and accumulating knowledge (Brady, 2005).

[8] https://elgg.leeds.ac.uk/ Community blogs in University of Leeds (since 2005)
[9] http://www.glam.ac.uk/blogs/1330 University of Glamorgan blog portal (since 2005)
[10] http://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/ University of Warwick blog platform (since 2004)
[11] http://elearning.heacademy.ac.uk/weblogs/benchmarking/ the UK HE sector's e-learning Benchmarking and Pathfinder Programme supported by the UK's Higher Education Academy and JISC (since 2006)

In addition, blogosphere is an element of applying blogs linking a teacher to a global community of educators, a student to a learning community or a librarian to widen library collaboration, and so on (Suzuki, 2004). This is due to blogosphere, which means blogs conversation networks or blogs community, which offers the possibility of indirect online interaction and communication (Downes, 2004a). For instance, Huffaker (2005) suggested using blogs as storytelling because they support interactive virtual space for educators to tell their work-based experiences and stories. Ganley (2004) provided a view of applying blogs as a facilitator of internal and external dialogue to motivate educators or professionals to write more, exchange more and think more. Blogs linkages amongst peer-groups will support interactive opportunities for bridging the traditional divide between classroom instruction and research interests of faculty, and supporting discourse both inside and outside of class (Roberts, 2003; Wrede, 2003). Without doubt, blogs provide an online environment where individuals are able to publish their own opinions, meet like-minded people and form interest-centred networks (Efimova and Fiedler, 2004). Benefited from blog communities, educators can work across time zones and at different universities to meet peer educators, brainstorm, exchange educational ideas and explore important teaching and learning issues, etc. (Davis, 2005). Further, educators can foster collaboration and help increase the relationships between students and tutors (McClellan, 2005). Aimeur et al. (2005) proposed that the blog is indeed helpful for interdisciplinary knowledge sharing and enables strong ties to develop between members of different knowledge communities. According to the very recent Ali-Hasan and Adamic's (2007) study on social relationships by examining links and comments on blogs, they also concluded that blogs do enable relationship formation, reciprocity and cohesion in online communities.

2.7.1.2 Facilitating learning

Apart from revealing that blogs support community, collaboration and sharing knowledge, a growing body of literature also has investigated the benefits of blog usage to students by three aspects, as follows.

Firstly, blogs can help students become subject-matter experts (Ferdig and Trammell, 2004). With blog features, such as self-pace writing, personalised design and easy publishing, students can use blogs to organise their work, to link to subject relevant sources, and to show a flow of their learning, interests and insights. Blogs thus can be used as an aggregator or filter of one certain topic of information. As Böttger and Röll (2004) indicated, blogs can be applied as personal knowledge repositories and learning journals; they enable people to develop their domain knowledge. Similarly, according to Coggins' (2004) idea, instead of writing on paper and traditional learning in class, blogs provide a way for students to record their learning materials systemically, to integrate related information easily and to reflect on their progress year after year, while Lankshear and Knobel (2003) called it as a kind of "back up brain". In terms of the above opinions of using blogs as information sources and supporting communities, it is clear that blogs accumulate knowledge and can be an information gateway which will "assist and accelerate the motivated learner toward expertise" (Dickinson, 2003: 20).

Secondly, "the use of blogs increases student interest and ownership in learning" (Ferdig and Trammell, 2004). This point is reflected by three factors as follows:

(1) The blog can act as a self-organised learning tool. For example, Du and Wagner (2005) reported their empirical study and concluded that blogs do not contravene traditional learning but enhance and facilitate cognitive constructivism and social constructivism. Blogs can be a reflective conversational tool for self-organised learning, and also as a discourse tool for self-awareness learning (Fiedler, 2003) because they make students become self-produced motivators to examine their thoughts, emotions and actions (Wiltse, 2004). Also, blogs allow learners to create their own learning, conceptual models and relevancies (Dickinson, 2003). Nardi et al. (2004a) identified five motivations for blogging (update others on activities and whereabouts; express opinions to influence others; seek others' opinions and feedback; "think by writing"; and release emotional tension) after analysing in-depth interviews data; they highlighted that a blog is a documentary of the blogger's life. Through her PhD study, standing on knowledge management perspective, Efimova (2003; 2004; 2005) presented a series of findings that blogging software can be employed as learning and personal knowledge management tools because it "fits well in contexts that require creating, processing, organising, storing or distributing ideas" (Efimova, 2003b). Another powerful example can be seen from Walker's (2005: 113) description of her own blogging experience:

> "I rapidly found that the daily writing was helping me become more confident about my research, and that I was developing a clearer voice of my own that carried through into my dissertation writing. As colleagues began to blog, I developed a research network at least as important to me in my everyday research as my local colleagues were."

In addition, Huffaker (2005) suggested that future research on blogs should include language acquisition, understanding similarities and differences among bloggers, and develop more personalised approaches to enhance the applicability of blogs.

(2) Blogs create a web-based learning environment. They offer the opportunity for conversation, discourse, and supporting social negotiation in learning, and further provide a learning forum where students can build their own nonlinear learning environment to enable interactive and collaborative learning (Ganley, 2004; Williams and Jacobs, 2004). The opportunity of sharing thoughts is beyond the classroom. For example, Bergner (2004) outlined various features of blogs such as Blogroll, RSS Feed, Trackback, and permaLinks to describe that blogs are extremely suitable for building up a virtual discussion context, which helps students exchange diverse perspectives. Hall and Davison (2007) stated that blogs bring geographically dispersed students together. The open dialogue results in students learning from each other, understanding the relational and contextual basis of knowledge, and promoting the new creation of knowledge (Ferdig and Trammell, 2004; Wiltse, 2004). The dialogue over blogs is also very useful for categorising and managing a vast number of thoughts and encouraging broader participation in debates (Salleh, 2005). Moreover, by offering interactive dialogue contents, blogs may decrease the learner's feelings of alienation and isolation in a virtual distance-learning environment

(Dickey, 2004). In fact, rather than supporting fast interaction, blogs expand communication and open a door to infinite insights.

(3) Blogs support potent pedagogical approaches to enhance learners' writing, reading and critical thinking skills (Lankshear and Knobel, 2003). As mentioned above, blogs provide a flexible self-publishing environment, through blogging, students start to learn how to write a review explicitly, how to select the related ideas from others' work and become aware of the qualities of information sources. As both Brandon (2003) and Walker (2005) suggested, students may become habitual writers through maintaining their blogs. According to Downes' (2003) study, the blog is a good platform for students to write and release their own voice. Blogging can support exploratory learning and improve students' critical thinking skills (Böttger and Röll, 2004). Similarly, Eide and Eide (2005), two physician-learning specialists noted that blogs can promote critical and analytical thinking because of self-paced and nature-words reflection. Blogging online with reading and writing is an art combining monologue and dialogue, and will also engage in community-oriented learning and lifelong learning (Wrede, 2003).

Thirdly, another primary application of blogs is that they provide students legitimate chances to participate (Ferdig and Trammell, 2004). Oravec (2002: 618) claimed that "weblog construction can serve as a way to reduce plagiarism and encourage development of independent styles…" because students write, read and discuss within blogs in an open public domain, they have to be aware that what they have written will be widely read. The blogging process makes them realise how to use network technology appropriately to help express their opinions. Through blogging, the content of a student's blog such as the citation of others' work, the relative critical insights, and copyright violations will be evaluated in a public way. Webber (2007) pointed out that the blog is not good as a reference source for HE students, but is good for developing and presenting ideas. Considering that there is no criterion for the authorisation of blog sources thus far, students are suggested to use blogs for expanding views but not cite in academic writing. Besides learning about plagiarism, copyright, privacy, ethics and defamation, students have to realise the online safety and security issues (Brooks-Young, 2005). For example, they will learn how to post a sensitive opinion online, keep away from network crime, minimise biases and so forth. Meanwhile, this technology may empower students to become more active, analytical and critical to Internet materials (Salleh, 2005). Students may also learn appropriate netiquette and develop an awareness of how to respond to different views or criticism on the Internet. Moreover, Mortensen and Walker (2002: 256) elucidated different ways of using blogs:

> "…weblogs straddle the boundaries between publication and process, between writing towards others and writing for oneself. A weblog is always both for oneself and for one's readers. If it were only for oneself, a private diary would be more useful. If it were only for readers and not a tool for oneself, a more polished and finished form of publication would probably be more appropriate."

2.7.2 Theoretical basis and practical arguments

It is apparent that a fair amount of pedagogic use of blogs is grounded in learning theory, socio-cultural and constructivist perspectives. For example, according to Vygotsky's notions of social cognition, Lipman's concept of a community of inquire as well as Wenger, McDermott and Snyder's ideas of community of practice, Glogoff (2005) demonstrated the meaningful role of blogging in the learning community interaction. By investigating the use of blogs in online journalism courses, Wiltse (2004) claimed that their results support Bandura's social-cognitive learning theory and reported that blogging relates to the interaction of three types of motivation: incentive; vicarious; and self-produced. Grounded in both Kelly's construct psychology and Harri-Augstein and Tomas' conversational framework, Fiedler (2003) argued that blogs can be conceptualised as a reflective conversational learning tool for self-organised learning and blog networks can be conceptualised as conversational learning environments for learners. Also, based on the social penetration theory, a more recent study by Harper and Harper (2006) reported that blogging may encourage self-disclosure which the formal classroom often lacks.

Meanwhile, a few theses also show recent studies into blogs usage. Loft's (2004) research explored the understanding of community blogs by using literature and investigation methods. Schuetz (2005) displayed a research on blog applications in education by drawing on language as "social-semiotic" through a questionnaire quantitative method and shed light on the intricacies of intercultural learning. Johnson (2004) described blogs phenomenon by using a qualitative method through narrative and rhetorical analysis. Furthermore, viewing it as a technology, Milne (2004: iv, 155) concluded that "blogging isn't going to revolutionize anything"; like all other technologies, it has a lifecycle: "originates within existing social practice (context); has a diffusion process that causes it to spread between people (Geek-Chic); and leads to certain social outcomes (Personal Community)". More recently, Felix (2007) conducted a qualitative, holistic multiple case study to examine classroom blogs, and provided insights on how teachers can use blogs to communicate with students, promote effective instructional practice, and enhance student performance.

There is little doubt that the blog has its place in assisting learning, especially in the era of information technology, becoming increasingly used in education. A large body of literature presents its usage from positive aspects. Yet, in the meantime, there are some authors who draw attention to the problems of blogs, for instance, Brook (2002) sharply criticised blogs and called for a rethinking of why people keep blogging. Bruck (2004) stated that real specialists may not engage in blogging and blogs promote narcissism rather than learning by dialogue. David Supple, a web strategy manager at Birmingham University, warned universities should be cautious that the blog's unstructured nature may create further unexpected problems such as porn blogs, illegal and network etiquette issues (Adenekan, 2005). Although blogs can be used to be information sources, Clyde (2004) reminded bloggers to avoid pointless and self-indulgent publishing. Sade (2005) concerned that the blog provides an open constructive learning environment for students but it may not be ideal for the purpose of creating authentic learning experiences. Ganley (2004) wrote, some “bloggers subvert higher education’s lofty aims with their disregard for tradition and protocol, hierarchy and even intellectual property”. Moreover, Suzuki (2004) reminded educators that using blogs in education takes time and lacks objective stance. Besides these, spam is another concern when use blogs in education (e.g., Adenekan, 2005; Mann, 2006).

Taken as a whole, the literature shows that blogs cannot displace face-to-face interaction in traditional classroom, but because of the ease, flexibility and unlimited capacity for accelerating online content, they potentially provide learning possibilities and stimulate the improvement of the traditional learning approaches and environment, particularly, when information technology evolution happens rapidly. They may help students build and progress subject-centred expertise and their specific subject interests. They can promote self-awareness learning, community-oriented learning and web-based interactivity without the limitation of the classroom. They provide opportunities for students to exchange ideas and share thoughts, and also draw students’ attention to lawful issues in cyberspace. In short, blogs improve flexibility in traditional education as well as bring new thinking to traditional education.

2.8 Research gaps and challenge

Without doubt, a number of publications and presentations devoted to the idea of using blogs in HE to facilitate flexible learning and to benefit the learner is growing. However, a host of questions remain from the literature, for example, why do HE students blog? What are students’ perceptions of learning through blogging? Are there any differences between bloggers and pure blog readers by their experience? If it helps share knowledge, what form of knowledge is transferred or shared through blogs? These all reflect that there are not enough in-depth studies into the blogging phenomenon from sharing knowledge perspective and at an individual level. There is a need for further research into the nature of blogs (blogging and reading blogs) and how blogs affect HE students’ learning.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, this study is not about blog technology itself but focuses on the use of blogs for personal learning and further facilitating knowledge sharing practice in a network environment. Its principal aim is to explore the HE students’ motivations for blogging and their conceptualised blogging experience which impacts on personal learning and potentially influences knowledge, especially tacit knowledge sharing. It attempts to bridge the gap in current studies on HE students’ learning and sharing by using a new technological application – blogs. Based on this purpose, the primary core research problem is: how do blogs impact on HE students’ learning and facilitate knowledge sharing. According to recent studies into blogs, it presents that bloggers are the main research target. However, pure blog readers should not been discounted. Bloggers and pure blog readers may have different understanding or perceptions of blogs because of different experiences. Therefore, in order to explore the research problem better, the primary research questions were divided into two groups of sub-questions in terms of bloggers and pure blog readers (see section 1.5). Created at the early stage, these sub-questions were a starting point for the researcher to start the study. They provide a boundary and focus. Later, the questions were refined during the data collection and analysis process.

Briefly, the significances of the research are reflected in three ways. Firstly, a blog can be used as not only a publishing tool but also an accessorial learning tool. Even though it cannot replace the face-to-face interaction in reality, blogs usage may play an irreplaceable role in intensifying and enhancing interactions by extending certain topical discussions, creating a dense interconnected community of learners, and even helping improve learning techniques (Ganley, 2004). This study provides a way of better understanding the nature of virtual learning outside the classroom. Secondly, this study presents an important first step towards providing educators real data that could suggest best uses of blog technology. It can be used as a basis for further study on the uses of social software in different academic disciplines, with various subjects and different learning goals. It attempts to benefit teaching and learning in a more effective way. Thirdly, according to Blood (2002b: 14), blogging "is a similar journey of self-discovery and intellectual self-reliance", therefore, blogs offer people a way of managing personal knowledge and self-development. The research on HE students' blogging and reading blogs experience is important in helping analyse knowledge conversion, knowledge construction and knowledge creation.

The challenge of this study lies in that tacit knowledge is a kind of knowledge which "does not exist in itself or as an object like information, rather it exists in people's mind" (Raynes-Goldie, 2004). Tacit knowledge itself is a disputable term and research into it is still in controversy. What the researcher can study are the opinions that people expressed rather than the thinking or symbolic cognitive process that is in their mind. Meanwhile, there is little in-depth research related to this study, that is, linking blogs, personal learning and knowledge sharing together. It requires the researcher to discover and make sense of the concepts and relationships.

2.9 Summary

This chapter has provided a context for the study, including the literature closely related to it: learning theories and current concerns; knowledge theory and knowledge sharing studies; blog phenomenon and research into its use in HE settings; and the research gaps and research problems. Also, it indicates the emergent literature from data analysis as a confirmation and validation of the knowledge area.

The learning theories reflect the evolution of opinions of human learning, from traditional behavioural theories, an instrumental approach to teaching and learning, through cognitivist theories, providing a variety of ways with human development cognitively, to constructivism, which emphasises knowledge is constructed and learning varies depending on historical and socio-cultural context. Undoubtedly, in this era, information technology is rapidly updating and the studies into the understanding of human learning has its specific characteristics, for instance:

drawing more attention to the web-based environment; the impact of social software in traditional education; computer and human interaction; socio-emotional communication; and informal, flexible and lifelong learning.

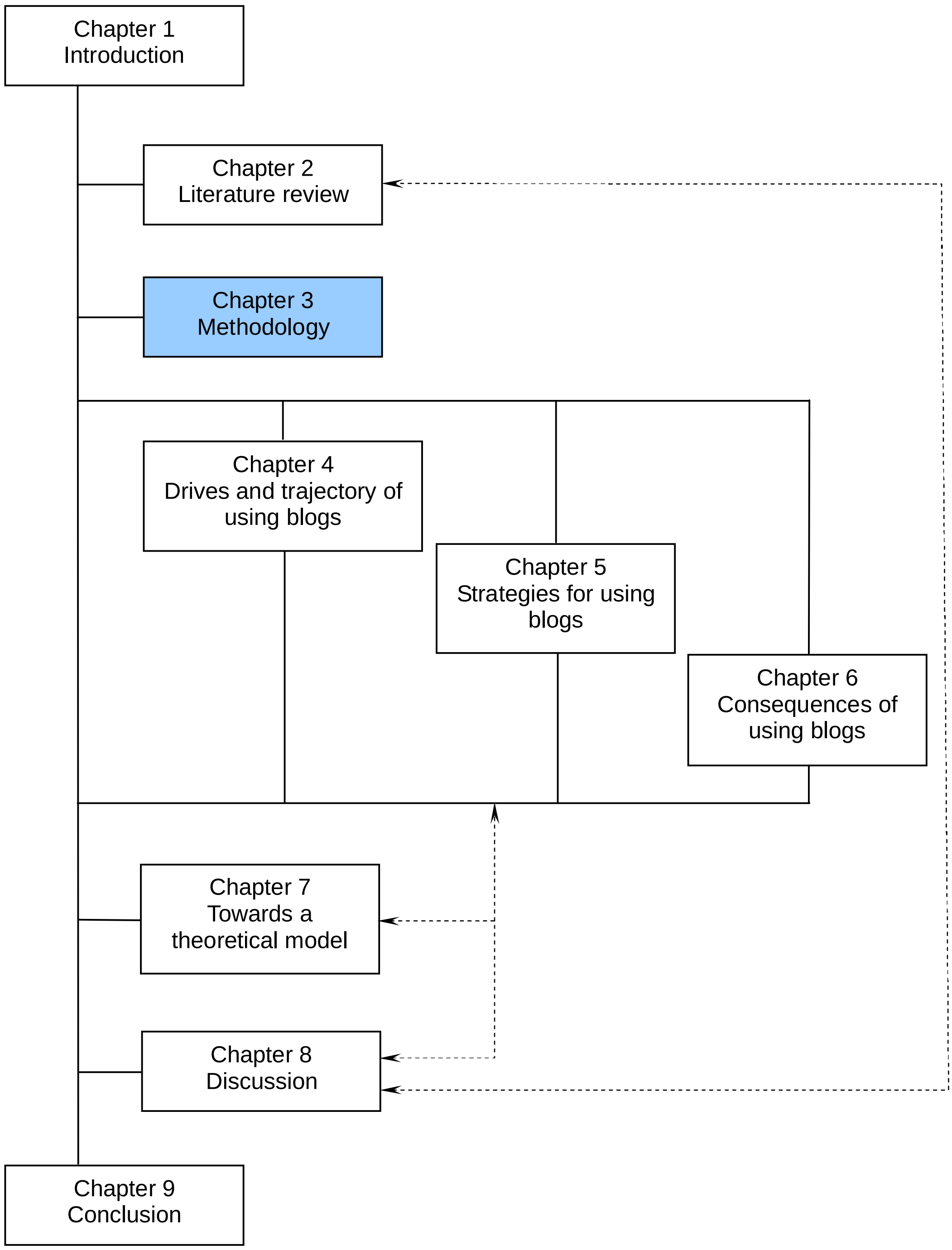
Knowledge is intertwined with learning. The cognition of knowledge has a long philosophical root and is full of epistemological debates. The researcher mostly reviewed the discussion in the KM field and studies that demonstrated the troublesome knowledge (particularly, tacit knowledge) in knowledge sharing and learning. It shows that learning needs knowledge sharing, but sharing tacit knowledge, such as experience, encounters barriers. The research about knowledge sharing is increasingly encouraged by promoting organisational learning in KM, whereas in educational studies, it is not addressed as such. In this field, it is mainly presented by studies into understanding meaning due to the opinion that the student is learning and acquiring knowledge in education, and knowledge is shared in this process.

In addition, the review shows that the soaring popularity of blogs is specifically remarkable in improving organisational learning as well as assisting teaching and learning in academia. The blog was born 10 yeas ago and now exists as a trend of Web 2.0. It has distinguishing characteristics such as personal editorship, flexible hyperlinks, colloquial language, feedback and comments which enable an individual to capture, organise and share viewpoints easily. It potentially supports a learning environment; it is an outlet for thoughts and feelings, and it is a form of personal communication (Nardi *et al.*, 2004b). Also, the literature shows that blogs provide potential opportunities for students. It contributes powerfully to expertise promotion. Students can use blogs as learning repositories where storage and control of subject-centred or interest-related information. With the advantages of blogs, such as archiving and quick-feedback, students can show their learning processes, discover problems, reduce misunderstanding, learn from each other, and trail their subject development and so on. Meanwhile, blogs offer potential benefits to students by accelerating the learning processes and making them learn how to learn, learn how to write and learn how to evaluate information online. Replacing face-to-face interaction in the classroom, the flexible communication channels help students become open to criticism and different perspectives as well as promote them to become active learners by self-organised, collaborative and community-based learning. Not only do blogs provide effective ways to foster learning, but they also serve as potent collective knowledge-banks which are used to interact, self-discourse, dialogue and exchange thoughts (Nardi *et al.*, 2004b). In particular, blogs in a way offer solutions for legitimising relevant issues, for instance: ethics; copyright; and poaching of ideas.

However, every technology has drawbacks, blogs are no exception. They are criticised for the personalised and free publishing features. For example: they reduce learning dialogue; have no clear-cut scope and an unstructured style, which cause pointless and self-indulgent publishing; may localise a student’s interests in a small circle; and so on. Although the blog is arguably one of the most controversial forms of new media today, it is being advanced by early adopters and is “just beginning to break into the larger awareness” (Brandon, 2003: 8). The findings presented in recent publications, blogs are not merely a favourable learning environment, they to some extent bridge the gap between the current weaknesses of HE and the high requirements of HE from society. Therefore, the use of blogs for professional growth and personal learning need further understanding.

As Norris et al. (2003a) said, knowledge, either implicit or tacit, is subjective, experience-based and highly context specific. People widely discuss what is tacit knowledge, knowledge sharing and learning, but little literature reveals the relationships between learning, tacit knowledge sharing and blogs. Learning and knowledge sharing are not stand-alone activities. Learning is embedded in knowledge sharing and knowledge sharing is learning processes for acquiring knowledge. According to viewpoints from the literature (e.g., Fiedler, 2003; 2004; Oravec, 2003a; 2003b; Tosh and Werdmuller, 2005; Williams and Jacobs, 2004), blogs offer the opportunity for self-learning and critical thinking, discourse as well as conversation, which may enable tacit knowledge sharing. Thus, the purpose of this study is to answer the questions such as why HE students blog and how the students' conceptualise learning and sharing through their blog use experience, and contribute to a theory of understanding of contemporary HE students' learning and sharing in a web-based environment that the technology rapidly renovates.

Bearing in mind the purpose, the researcher found that Carl Rogers' ELT are particularly relevant to the findings of this study. Rogers' (1969; 1995) ideas of learning, such as learning involves the whole person, each individual has a desire of well-being, learning is a continuing openness to change, and the importance of individual's subjective experience are still useful today. Although Rogers has been criticised as too optimistic and not realistic, his opinions such as "self-structured", "self-appropriated" have been reflected in this study into investigating blogging phenomenon. Also, narcissism, differing from its usual use as a negative term, is found being moderately presented by exploring the interview data from the participants. Studies into narcissism as a motivation have shown that narcissism has close relationship with self-esteem and ego. Needs for power, affiliation and achievement are three motives of narcissism (Sturman, 2000). Relating to having good feelings about oneself and one's abilities, narcissistic traits are helpful for psychological health; whereas relating to having feelings about accurate self knowledge, narcissistic traits are harmful to self-regulation (Campbell and Foster, 2007). Narcissistic traits provide a new perspective for researchers to observe current socio-technical phenomena. The analysis in later chapters will reveal the validation and extension of the body of literature to help this study.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CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

> *"Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts." – Albert Einstein (1879-1955) (a sign hanging up in his office in Princeton)*

3.1 Introduction

Methodology refers to "the choices we make about appropriate models, cases to study, methods of data gathering, forms of data analysis etc. in planning and executing a research study" (Silverman, 2006: 402). It mirrors the perspective and angle that the researcher took on the question being asked. This chapter is devoted to the choice of methodology, the emergent research design as well as the methods adopted that are bounded with the research problem: what is the nature of blogging and how it facilitates personal learning and knowledge sharing. It begins with a comparison between qualitative and quantitative research in general and in particular discusses the Grounded Theory (GT) approach. It presents the data collection and analysis procedures at different stages. In addition, it outlines the strategies employed for establishing rigour and trustworthiness.

3.2 Approaches to research

Philosophically, ontology entails people making claims about what is knowledge, epistemology is how people know it, axiology is what values go into it, rhetoric is how people write about it, and methodology is the process for studying it (Creswell, 2003: 6). Therefore, there are various terminologies, such as "paradigm", "mode of enquiry", "method", "technique", "strategy" and "approach" in multidisciplinary research in relation with a researcher's philosophical views of the world and different methods of inquiry. To clarify the relationships amongst these terms, Pickard (2007) illustrated a research hierarchy which integrated research paradigms (positivist, interpretivist), research methodologies (qualitative, quantitative), research methods (case study, survey, experimental research, ethnography, Delphi study, action research, historical research, grounded theory), research techniques (questionnaire, experiment, interview), and research instrument (human, pencil and paper, Brass, etc). Walliman (2005) grouped research strategies into experimental, survey, archival analysis, historical, and case study; whereas Silverman (2005: 99) suggested that "in social research, methodologies may be defined very broadly (e.g. quantitative or qualitative) or more narrowly (e.g. grounded theory or conversation analysis)".

As Kumar (1999) put it, if people examine a research study from its objectives aspect, the study can be classified into quantitative, qualitative and mixed approaches. The following discussions will centre on the differences between these approaches and qualitative approach in detail.

3.2.1 Qualitative research versus quantitative research

There is a considerable amount of literature that discusses quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Generally speaking, quantitative research is empirical research in which the data (numbers) is counted or measured whereas qualitative research looks into the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of non-numeric data (words). “Qualitative” implies an idea that experiences are lived, felt, undergone, or difficult to count, whereas “quantitative” treats experiences as similar, countable, measurable or quantifiable (Berg, 2001; Blaxter *et al.*, 2001; Punch, 1998). Leedy and Ormrod (2005: 94) commented the notion of quantitative and qualitative research as follows:

> “In general, quantitative research is used to answer questions about relationships among measured variables with the purpose of explaining, predicting, and controlling phenomena. This approach is sometimes called the *traditional*, *experimental*, or *positivist* approach. … In contrast, qualitative research is typically used to answer questions about the complex nature of phenomena, often with the purpose of describing and understanding the phenomena from the participants’ point of view. The qualitative approach is also referred to as the *interpretative*, *constructivist*, or *postpositivist* approach.”

In Table 3.1, the researcher attempts to draw out the chief contrasting attributes between the two methodologies. It shows that, first of all, the heart of the distinction between quantitative and qualitative paradigms lies on their different philosophical rationales - the schools of realism and idealism, and their subsequent reformulation (Filstead, 1979). The inquirer in qualitative research often makes knowledge claims based on constructivist or advocacy/participatory perspectives. Conversely, the investigator using quantitative approach primarily claims for developing knowledge by employing a natural science model from positivist or empiricist perspectives (Creswell, 2003).

Secondly, due to different philosophical views of the world (or assumptions of knowledge claims), there are different guiding principles between qualitative and quantitative research. The qualitative researcher views social phenomena holistically with panoramic perspectives. In contrast, the quantitative researcher views social phenomena atomistically with particularistic perspectives (Reichardt and Cook, 1979). As Mason (2002: 233-234) stated, “quantitative research tends to be associated with a predetermined research design”, whereas “qualitative research tends to be associated with an emergent research design”. In accordance with the principal orientation to the role of theory in relation to research, qualitative approach follows inductive reasoning, which uses the data to generate ideas (hypothesis/theory generating), whereas quantitative approach engages in deductive reasoning, which “begins with the idea and uses the data to confirm or negate the idea (hypothesis testing)" (Thorne, 2000: 68). Creswell (2003: 125, 132) has demonstrated the two logics explicitly (see Figure 3.1).

Table 3.1 Traditional distinctive attributes of quantitative and qualitative research
(Adapted from Bryman, 2004: 10-31, 270-288; Gorman and Clayton, 2005: 4-9; Hoepfl, 1997; Larkin, 2002; Pickard, 2007: 5-22; Reichardt and Cook, 1979: 9-10; Wellington, 2000: 18)

	Qualitative research	**Quantitative research**
View of the world (Philosophic background)	Reality is subjective, constructed Social anthropological world view A rationalist's view of knowledge Phenomenological Interpretivist	Reality is objective Natural science world view An empiricist's view of knowledge Positivistic Positivist
Guiding principles	Accepts subjectivity Holistic Data-driven Theory emerging Inductive Exploratory Sensitising concepts Process-oriented	Claims objectivity Atomistic/aggregative Theory-driven Theory testing Hypothetic-deductive Prediction Definitive concepts Outcome-oriented
Usage	Small-scale studies in depth	Large-scale studies
Data collection	Natural settings Purposive Representative perspective sample Soft, rich, nuanced, deep data Textual Researcher as own instrument Open (ecological validity)	Artificial settings Probabilistic Representative population sample Hard, reliable, replicable data Numerical Measurement, testing instruments Closed (experimental control)
Data analysis	Insider perspective Interpretative Discovery Understanding participants' views Dependent on the researcher	Outsider perspective Statistic Verification Seeking facts and causes Independent of the researcher
Quality criteria	Trustworthiness Contextual account Dependability/consistency Transferability Credibility Confirmability	Rigour Generalisable account Reliability External validity Internal validity Objectivity

Thirdly, qualitative and quantitative approaches have different usages. Qualitative research is often related to small-scale studies, employing interview or observation method in a natural field setting. It helps the researcher to understand the process (or whatever he/she is interested in) in-depth. Quantitative samples are usually large in size and the data is collected by using survey method. It aims to represent a population and to examine the generalisability of findings, therefore, the larger the sample, the more reliable the findings would be (Denscombe, 2003; Mason, 2002; Simpson, 1990).

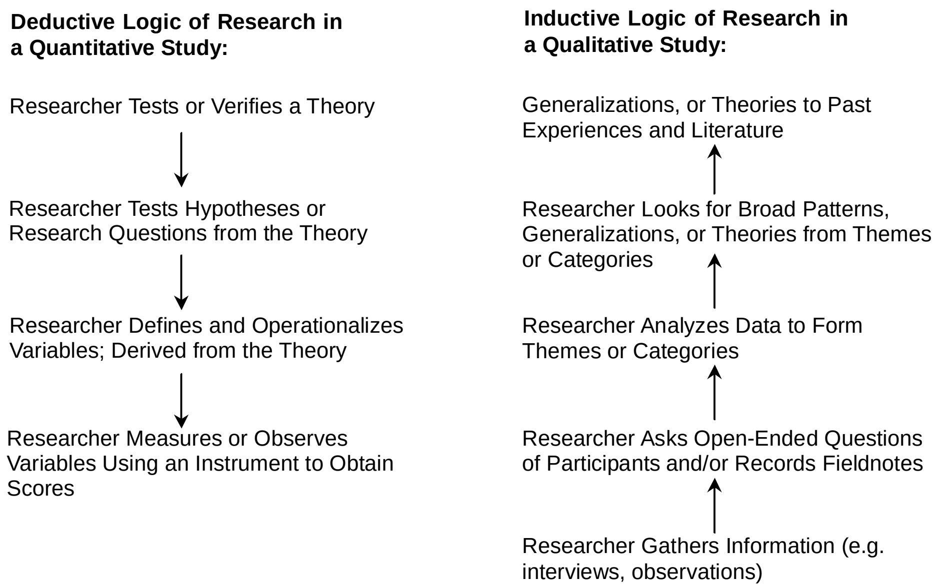


Figure 3.1 Quantitative approach and qualitative approach
(Creswell, 2003: 125, 132)

In addition, the focuses of the data sought, and the subsequent methods of data analysis, are different. “Qualitative data are sexy”, according to Miles and Huberman (1994: 1); they provided a source of well grounded, richly described, fruitfully explored and chronologically traceable explanations of processes in identifiable local contexts, and help people “understand” or “discover” the nature of the phenomenon (Miles and Huberman, 1994). On the contrary, quantitative data offer non-chronologically-traceable, statistical, inferential explanations using described, related, categorised variables and their relationships or comparisons with the theory being tested. Walliman (2005: 247) dwelt on the dissimilarity as follows:

> “The researcher doing qualitative research will attempt to obtain an inside view of the phenomenon, getting as close as possible to the subject of the research in order to collect resonant, fertile data to enable the development of a social construct through the dynamic process of research. The quantitative researcher, on the other hand, chooses to remain distant as an outsider, collecting hard and reliable data, as reality is considered to be exoteric and static. The qualitative approach tends to be unstructured, allowing concepts and theories to emerge, while the quantitative approach begins with concepts and theories and tests them in a rigorous, structured fashion with the result that they are either supported, amended or rejected.”

Last but not least, qualitative and quantitative approaches follow different quality criteria. Validity and reliability are the most fundamental considerations in developing and evaluating theory testing methods. “Validity refers to the degree to which a measure assesses what it purports to measure" (Fink, 1998: 113). It guarantees that a test or a research instrument measures what it is supposed to measure by dealing with "truth", "correctness" or "precision" (Lewis and Ritchie, 2003). Reliability signifies "the degree to which the finding is independent of accidental circumstances of the research" and it is linked to repeatability or replicability (Kirk and Miller, 1986: 20). Nevertheless, there are many arguments against such traditionally addressed criteria in quantitative studies being used in qualitative research (e.g., Anfara *et al.*, 2002; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Marshall and Rossman, 1999). The quality criteria of judging qualitative research include "trustworthiness", "dependability", "transferability", and "confirmability", which will be discussed in detail in section 3.6.

The major focuses of the different paradigms listed in Table 3.1 attempt to compare the core dissimilarities between qualitative and quantitative research from their traditional adoptions, but not to prevent the researcher from utilising them flexibly or conjointly in terms of their research interests, time and means. As Reichardt and Cook (1979) critically analysed, there are no absolute ways of separating the two paradigms. "Quantitative methods are not always theory-laden or hypothesis-driven, and… Similarly, qualitative research can never be complete fiction…" (Wellington, 2000: 17). "Qualitative data may be quantified and quantitative data qualified" (Blaxter *et al.*, 2001: 199). Each approach has different biases, each can be used to check and learn from the other. Therefore, in recent years, there has been a growing body of literature on using mixed methods to reduce the contrasts and gain benefits from both approaches.

3.2.2 Mixed methods approach

Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004: 17) defined a mixed method "as the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study". Compared with qualitative and quantitative approaches, it is "new and still developing in form and substance" (Creswell, 2003: 3). Usually the researcher triangulates the two methods in order to check on the accuracy of the data gathered by each method, to lessen weaknesses in a study, and to answer a broader and more complete range of research questions (Denscombe, 2003; Mason, 2002; McNeill and Chapman, 2005). These purposes have been clearly stated by Gorman and Clayton (2005: 12-13) as follows:

> "First, when two or more methods are employed, the researcher is able to address different aspects of the same research question, thereby extending the breadth of the project. Second, by employing methods from different research paradigms (positivist and interpretivist), the researcher is able to compensate for inherent weaknesses in each approach."

Mixed methods approaches base on pragmatic knowledge claims and collect diverse types of data sequentially, concurrently or transformatively, which best provide an understanding of a research problem (Creswell, 2003). There is general agreement about the potential benefits and obstacles of using mixed approaches. The researcher outlines them in Table 3.2. Creswell (2003) proposed three sequential and alternative strategies of implementing mixed methods research and advised the researcher to consider the reasons why a mixed methods design is feasible for their study.

Table 3.2 The strengths and weaknesses in mixed methods approaches
(Adapted from Blaxter *et al.*, 2001: 65; Johnson and Christensen, 2004; Reichardt and Cook, 1979: 21-26)

Benefits	Obstacles
▪ Researcher can generate and test a grounded theory ▪ Each method-type building upon the other ▪ Multiple purposes which concern both process and outcome ▪ Triangulation through converging operations ▪ Both qualitative data and quantitative data are collected ▪ To increase the generalisability of the results ▪ Can provide stronger evidence for a conclusion through convergence and corroboration of findings.	▪ Difficult and risky for a single new researcher to carry out ▪ Can be prohibitively expensive ▪ May be more time consuming, unless the activities of the two methods can proceed concurrently ▪ Both inductive and deductive reasoning are used so that the researcher has to gain sufficient training about multiple methods and understand how to mix them appropriately

3.2.3 Qualitative approaches in detail

Dezin and Lincoln (2005: 2) stated that "by the 1960s, battle lines were drawn within qualitative and quantitative camps". From the 1970s to the 1990s, statistical approaches were well established in many areas of research such as history, sociology, economics and management qualification, whereas the research methodology, by the 1990s, as Bryman and Burgess (1994a) noted, shifted from the pre-eminence and predominance of quantitative methodology to an emphasis upon qualitative methodology in British sociology. Viewed as a "soft science", practices of qualitative research have spread widely into many different disciplines and emerging interdisciplines, such as computing, political science, religion, journalism, education, health care, literacy criticism and library and information science (LIS) (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Maxwell (1996: 17) wrote that "the strengths of qualitative research derive primarily from its inductive approach, its focus on specific situations or people, and its emphasis on words rather than numbers". These strengths allow the researcher far greater flexibility to build "a complex, holistic picture", analyse words, report "detailed views of informants", and conduct "the study in a natural setting" (Creswell, 1998: 15) than in most quantitative research.

According to different theoretical perspectives on strategies of inquiry, there are various classifications of methodologies in qualitative research study. For example, Maione and Chenail (1999) explained that qualitative research is "a cover term for a group of methodologies dedicated to the description and interpretation of social phenomenon". They split qualitative research approaches into: ethnography; ethnomethodology; discourse analysis; narrative analysis; grounded theory; phenomenology; frame analysis; hermeneutics; and conversation analysis.

Trochim (2005) identified four main approaches in qualitative research: ethnography; phenomenology; field research; and grounded theory. In Denscombe's view (2003), there were eight strategies of studies: surveys; case studies; internet research; experiment; action research; ethnography; phenomenology; and grounded theory. Yet, Creswell (2003) stated five main types of qualitative approach: ethnography; case studies; phenomenology; narrative research; and grounded theory. Moreover, Patton (2002: 125) provided an in-depth comparative description of these methodologies:

> "Ethnography focuses on culture, ethnomethodology on everyday life, symbolic interactionism on symbolic meanings in behavior, semiotics on signs, hermeneutics on interpretations, and phenomenology on lived experience. Their theoretical frameworks direct us to particular aspects of human experience as especially deserving of attention in our attempt to make sense of the social world. In contrast, grounded theory focuses on the process of generating theory rather than a particular theoretical content. It emphasizes steps and procedures for connecting induction and deduction through the constant comparative method, comparing research sites, doing theoretical sampling, and testing emergent concepts with additional fieldwork."

To understand the specific strategic direction of conducting a research, Table 3.3 below illustrates the most identified eight methodologies in social science and LIS in the literature on qualitative study.

Considering the discussion thus far, with reference to the research aim, to explore the nature of blogging and its impacts on personal learning and knowledge sharing, this study seeks to investigate understandings, meanings, perceptions and the subjective experiences of blogging and reading blogs. Therefore, the researcher is claiming knowledge through a social constructivism perspective and has chosen a qualitative approach. As Thomas (2006: 238) said below, highly inductive, loosely designed research can help the researcher understand the phenomenon deeply and thoroughly.

> "The primary purpose of the inductive approach is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies."

Moreover, the researcher intends to analyse the nature of the blog phenomenon through conceptualisation rather than statistics and mathematics, that is, this study is intent on exploring the blog phenomenon by collecting data in a natural setting and generating a theory rather than testing or verifying an existent theory. From this point of view quantitative approaches are not appropriate.

A mixed approach could possibly be used to research into the blog phenomenon, but again this project is proceeding on the basis of in-depth inductive reasoning from multiple practitioners' perspectives to a substantive conclusion, that is, generate a theory. Thereby, considering the practical exigencies of time, financial support, and other resources, mixed method was not adopted and it is hoped the emergent theory can be either further developed using qualitative research, or verified through quantitative analysis in other complementary studies.

Table 3.3 Qualitative research methodologies and goals
(Adapted from Bryman, 2004: 537-547; Denscombe, 2003: 73-128; Law *et al.*, 1998; Leedy and Ormrod, 2005: 108-144; Silverman, 2001: 304-307; Snape and Spencer, 2003: 12-13)

Methodology	Aim	Usage
Action analysis	A type of applied research that focuses on finding a solution to local problem in a local setting.	Action research is normally associated with 'hand-on', small scale research projects. The researcher often is practitioner/user.
Case study	Learning more about an unknown or poorly understand situation by exploring a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals in depth.	To understand one or few cases within its/their natural setting. The cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed case information.
Content analysis	Identifying patterns, themes, or biases within a particular body of material through a detailed and systematical examination of the contents of that material.	Applied to any verbal, visual, documents and texts or behavioural form of human communication for quantifying content in terms of predetermined categories.
Discourse analysis	Examining the way knowledge is produced within different discourses and the performances, linguistic styles and rhetorical devices used in particular accounts.	Closely relates to language, mainly analysing talk, text, writing etc. what is being communicated and how.
Ethnography	Understanding the social world of people being studied through immersion in their community to produce detailed description of people, their culture and beliefs.	Tends to emphasise the importance of understanding things from the point of view of intact cultural group in natural setting.
Grounded theory	Developing 'emergent' theories of social action through the identification of analytical categories and the relationships between them.	The emphasis is placed on generation of theory rather than verification.
Narrative analysis	Analysing the way different conversations are structured and the meanings they contain.	The analysis is concerned with uncovering the underlying structures of talking in action. It is grounded in ethnomethodology.
Phenomenological study	Understanding the 'constructs' people use in everyday life to make sense of their world. It seeks to understand the phenomenon of a lived experience.	Phenomenology deals with the ways people interpret events and, literally, make sense of their personal experience.

In addition, qualitative research serves an emergent design which enables the researcher to focus on the emerging process as well as the outcomes or product of the research (Hoepfl, 1997). According to the above comparisons between qualitative approaches, this study is not to diagnose a problem and search for a solution to the problem; not to entail the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case; not to quantify the narrative to apply standardised measurements to metrically defined units; not to study the rhetorical or linguistic organisation of talk and text; not to answer the question "what is it like to experience the event?" for instance;

and also not to write highly descriptively about human behaviour within a certain culture (Bryman, 2004; Leedy and Ormrod, 2005; Pickard, 2007; Silverman, 2006; Wellington, 2000). In this study, GT was selected because the value of using it lies in exploring new ideas and generating theory. It not only could be employed with loose and flexible design but also was suitable to the requirements of this study. The major considerations of adopting GT are further discussed in next section.

3.3 Grounded theory

Regarded as a framework for inductively generating theory from data (Douglas, 2003), GT has its roots in medical sociology (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), and has spread to wider practitioner fields such as nursing, education, psychology, accounting, business management, public health, social work, and LIS (Strauss and Corbin, 1997). During the past 40 years, an increasing range of discussions, practical applications and debates of GT has become available in the literature. This section presents (1) an overview of GT (2) reflects briefly on the notion of adopting a GT approach in this study as well as (3) how the researcher applied the approach in practice.

3.3.1 An overview of GT

GT, "the discovery of theory from data" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 1), was first defined by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in their book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* in 1967. Although the cofounders Glaser (from Columbia University, with a quantitative research tradition) and Strauss (from the University of Chicago, with a tradition in qualitative research) were from different philosophical and research traditions, it is widely recognised that original theoretical underpinnings in GT were from pragmatics and symbolic interactionism (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000; Corbin and Strauss, 1990; Pickard, 2007; Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), the aim of GT is to generate theory rather than verify theory. More importantly, it not only generates theory but also grounds that theory in data, that is, the data is systematically collected and analysed to generate an inductive theory about a substantive area (Glaser, 1992; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). As Morse (1997: 164) noted, "theory appears in many forms that vary in structure, sophistication, and modes of derivation". GT itself is not a theory but an approach, a strategy (Punch, 1998). By theory in this approach, Glaser and Strauss (1967: 3) explicitly claimed that in sociology, it is "a strategy for handling data in research, providing modes of conceptualization for describing and explaining". Mjøset (2005: 379) further put it as "a case of the explanation-based type of theory reflecting a pragmatist attitude".

As one of approaches in qualitative research, GT has been rapidly and influentially used because it generates a conceptual understanding of issues (or phenomena) that are embedded in reality (Cutcliffe, 2000; Douglas, 2003). Researchers using this approach often regard particular events, groups, situations and settings as data sources, and intend to create a theory by constant comparison, coding and analysis of conceptual relationships amongst this data (Backman and Kyngäs, 1999; Hunter *et al.*, 2005). According to Bailey et al. (1999) and McCallin (2003), there are six basic premises of GT: (1) the world is in a constant state of flux and the individuals are not all equally placed (2) qualitative data analysis is basically pragmatic (3) the aim of qualitative analysis is to generate new concepts and theories (4) theories should be "grounded" in empirical reality (5) the researcher is open minded, and (6) participants cannot be predicted entirely at the beginning of the research, which affects the research design.

In 1967, Glaser and Strauss argued against a "logical deductive" view and suggested the researcher should start with "tabula rasa", collect data in reality, first define the raw data into as many categories as possible and then integrate the categories by constantly comparing them (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The core elements in this process include: literature use; theoretical sampling; constant comparison method; categories and theoretical saturation. Theoretical sampling will be discussed in section 3.4 and other ones will be indicated in detail through the practical research procedures described in section 3.3.3.

The GT approach has a 40-year history of generating important insights and conceptual explanations across a highly diverse range of substantive areas; however, it has undergone a series of variations over the past twenty years due to key elements in GT (Denscombe, 2003; Wilson and Hutchinson, 1996). Firstly, it became clear that Glaser and Strauss contributed to GT separately since the first edition in 1990 of Strauss and Corbin's book *Basics of Qualitative Research* and Glaser's book *Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis* published in 1992. Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) introduced "a new coding process with a strong emphasis on conditions, context, interaction strategies and consequences" (Goulding, 2002: 158). Glaser (1978; 1992; 2002a) interpreted and stressed the emergence of theory by data conceptualisation. He argued Strauss' approach is no longer GT, but "full conceptual description" and "forcing data" (Glaser, 1992: 122). Glaser has a more traditional positivist perspective "with emphasis on supposition of an objective and external reality as well as being a neutral observer", whereas Strauss' later work "is based on the assumption of having an unbiased position in collecting data and applying a certain technical procedures [sic] by letting the participants have their own voice" (Moghaddam, 2006: 53). The key arguments between Glaserian and Straussian perspectives are summarised by Onions (2006) in Table 3.4. As Pickard (2007) pointed out, this divergence has left researchers with two fundamental approaches: Straussian's more structured approach to analysis through the constant comparative technique and Glaserian's less structured approach of "theoretical sensitivity".

Moreover, Charmaz (2000; 2002; 2006) developed GT from a constructivism perspective. She emphasised the pragmatist foundation and contemporary constructivist sensibilities in that, "a constructivist grounded theory retains the fluidity and open-ended character of pragmatism as evidenced in Strauss' works and those influenced by him" (Charmaz, 2006: 184). Charmaz argued that "no researcher is neutral" in terms of using language to understand meaning or views (Charmaz, 2006: 46-47). She (Charmaz, 2006: 10) proposed her standpoint as follows,

> "Glaser and Strauss talk about discovering theory as emerging from data separate from the scientific observer. Unlike their position, I assume that neither data nor theories are discovered. Rather, we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspective, and research practices".

Also she (Charmaz, 2000: 510) noted that,

> "the strategies of grounded theory include (a) simultaneous collection and analysis of data, (b) a two-step data coding process, (c) comparative methods, (d) memo writing aimed at the construction of conceptual analyses, (e) sampling to refine the researcher's emerging theoretical ideas, and (f) integration of the theoretical framework".

Table 3.4 Key differences between Glaserian and Straussian in GT approach
(Onions, 2006: 8-9)

'Glaserian'	**'Straussian'**
Beginning with general wonderment (an empty mind)	Having a general idea of where to begin
Emerging theory, with neutral questions	Forcing the theory, with structured questions
Development of a conceptual theory	Conceptual description (description of situations)
Theoretical sensitivity (the ability to perceive variables and relationships) comes from immersion in the data	Theoretical sensitivity comes from methods and tools
The theory is grounded in the data	The theory is interpreted by an observer
The credibility of the theory, or verification, is derived from its grounding in the data	The credibility of the theory comes from the rigour of the method
A basic social process should be identified	Basic social processes need not be identified
The researcher is passive, exhibiting disciplined restraint	The researcher is active
Data reveals the theory	Data is structured to reveal the theory
Coding is less rigorous, a constant comparison of incident to incident, with neutral questions and categories and properties evolving. Take care not to 'over-conceptualise', identify key points	Coding is more rigorous and defined by technique. The nature of making comparisons varies with the coding technique. Labels are carefully crafted at the time. Codes are derived from 'micro-analysis which consists of analysis data word-by-word'
Two coding phases or types, simple (fracture the data then conceptually group it) and substantive (open or selective, to produce categories and properties)	Three types of coding, open (identifying, naming, categorising and describing phenomena), axial (the process of relating codes to each other) and selective (choosing a core category and relating other categories to that)
Regarded by some as the only 'true' GT method	Regarded by some as a form of qualitative data analysis (QDA)

Nevertheless, Glaser (2002b) argued that "constructivist grounded theory is a misnomer" and criticised Charmaz that,

> "…she neglects the carefulness of the GT method which makes the generated theory as objective as humanly possible. But also she neglects that the product is conceptual which provides an abstract distance from the data. Thus the conceptualizations are distant, objectifications if she wishes to use these terms. But more to the point, she is caught by descriptive capture and is remodeling GT to QDA story talk, while neglecting the fundamental properties of abstraction analysis".

In addition, there are many other versions in different disciplines based on the original 1967 Glaser and Strauss' work. For example, Pandit (1996) outlined concepts, categories and propositions as the three basic elements of GT and argued that the original GT produces conceptual but not measured relationships. Hutchinson (1988) developed a schema form of GT in educational research and identified three levels coding I to III, standing for in vivo or substantive, categories and theoretical constructs. Schwandt (1997: 60) distinguished "grounded theory methodology" from "grounded theory" as follows:

> "The term 'grounded theory' is often used in a nonspecific way to refer to any approach to developing theoretical ideas (concepts, models, formal theories) that somehow begins with data. But grounded theory methodology is a specific, highly developed, rigorous set of procedures for producing substantive theory of social phenomena. This approach to the analysis of qualitative data simultaneously employs techniques of induction, deduction, and verification to develop theory."

Apart from the different versions of GT, there are multiple debates of it as well. Silverman (2005) argued that GT fails to acknowledge implicit theories which guide early analysis. Wilson and Hutchinson (1996) identified six methodological mistakes in GT: muddling qualitative methods; generational erosion; premature closure; overly generic labels; importing concepts; and methodological transgression. Goulding (2002) questioned that it is hard without any fixed ideas; a novice researcher may feel it is difficult to clear up their thoughts, narrow down the topic of research and find a new point of view, which in short, results in the difficulties of building their own theory grounded in terms of their experiences (Backman and Kyngäs, 1999). Denscombe (2003) pointed out that the disadvantages of GT include the fact that it does not enable precise planning due to the uncertainty of predicting theoretical sampling in advance; there is a danger that the theory generated from the data might ignore the influence of social, economic and political factors and the historical background to events, which might be vital to any full and valid theory explaining the phenomenon. Both Bryman (2004) and Goulding (2002) put forward an argument that there are still not sufficient descriptions of the difference between concepts and categories in GT, and which concepts are built up into categories.

Yet, regardless of Glaserian's or Straussian's philosophical perspectives, and the existence of diverse versions of GT, there is hardly any doubt that they have a similar standpoint with respect to the basic research process, including collecting data, coding, comparing, categorising, theoretical sampling, categories saturation, and theory generation (Moghaddam, 2006). The uniqueness of the GT approach lies in three elements (Glaser, 1978; 1992; Glaser and Holton, 2004; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998):

- Theory is emergent from empirical data rather than from inferences or existing theory.
- Constant comparison method enables the theory generation during systematic collective and analytic procedures.
- Memo-writing is the formulation and revision of theory throughout the research process.

3.3.2 The rationale of adopting GT

In this study, the research journey largely progressed through following the original Glaser and Strauss' *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967) and Strauss and Corbin's *Basics of Qualitative Research* (1998) as technique and strategy guides. Heath and Cowley (2004: 142) provided an explicit explanation,

> "Glaser (1978) had extended grounded theory beyond the original text (Glaser and Strauss 1967) to explain in more detail concepts such as theoretical sampling, theoretical coding and use of theoretical memos, but it was Strauss and Corbin (1990) who focused on developing the analytic techniques and providing guidance to novice researchers… It is methodological rather than ontological and epistemological aspects that have been cited as the main source of divergence".

The rationale of employing GT here is based on a reflection of five aspects. The first consideration was that the research topic relates to a technology developed less than 10 years ago. According to Fernández's (2004a) description, GT method is applicable to the study of new socio-technical phenomena. Goulding (1999: 8) also noted that usually people adopt GT "when the topic of interest has been relatively ignored in the literature, or has been given only superficial attention". Thus arguably, a GT approach basically fits the research topic. This study is about a socio-technical phenomenon (blogs), individual experiences and perceptions (about personal learning and knowledge sharing), which only raised academic interests from the late 1990s. As mentioned in Chapter 2, there are certain gaps in these areas. Little doubt that, in 2005 when this study began, the area of interest was a new developing one and did not yet have a long, firm and empirically based literature (Goulding, 1999). Therefore, in this respect, "the rationale for doing a grounded theory study is that we have no satisfactory theory on the topic, and that we do not understand enough about it to begin theorizing" (Punch, 1998: 168).

The second consideration was that the purpose of the study is to explore the motivations for blogging and how HE student's personal learning and sharing are being facilitated through using blogs. The GT approach is suitable for studying such individual processes. In light of this, GT helped the researcher discover theory underpinning the phenomenon grounded in empirical data. The flexibility in both the selection of instances in sampling and the comparative analysis of the data enabled the exploration of new ideas (Denscombe, 2003). The concurrent processes of collection and analysis was intended neither to answer specific questions nor to test an existing hypothesis, but to understand, to explore, to discover and to interpret the blogging phenomenon from the participant's viewpoint (Pickard, 2007). Using Onions' (2006: 6) words, "it begins with a situation that the researcher wishes to understand" and the emerging theory may be refined or abandoned flexibly over the procedure.

Thirdly, GT itself is a well documented approach, which has increasingly been systematically used since the 1960s (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). GT provides a single, unified, systematic method of research analysis, which helps develop an emergent theory and find out possible relationships (Goulding, 1999). It not only allows accessing and processing of a rich variety of data but also is itself an interactive and spiral process. It may be based on single or multiple sources of data and the researcher can hold multiple perspectives in the discovery process (Fernández, 2004a; Onions, 2006). With these strengths, GT is feasible because it either fits "the situation being researched" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 3) or benefits the research process. Without regard to the transformation of GT, its distinct advantages are revealed as follows (Denscombe, 2003: 126; Goulding, 2002: 107; Mason, 2002: 125; Turner, 1981):

- GT is a fairly adaptable, established and credible methodology, associated with using a variety of qualitative data collection methods (e.g., interviewing, observations, focus group and diaries).
- GT focuses on practice and produces explanations that represent data on human interaction in reality.
- Theory is able to emerge by interactive data collection (e.g., theoretical sampling) and analysis (e.g., constant comparison) processes with the application of theoretical sensitivity.
- GT promotes the exploration of new topics and new ideas because it encourages creativity and self-development and enables researchers to develop their own theories.
- Computer software such as ATLAS.ti and NVivo, can be employed for helping qualitative data management and analysis.

The fourth rationale for using GT lays in the research tradition of LIS. Seldén (2005) traced back its history to the early 1980s and declared that LIS researchers in Sheffield were one of the pioneers that employ GT in LIS. A number of studies, for instance, by Brown (1990), Ellis (1993), Lucas (1991), Powell (1999), and Soto (1992), have importantly contributed to this tradition, primarily in fields such as information-seeking behaviour, interactions between the user and web recourses. More recently, Mansourian (2006: 399) provided further views about the implementations and implications of GT in LIS:

> "GT is a credible methodology in its place and for the researchers who know how to implement it. GT is applicable in LIS when the researcher does it well and it is weak when the researcher does not do it as thoroughly as he/she should. … GT requires a long time engagement with the research context. Constant comparison is a pivotal point for success of GT in a research project. Long time interaction between the researcher and the dataset is an indispensable part of GT. Different concepts and their links only emerge after long time interplay with the data. Therefore, GT is more suitable for long-term projects like PhD research…"

Therefore, these successful studies encouraged the researcher to "bravely adopt" GT in her study. Taking into account the benefits and risks of GT as a whole, the researcher agrees that it adds value to her professional experience. She was aware of the major drawbacks of using the GT approach, such as incredibly time-consuming and complex (Bartlett and Payne, 1997: 194), not suitable for inexperienced researchers (Backman and Kyngäs, 1999; Davidson, 2002), not lend itself to precise planning (Denscombe, 2003: 127), and practical difficulties (Bryman, 2004: 407). To some extent, it is a beneficial training for the researcher. The fact that "…it is time-consuming, often frustrating, and because of its nature, frequently takes the research in a number of different directions before a plausible theory starts to emerge" (Goulding, 1999: 19), meant that the GT approach helped the researcher to learn patience, open-mindedness, sensitivity and flexibility as well as to gain qualitative research skills, for example: interviewing and using inductive techniques; coding and categorising skills; interpreting data; and reasoning ability. In 1999, McCarthy had presented a vivid example of how rich the experience of using GT could be. As Pickard (2007: 242) said, "for the neophyte qualitative researcher, Strauss offers something to hang on to in what can often be a turbulent sea of excessive amounts of unbounded, descriptive data".

Through this discovery process, the researcher expects that the theoretical models she develops will reflect the reality of personal learning and sharing in the context of HE students' blogging experiences.

3.3.3 GT study process

There are many different forms of presenting the GT study process. Typical examples include streamlined diagrams by Bryman (2004: 404) and Eaves (2001); a circular graph by Pandit (1996), a programme flow chart by Fernández (2004b; cited Lehmann, 2001), and a diagrammatic wheel presentation by Vasconcelos (2007) (adapted from Rudestam and Newton, 1992). All of them show that a researcher needs to continually move back and forth amongst data collection, coding and categories, refining and interconnecting through additional collected data until he/she reaches theoretical saturation. Undoubtedly, the differences of a GT study process compared to a general qualitative research process relate to the interplay between data analysis and data collection, since the data is first collected then a theory is evolved through conceptual density.

Figure 3.2 provides an overview of the research procedure in this study, which adopted the GT approach flexibly. It includes the major processes, activities and phase outcomes.

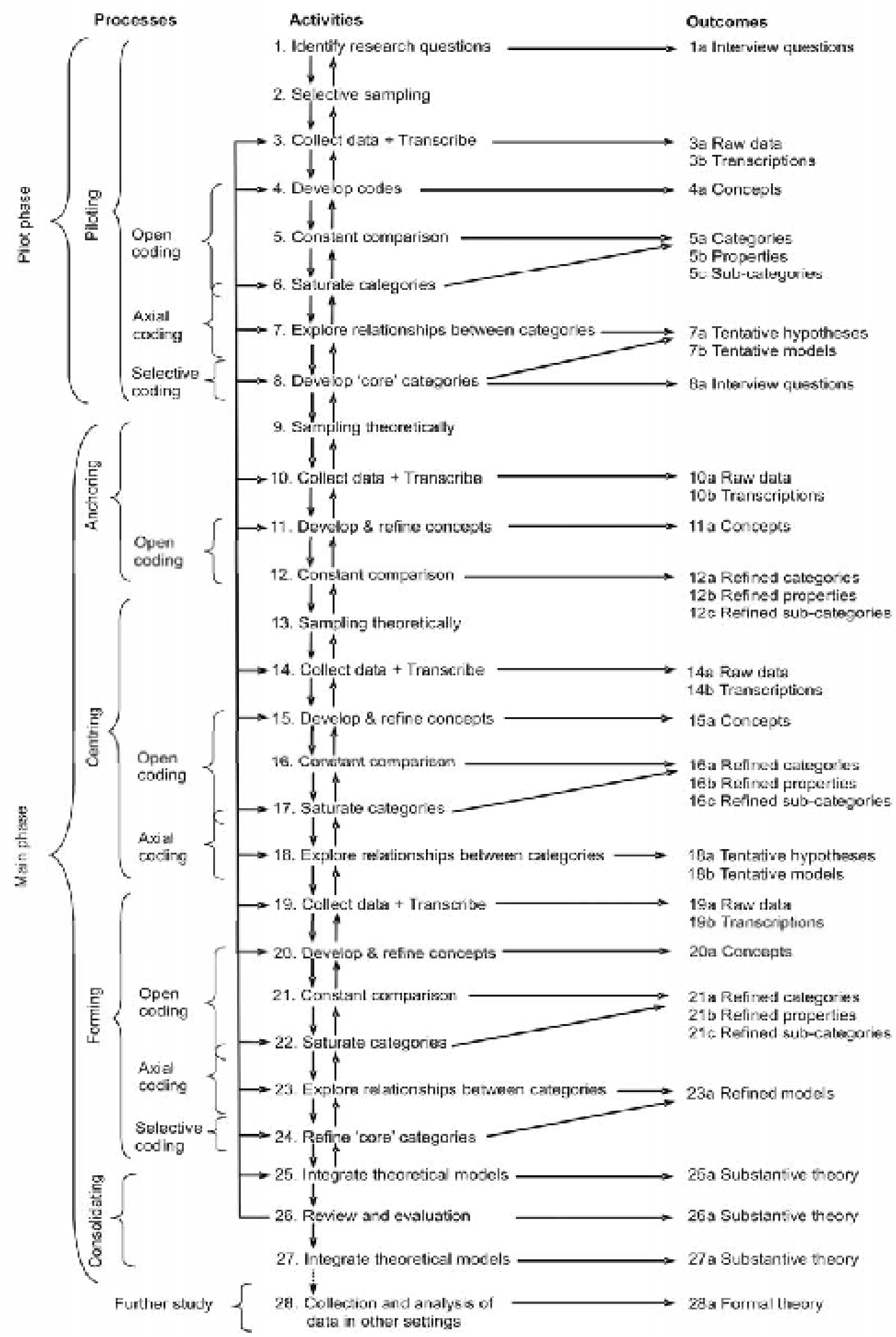


Figure 3.2 GT processes and outcomes in this research study
(Adapted from Bartlett and Payne, 1997: 183; Bryman, 2004: 305,404)

Glaser and Strauss (1967) indicated that the researcher should start with an "open-mind". They encouraged the researcher to "use any materials bearing on his area" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 169). Glaser (1998) particularly stressed that researchers should ignore the use of prior theories and concepts. Yet, "nobody starts with a totally blank sheet" (Goulding, 2002: 55) and "an open mind does not mean an empty head" (Seidel and Kelle, 1995: 56). As Heath and Cowley (2004) said, hardly anyone enters a field completely free from the influence of past experience and reading. In practice, the researcher reviewed the literature widely and variously over the whole study, centring on different aspects at different phases. She agrees that a literature review will not only help her to know what the latest research is in the area, what factors have been studied with which approaches, what similar studies exist, but also help her to foster theoretical sensitivity. She has not been totally convinced by Glaser and Holton's (2004) saying,

> "Instead, GT methodology treats the literature as another source of data to be integrated into the constant comparative analysis process once the core category, its properties and related categories have emerged and the basic conceptual development is well underway. The pre study literature review of QDA is a waste of time and a derailing of relevance for the GT Study".

Ostensibly, literature review is not shown in the study process diagram (Figure 3.2). This is because it runs throughout the research. The researcher bore in mind the need to keep a distance between the data and the sources from literature, that is, without being influenced by previous theories or other research relating to the area. She began with broad questions, which as Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Denscombe (2003) suggested, in which the questions are not fixed nor necessarily right; they are simply a tentative focus and a starting point for launching the investigation. The researcher had some theoretical preconceptions, for instance, "people may blog according to their personality". But here the "hypotheses" are not "hypotheses" in the ordinary sense of the word in quantitative research, and she treated them as provisional ideas rather than empirical facts (Seidel and Kelle, 1995).

With the starting questions, the researcher began to search for key informants, bloggers who were in her department. This corresponds to activities 1, 2 and 3 in Figure 3.2, which will be discussed in detail in section 3.4.1. She used semi-structured interviews to collect data (see more detail in section 3.4.2), and employed ATLAS.ti (version 4.1 for Windows 95 and Windows NT), one of the popular computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), to manage data, speed up as well as liven up the analysis process. She transcribed the interview recordings using an audiocassette transcriber and stored all transcriptions in .txt documents separately (supported by ATLAS.ti). She put the participants' basic information such as name, email, department, into a password protected ACCESS database. Shown in Figure 3.2, raw data and transcriptions were outcomes of the activity 3. By raw data, this means the original cassette interview recordings. Transcription refers to the textual interviews transcribed by the researcher with symbols to help analysis (an example see Appendix 11). In certain contexts, it is replaced by the term "data" in this thesis. There may be some typos or spelling mistakes in the transcripts, however by using constant comparison, the researcher has attempted to minimise bias by reviewing the transcription multiple times. For each review, she either concentrated on confirming the transcript accuracy or to recall an interview for any inappropriate coding or missed information.

As Seidel and Kelle (1995: 58) stated, "coding is heuristic devices for discovery". It is the fundamental analytical process, which plays a vital role in analysing, organising and making sense of textual data (Basit, 2003). The researcher then analysed the transcripts following the dynamic and fluid coding procedure: open coding; axial coding; and selective coding, suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998) (see Figure 3.2, activities 4-8). This procedure is illustrated in Figure 3.3, adapted from Warburton (2005) (was adapted from Harwood (2002: 76)).

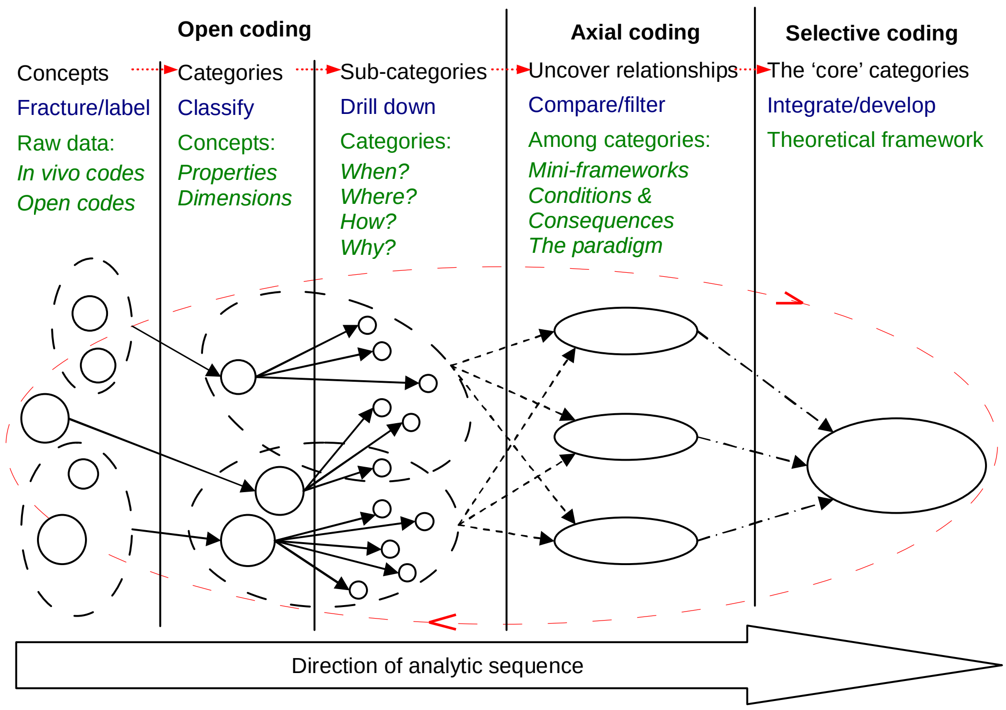


Figure 3.3 The grounded theory analytic process
(Adapted from Warburton, 2005, which was adapted from Harwood, 2002: 76)

As Glaser (1992: 39) identified, "open coding is the initial step of theoretical analysis that pertains to the initial discovery of categories and their properties". Open coding is the product of early analysis and also the interpretive process of breaking down the data into distinct units of meaning by asking simple questions such as what, where, when, how much and so forth. Allan (2003) pointed out two weaknesses in the word-by-word and line-by-line techniques in analysis of data recommended by Strauss and Corbin: one is time-consuming and the other is it may lead to confusion resulting in focus loss. Considering this warning, the researcher did not analyse the data word by word, rather, she separated each dataset into the smallest meaningful units. By using ATLAS.ti software, she put each identifiable unit of meaning in a line (often a sentence, a clause, or a few sentences, very occasionally a paragraph); she unrestrictedly labelled the data, assigning representational and conceptual codes to each unit highlighted within the data; she could easily code them, write notes relevant to the code and shift between the dataset and the code as well as among different interview transcripts (see Appendix 11). The method helped reduce doubts of what the researcher was looking for.

Often, these codes comprised key words, phrases or sentences, and were developed through comparing the similarities and differences amongst events, activities, functions, relationships, contexts, influences and outcomes (Corbin and Strauss, 1990; Douglas, 2003b; Goulding, 2002; Pandit, 1996). Concepts refer to these codes. According to Goulding (2002: 77), “a concept is basically the underlying meaning, uniformity and/or/pattern within a set of descriptive incidents”. From the researcher’s point of view, chunk, segment, incident, passage, or dataset was similarly used as “quotation” in ALTAS.ti, which demotes the smallest meaningful unit of analysis and is the most essential element of a concept or a code.

Constant comparison is a central method in GT. Based on Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) view, the two rules of the method are (1) “while coding an incident for a category, compare it with the previous incidents in the same and different groups coded in the same category” (1967: 106), (2) “the second rule of the constant comparative method is: stop coding and record a memo on your ideas” (1967: 107). By categories, Goulding (2002: 77) provided a definition, “categories are higher order concepts. They have much wider explanatory power, and pull together all the identified concepts into a theoretical framework”. Therefore, when the researcher selected a passage of text and coded it, she compared it with all those previously coded passages, explored similarities and differences across incidents in the data, and considered the possibility “either that some of the passages coded that way don’t fit as well … or that there are dimensions or phenomena in the passages that might well be coded another way as well” (Gibbs and Taylor, 2005). According to Boeije’s (2002) step-by-step approach to constant comparison method, the researcher similarly used this technique, not linearly, but concurrently.

The researcher compared the similarity and differences within a single interview. If one segment was given the label “self-liberating”, for instance, the other segments that have similar sense would be given the same code. This internal comparison technique was to help develop categories and to label them with the most appropriate conceptualised codes. Apart from the internal comparison technique, in activities 5, 7 and 8, especially at a later stage, activities 12, 16, 18, 21, 23 and 24 (see Figure 3.2), the researcher did joint comparisons between interviews within the same group (e.g., the longer experienced blogger and the short experienced blogger) and from different groups (e.g., bloggers and pure blog readers). By comparing data within the same group, some interview cases were grouped together because they were similar with regard to certain criteria, for example, blogging with different orientation (e.g., blogging for themselves or blogger for sharing views). By comparing data from different groups, there emerged new questions about certain categories, and some categories were collapsed into more encompassing topic categories, or created provisional ideas. It not only became evident that there might be different meanings of a category for different groups, but also helped abstract to a higher level of understanding the differences.

Through using the constant comparison method, categories, properties and subcategories emerged and the researcher wrote memos when the thoughts came to her without the need to be orderly or linear. Properties were defined, using Strauss and Corbin's (1998: 101) definition as "characteristics of a category, the delineation of which defines and gives it meaning". An example of open coding process at a textual level is shown in Table 3.5. By memo, it means "a running log of analytic sessions" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 153).

Table 3.5 An example of coding and categorising (a textual level and a conceptual level)

Outcome	Quotation	Open code	Category	Code type
Codes	"Because it's always like sharing, and just exploring our own views." (Jo)	Exploring views	Purpose of blogging	In-Vivo code
	"In terms of chronological feature of the weblog, it was very useful for me." (Antony)	Reverse chronological order	Feature of blogs - Operability	Priori code
	"…you learn a little bit about yourself really." (Dick)	Learn themselves	Self-censorship	Question addressed
	"Sometimes I just read their blogs, observe what kind of characteristic is inside." (Lucy)	Observe people	Self-perception	New idea
Memo codes*	"I think that helps people to put their ideas a bit more clearly." (Dick)	Directly make things more clear	Clarify views	New idea
	"…there is a slight awareness of audience when you are writing, particularly because of the comments" (Judy)	Who are readers	Relationships	Question addressed

NB: * Here 'memo codes' does not mean the memo in memo writing. In ATLAS.ti, it refers to a code which is longer than three words. It also belongs to concept, a part of open coding outcome.
'In-vivo code' means the code is directly mentioned by the participant.
'Priori code' means that the code has been used in certain literature. The researcher had realised its existence.
'Question addressed' means that the code raises new research questions and hypotheses.
'New idea' means that the code is emergent as an original concept.
The participant is under an assumed name.

There is little doubt that memo writing begins with the first coding session and continues until the very end of the research project. This is the reason why it is not exhibited in Figure 3.2. Memos may be the descriptions of behaviours, theoretical insights, the researcher's thoughts, interpretations, experiences and questions, or a source of direction for further research (Goulding, 2002). Not limited by Strauss and Corbin's (1998) memo forms (code notes, theoretical notes, operational notes), the researcher treated writing memos as an analysis, which helped her to: memorise fragmentary thinking about the data; spark ideas to investigate in further data collection; discover gaps in earlier data collection; make explicit comparisons; and record the evolving research process. Memos are vital evidences of the history of analysis and conceptualisation which the researcher can trace back. Basically, in this study, there are four forms of memos.

Firstly, in ATLAS.ti, memos were written in relation to a code, a quotation or a memo code in several situations, (1) when a new open code was created, the researcher recorded the ideas of a code, the reasons for the label, and what were the assumptions; (2) when she undertook axial coding to compare the code constantly, the researcher recorded the ideas of differences and similarities; (3) whenever ideas, questions or assumptions came to mind whilst reading a transcription, the researcher noted them immediately (see examples in Figure 3.4).

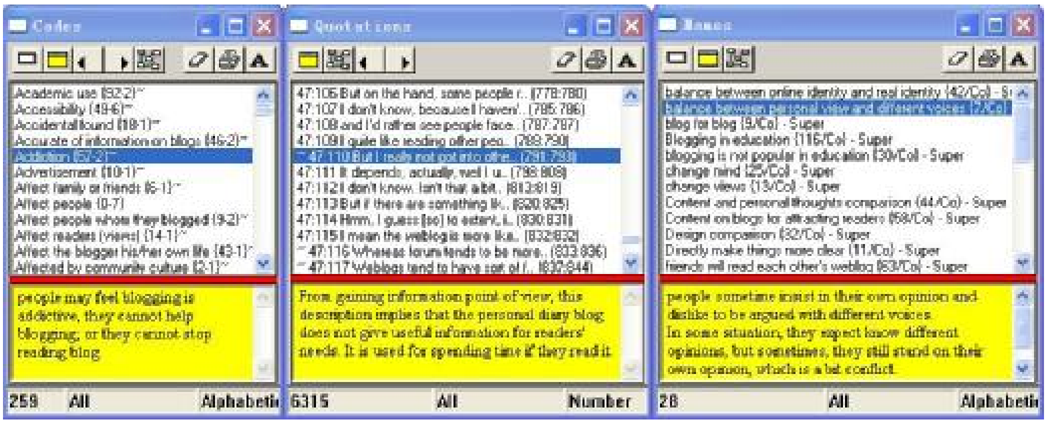


Figure 3.4 Memo writing examples in ATLAS.ti

Secondly, the researcher wrote down her ideas, inquiries, hypotheses or provisional ideas in a personal research diary. The memos were conversations between the researcher and herself. It could be a short description of an idea, a diagram of categories, or a reflection after a talk with people. Appendix 12 provides an example.

Thirdly, the most conceptualised theoretical memos were recorded in a Word document. The researcher often stopped coding work and wrote down interesting concepts synthetically. The concept was then expanded over the research process. Sometimes, those analyses were developed to formal outcomes, such as a conference paper or a research report (see an example in Appendix 13).

In addition, the researcher keeps an academic blog[12], which she orients as an open research log. She writes ideas and provides information sources, which are interesting and relevant to the research area. She openly shares selected information with readers – selected to ensure that the researcher does not pre-present any important findings of her study at an immature stage, but rather, presents useful information which is related to the blog phenomenon, new research findings, academic events, etc. The memos aim to help the researcher improve her academic sensitivity.

The researcher continuously compared the concepts between existing and new data. In terms of the practical situation, she felt that certain concepts and categories were repeatedly emerging

[12] http://jin-thoughts.blogspot.com

after analysing 11 interviews at the piloting stage (see Figure 3.2). In other words, some categories were considered saturated, the moment "when no new properties, dimensions, conditions, actions/interactions, or consequences are seen in the data" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 136). Then, the researcher started to reassemble the data that were fractured during open coding for developing core categories and their sub-categories in new ways and linked those categories at the level of properties and dimensions (Pandit, 1996; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). This is so-called axial coding.

In axial coding, Strauss and Corbin (1998: 124) said "a category stands for a phenomenon" and suggested that the researcher explain a phenomenon by answering questions about the phenomenon such as when, where, why, who, how and with what consequences. They (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) provided the "paradigm model" as a device to help discover the relationships among categories and the core category.

> "The paradigm is nothing more than a perspective taken toward data, another analytic stance that helps to systematically gather and order data in such a way that structure and process are integrated." (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 128)

Largely according to Strauss and Corbin's (1998) advice, the researcher conducted the basic tasks in axial coding, including: (1) laying out the properties of a category and their dimensions (2) identifying conditions, context, actions, strategies and consequences associated with a phenomenon, and (3) relating a category to its subcategories through statements denoting their relationships. An example of a category in open coding and axial coding is presented in Table 3.6 (not fully expanded).

Next, the researcher made an effort to select and integrate the core categories for validating the statements of relationships among concepts and generating a tentative theory. This was the main task of selective coding. In accordance with Leedy and Ormrod (2005: 141), in this process, "the categories and their interrelationships are combined to form a story line that describes 'what happens' in the phenomenon being studied". As Bartlett and Payne (1997: 193) indicated,

> "Selective coding uses exactly the same techniques as axial coding, but relates all the categories to the core category and the categories are then related not only at the conceptual level, but also at the property and dimensional levels".

According to Coffey and Atkinson (1996: 26-27), it was not "to search for the 'right' set of codes but to recognize them for that they are: links between particular segments of data and the categories we want to use in order to conceptualize those segments". Thus far, the researcher had a sense of "reflective orientations" in blog usage. She developed two tentative hypotheses (see section 3.4.1.1) and five tentative models (see details in section 3.5) to address the research questions. She refined the interview questions, and targeted two departments (the School of English Literature, Language and Linguistics and the School of Education) as further theoretical samples (for more explanation, see section 3.4.1.2).

Table 3.6 An example of categorising (an abstract conceptual level)

Category		Maintaining & expansion of relationships	
Subcategory		Keep in touch with people	Think about readers when blog
Subcategories	**Where**	Social connection; Personality – like to be online;	Social connection; Awareness of security; Personality – like to be online; Personality – observe people; Personality – teaching;
	When	Geographic distance; Operability – easy; Operability – convenience; Operability – flexibility;	Interaction; Reading their own blogs; Reading other people's blogs;
	What	Communication styles; Supplement of information;	Online etiquette; Self-anxiety; Relationship in readers' interests; Clarify thoughts;
	Why	Care; Friends; Reflect reality; Present personal experience; Present personal opinions;	Social connected lessons; Online identity; Gain distinction; Online business;
	How	Reading other people's blogs; Leave comments; Interaction; Friends will read each other's blogs;	Content on blogs for attracting readers; Who are readers; Blog for blog;
	Consequence	Promote relationship; Learn about the blogger; Sense of belonging; Sharing;	Reciprocity; Probability of meeting like-minded people; Learning how to communicate with people; Balance between online identity and real identity; Build confidence;
Property		Strategy	Perception
Dimension		Learning community; Self-therapy; Professional development	Online identity; Self-censorship; Self-evaluation;
Statement		Through blogging or reading blogs to keep in touch with people is a strategy of maintaining and expanding social connections.	Thinking of readers is a perception process by a blogger to form his/her own identity in social connections.

The researcher finished piloting the study and moved into collecting further data, with the tentative hypotheses, models and an open-mind. In Figure 3.2, it can be seen that the researcher followed the same methods and techniques to collect and analyse data. As Punch (1998) noted, open coding, axial coding and selective coding do not necessarily occur in a linear order. Rather, they are likely to be overlapping and done concurrently. The researcher, therefore, fully transcribed each interview; coded the data based on the two departments and expanded theoretical sampling into nine faculties at the University of Sheffield. This enabled the researcher to select key informants from more potential participants. This will be explained in detail in section 3.4.1.2.

There is hardly any doubt that linked with theoretical sampling and saturation, continuous comparative analysis helped the researcher to verify and develop emerging ideas, from initial data sets, the refined concepts, categories and their properties, to the later generated theoretical categories. It would not stop until the researcher felt the study focus started to emerge.

During the forming and consolidating stage (see Figure 3.2), the researcher used the term “refine” instead of “reduce”. Glaser and Strauss’ (1967: 110) offered the original definition, “by reduction we mean that the analyst may discover underlying uniformities in original set of categories or their properties, and can then formulate the theory with a smaller set of higher level concepts”. Alternatively, unlike Fielding and Lee’s (1998) statement that reduction is used for generality, the researcher did data reduction to pull out essential elements, sharpen categories, focus, discard, and systematise data. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), a researcher stops sampling when the different groups pertinent to a category saturate theoretically. In fact, different researchers may perceive theoretical saturation at different points depending on their different levels of empirical experience and their theoretical sensitivities. Based on the recommendation by Strauss and Corbin (1998), Denscombe (2003: 123) provided an explanation of a final generated theory in a GT study:

> “Two kinds of theory can be generated using the grounded theory approach. The first is linked closely to the empirical situation that has been the subject of study. It is a fairly localized kind of theory and is known as substantive theory. This is by far the most common kind of theory associated with the approach. The other kind of theory is more conceptual, with more general coverage and application to circumstances beyond particular settings. This is known as formal theory.”

In this sense, the researcher realised that this study did not generate a formal theory, but a substantive theory. It did not achieve the answers to the initially desired questions, namely to gain understandings of factors perceived by blog users themselves to be influential in their learning and sharing. Rather, it illuminated the motivations for blogging and how they constructed learning and sharing during their use of blogs. Certainly, in practice, the researcher bore the key concepts of GT in mind and adopted the approach flexibly without being limited strictly by Glaser’s or Strauss’ views. The researcher does not deny her personal experience may have an influence in this procedure. However, she believes that the flexibility of using GT did not distort the theory emerging procedure, but mirrored the reality substantially. The next sections will present the data collection and analysis procedures in more detail.

3.4 Data collection procedure

3.4.1 Sampling

A sample is a subset of the population and refers to a smaller number of cases, units or sites selected from a much larger population. The procedure for finding the subset to study is sampling (Bryman, 2004; Wellington, 2000). As Silverman (2006) noted, sampling has two functions: to allow the researcher to estimate the representativeness of the cases they study, and thereby to estimate the degree of confidence in any inferences they draw from the cases. Unlike quantitative sampling strategies, qualitative samples tend to be purposive, that is, searching for information-rich cases which can be studied in depth rather than every case in a broad population (Hoepfl, 1997).

There are three terms: "selective", "purposeful" and "theoretical" sampling, which are used interchangeably in the literature about sampling procedures in qualitative research. All these terms address the non-probability and purpose-directed features in selection of a sample. Coyne (1997) pointed out that there was no explicit distinction between selective sampling defined by Schatzman and Strauss and purposeful sampling described by Patton. According to Sandelowski et al. (1992) who concurred with Patton's view, all types of sampling in qualitative research is purposeful (Coyne, 1997). Selective sampling is different from theoretical sampling because it is a pre-designed sampling frame at the beginning of a study which allows the researcher to develop the conceptual lines which will ultimately drive theoretical sampling, but theoretical sampling is determined and emergent during the theory generating procedure. Theoretical sampling, derived from the development of GT (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), implies that the sample is collected with a theoretical purpose, that is, it is purposeful, whereas purposeful sampling may not be driven by a theoretical purpose but by determinations to examine the phenomenon where it is found to exist (Coyne, 1997) (Some original definitions see below).

> *Selective sampling* is "shaped by the time the researcher has available to him, by his framework, by his starting and developing interests, and by any restrictions placed upon his observations by his hosts." (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973: 39)

> "The logic and power of *purposeful sampling* lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling." (Patton, 1990: 169)

> *Selective sampling* "refers to a decision made prior to beginning a study choosing to sample subjects according to a preconceived, but reasonable initial set of criteria. *Theoretical sampling* refers to a sampling decision made on analytic grounds developed in the course of a study." (Sandelowski *et al.*, 1992: 302)

> "*Theoretical sampling* is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges. The process of data collection is controlled by the emerging theory, whether substantive or formal." (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 45)

Sample selection has a crucial effect on the ultimate quality of any research. As Coyne (1997) stated, clarifying these concepts will help the researcher understand sampling strategies clearly.

> "…*theoretical sampling* is always purposeful and it could be said that some qualitative studies may contain purposeful and theoretical sampling. However, other studies may contain only purposeful sampling since purposeful sampling is not always theoretical. It may be acceptable to view theoretical sampling as a variant within purposeful sampling." (Coyne, 1997: 629)

3.4.1.1 Sampling in the pilot phase

Patton (2002: 244) stated that "there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry". At the beginning of this study (piloting phase, see Figure 3.2), the pilot sample size was designed to be 5-7 HE students from the Department of Information Studies at the University of Sheffield, with blogging experience. After the granting of departmental ethical approval, the participants were recruited between February and June 2006 through three channels in light of practical conditions: (1) snowball method (2) recruitment email, and (3) recruitment in lectures.

Following Pickard's (2007) suggestion below, snowball sampling was used to identify purposive informants who used blogs, who read blogs, who were interested in blogs and would like to share their perspectives with the researcher. The first three interviewees were recruited by this means.

> "Snowball sampling … is the technique that is most commonly used to identify a theoretical sample and it can be accomplished in two ways. The first and original method of this type of sampling is to make initial contact with key informants who, in turn, point to information-rich cases. The second is to begin with an initial participant who, through the process of interview and observation, will point out characteristics and issues that need further inquiry." (Pickard, 2007: 65)

At the same time, to recruit more informants to attend interview, a research support officer sent out a recruitment email on behalf of the researcher (see Appendix 1 and 2) to all undergraduates (totally 145) in the researcher's department in February 2006. One volunteer responded to the recruitment email.

Due to the low response rate, the researcher then asked the staff's permission and went into two lectures (comprising approximately 50 students) to recruit volunteers. Then there were seven students participating in the study.

By June 2006, eleven students had voluntarily attended interviews (see Table 3.7). There were three male and eight female students, ranging in age from 19 to 32. Among the participants, two were undergraduates; two were research students and seven were taught masters students. Three participants did not have their own blogs but had blog reading experience. Half of the participants had at least one year blogging experience and half of them were non-English native speakers. The blog services they mentioned included: MSN space; Blogspot (currently Blogger.com); LiveJournal; Xanga; and MySpace.

Table 3.7 The 11 participants' information (Piloting phase)

No	Alias	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	EB	BE	IUE	Channel
1	Antony	M	32	Iranian	RS	3	8	S
2	Jo	F	25	Taiwanese	TP	<1	7	S
3	Annie	F	29	Iranian	RS	R	8	S
4	Ben	M	19	Caucasian (White)	2nd year UG	R	9	E
5	Elsa	F	21	Chinese	3rd year UG	1.5	10	L
6	Dick	M	26	Caucasian (White)	TP	2	8	L
7	Betty	F	22	White British	TP	2.5	12	L
8	Jenny	F	23	White British	TP	R	5	L
9	Judy	F	23	White British	TP	4	7	L
10	Lucy	F	24	Taiwanese	TP	<1	6	L
11	May	F	25	Taiwanese	TP	2	12	L

NB: BE = blogging experience (years), E = recruitment email, EB = educational background,
F = female, IUE = Internet use experience (years), L = recruitment in lectures, M = male,
R = read blogs, RS = research/PhD student, S = snowball method,
TP = taught postgraduate, UG = undergraduate

Strictly speaking, according to Sandelowski et al. (1992), the total sampling particularly at the pilot stage was not theoretical, but selective sampling with a purpose of setting reasoned criteria for driving theory generation. Nevertheless, as Glaser and Strauss (1967) claimed, theoretical sampling is an ongoing process and the theory developed is "grounded" in data that was collected and analysed in the field rather than taken from the literature. In a way, the initial sample particularly after the first three (purposively sampled) interviewees *was* theoretical because it was not selected on the basis of "a priori" criteria, rather inductively in line with the conceptualising purpose of the study. The target informants were chosen to help the researcher check the issues in the research design, examine the research questions, inspect the researcher's interviewing techniques, search for valuable data to develop concepts and interrelationships among those concepts and develop a theoretical hypothesis from the data.

During the piloting procedure, the researcher realised the research limits, learned from several research lessons and developed the research design from three aspects as follows.

Firstly, the recruitment email was improved, interview questions were refined and interviewing skills were improved. The researcher became aware of the problem of writing a recruiting email because of the low response rate. She improved the email through listening to the participants' suggestions and following advice from the literature on interviewing. She also developed a guide to conducting interviews to avoid repeating the errors (more discussion in section 3.4.2). As Berg (2001: 100) suggested, "the only way to actually become proficient at interviewing is to interview", the probing skills of asking open-ended questions were improved by consciously practising, and at the same time, the interview questions were refined based on the findings.

Secondly, following the suggestion in GT (e.g., Gibbs and Taylor, 2005; Muhr, 1997; Strauss and Corbin, 1998), the concurrent collection and analysis process thus far contributed to answering the research questions (more detail is given in section 3.5) and drove the researcher to build tentative theoretical models from several possible dimensions. There were two hypotheses emergent during this phase:

- **Hypothesis 1:** Blogs may help HE students form self-organised informal learning.
- **Hypothesis 2:** For leisure purposes, bloggers are more likely to use blogs to build unplanned learning, whereas for academic purpose, they are more likely to use blogs for engaging in self-organised learning.

Thirdly, theoretical sampling for the next stage was designed based on the tentative models and hypotheses. Similar to bloggers, another group of students who did not actually blog but read blogs on a regular basis had their own opinions on blog use as well. Thus, this brought into the research questions two distinct target groups: students who have their own blogs and keep updating the blog more than one year, and students who do not have their own blogs but keep read blogs on a regular basis. The sample was also expanded to other faculties (School of English and Department of Education) to see if there were any educational factors relating to the participant's blogging experience.

3.4.1.2 Sampling in the main phase

As discussed above, theoretical sampling is "an ongoing process and is concerned with the refinement of ideas, rather than boosting sample size" (Bryman, 2004: 305). The main data collection process was spread from November 2006 to May 2007 and divided into three key phases: anchoring; centring; and forming stages (shown in Figure 3.2).

The anchoring stage refers to the beginning of the main study between November 2006 and February 2007, in which the researcher chose all students (253) from the School of English Literature, Language and Linguistics and all taught students who were UK based (55) at the School of Education at the University of Sheffield as a target sample. With permission from heads of schools and tutors, two pure blog readers and five bloggers were invited to attend interviews via the researcher who went into lectures and sent out an invitation via email to recruit volunteers. The seven participants' information can be seen in Table 3.8. The data analysis was conducted nearly synchronously with each transcription. Grounded in raw data (interview transcriptions), the researcher felt that the initial purposes of blogging might not be subject/educational-related as most of the participants expressed "enjoy writing" (treating blogging as writing). This called the researcher's attention to expand the sample to investigate if bloggers from other disciplines have the similar motives.

The centring stage started at the end of February 2007 and finished on March 2007. It was the toughest as well as the most fulfilling phase in data collection. Through the Corporate

Information and Computing Services (CiCS) special-list service in the university, the researcher sent out two refined recruitment emails (bloggers and pure blog readers separately, see Appendix 3 and 4) to nine faculties (Faculty of Pure Science, School of East Asian Studies, Management School, Faculty of Engineering, School of Architecture, School of Law, Faculty of Medicine, Department of Politics and Department of Journalism Studies, excluding the faculties chosen at previous phases). The decision to send out an email to a large sample (15,795 students) was made by making the assumption that blogging had not become popular at HE, and considering that to select important informants, the researcher should at first search for blog users as widely as possible. Thirty eight students expressed willingness to attend an interview. Taking into consideration the Easter vacation break and the fact that 27 of the volunteers were in their final year, the interviews were conducted from 1st March 2007 to 21st March 2007. Due to the concentrated time scale available for interviewing, full transcription was not possible immediately after each interview. Thus the researcher employed an alternative method to write down memos and note interesting and key points immediately after each interview before going on to the next. The interviews were fully transcribed in the next available period free of intensive interviews.

Table 3.8 The 7 participants' information (Anchoring phase)

No	Alias	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	EB	BE	IUE
12	Kelly	F	19	White British	1st year UG	4	7
13	Rose	F	21	White British	2nd year UG	1	7
14	Harry	M	22	White British	1st year UG	R	11
15	Cliff	M	24	Chinese	TP	3	10
16	Nancy	F	18	White British	1st year UG	<1	8
17	Hugh	M	19	White British	2nd year UG	R	9
18	Tina	F	36	British	1st year UG	<1	6

NB: BE = blogging experience (years), EB = educational background, F = female, IUE = Internet use experience (years), M = male, R = read blogs, RS = research/PhD student, TP = taught postgraduate, UG = undergraduate

Critically speaking, this process did not consist of transcribing and analysing one interview (including open coding, axial coding) in detail, then selecting the next informant and conducting an interview and analysis. Rather the researcher attempted to focus on sensing and searching for any new concepts based on the previous findings (e.g., tentative models, hypotheses, and coding in the anchoring phase), but largely not based on a fully finished analysis (at least complete open coding) of one case followed by an analysis of the next. Nevertheless, this process was useful for the researcher to avoid omitting important information according to the practical response situation. Not substantially deviating from what was suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967), the researcher agreed that "one of the major goals of qualitative research is the generation of concepts that can form the building blocks of theory" (Bryman and Burgess, 1994b: 219). As Denscombe (2003: 235) pointed out, "…the researcher can know neither how many or which people or events will be investigated until the end of the research". According to the length of their blog use experience, 17 informants were selected to participate in the study over this period of time (see Table 3.9 in detail).

Table 3.9 The 17 participants' information (Centring phase)

No	Alias	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	EB	BE	IUE
19	Susan	F	29	Taiwanese	TP	R	12
20	Lynn	F	21	White British	2nd year UG	1	8
21	Bob	M	32	Chinese	RS	1	10
22	Sally	F	19	White British	1st year UG	1	5
23	Don	M	27	Italian	TP	2	8
24	Wendy	F	20	Indian	3rd year UG	R	7
25	Daisy	F	26	White British	RS	3	9
26	Vicky	F	22	Malaysian	2nd year UG	5	9
27	Lisa	F	19	Malaysian	2nd year UG	R	9
28	William	M	29	Chinese	RS	1	10
29	Flora	F	24	Chinese	TP	1.5	10
30	Dora	F	21	White British	2nd year UG	5	8
31	Ellen	F	20	Malaysian	2nd year UG	1	4
32	Debby	F	21	Malaysian	2nd year UG	2.5	10
33	Todd	M	22	Indian	TP	1.5	7
34	Neil	M	21	Chinese	2nd year UG	2	11
35	Scott	M	19	White British	1st year UG	<1	8

NB: BE = blogging experience (years), EB = educational background, F = female,
IUE = Internet use experience (years), M = male, R = read blogs,
RS = research/PhD student, TP = taught postgraduate, UG = undergraduate

The forming stage refers to the period of time between 3rd April and 14th May 2007. After analysing the 17 interviews as a whole (coding and comparing emergent concepts, more discussion in section 3.5) at the centring stage, 13 participants (see Table 3.10) were further selected to saturate the categories and "to find any disconfirming evidence that may suggest revisions in the categories identified or in interrelationships among them" (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005: 141). The 13 interviews were fully transcribed and concepts, as well as drilled down categories were created one after another. There were still eight respondents on the list who could be contacted for subsequent interviews. Yet, following GT's constant comparison techniques, the researcher felt that the existent data was enough to allow the categories and interrelationships among them to emerge. She did not conduct further interviews.

In this research, there were a total of 48 informants contributing to the inquiry. Their ages ranged from 18 to 36, 11 participants were younger than 20 years old, 26 participants were between 21 and 25 years old, 7 participants spread between 26 and 30 years old and 4 participants older than 30 years old. In short, there were 77% participants between 18 and 25 years old. All volunteers were self-identified as a blogger or a pure blog reader. Sixteen bloggers provided their blog URLs. Apart from those covered at piloting phase, the blogging services mentioned by participants expanded to: Wordpress; Travelblog; Bebo; Blogdrive; Open diary; QQ Zone; Facebook; and a few blog hosting or supporting websites. Of the 48 participants, 23 were international students. To provide a complete picture, the informants as a whole are presented by five group factors as follows: (1) distribution of bloggers and pure blog readers, (2) gender distribution, (3) distribution of education background, (4) distribution of Internet use experience, and (5) distribution of blog use experience.

Table 3.10 The 13 participants' information (Forming phase)

No	Alias	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	EB	BE	IUE
36	Emily	F	21	Bangladeshi	3rd year UG	3	8
37	Alma	F	24	Caucasian (White)	RS	<1	5
38	Barbara	F	24	Caucasian (White)	TP	3	10
39	Alice	F	25	Malaysian	RS	2.5	8
40	Mike	M	19	White British	2nd year UG	1	7
41	Ruth	F	21	Bruneian	2nd year UG	R	8
42	Carol	F	19	Polish	1st year UG	R	12
43	Kent	M	22	White British	TP	R	7
44	Lauren	F	21	White British	3rd year UG	1	10
45	Bess	F	22	White British	TP	4	8
46	Rock	M	27	White British	TP	2	10
47	Frank	M	34	Caucasian (White)	TP	1	13
48	Jack	M	22	Caucasian (White)	3rd year UG	2	8

NB: BE = blogging experience (years), EB = educational background, F = female, IUE = Internet use experience (years), M = male, R = read blogs, RS = research/PhD student, TP = taught postgraduate, UG = undergraduate

Figure 3.5 shows that of the entire cohort of 48 informants, 31 were female and 17 were male. Female blog users were almost twice as many as male blog users.

Figure 3.5 Participants' gender distributions

The distribution of the participants' education background displays that undergraduates accounted for 50%, taught postgraduates accounted for 35% and research postgraduates accounted for 15% (see Figure 3.6).

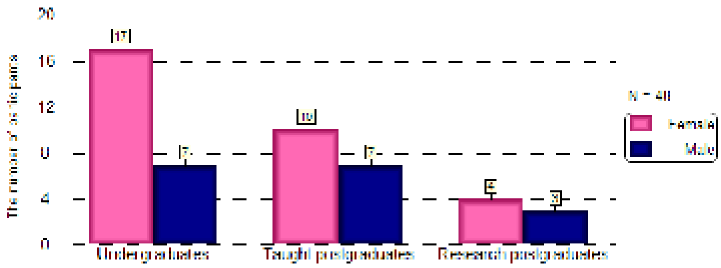


Figure 3.6 Participants' education background distributions

Figure 3.7 illuminates that there were 37 bloggers and 11 pure blog readers. Female bloggers accounted for one half of the participants (24 out of 48).

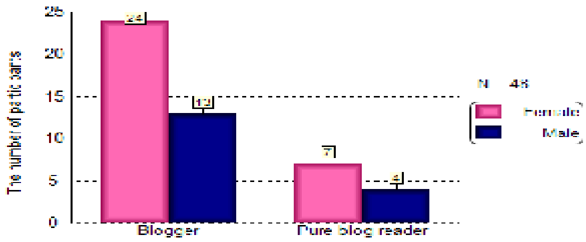


Figure 3.7 Gender distributions in blogger group and pure blog reader group

Figure 3.8 shows that most participants' blogging experiences ranged from 1 year to 3 years, accounting for 38% of the whole number of blog use experiences. It seems that female participants were inclined to have longer blogging experiences than male participants because there were 15 (68%) female bloggers that had used blogs form 1 year to 5 years, whereas 7 (32%) male bloggers had blogging experience from 1 year to 3 years, and none of the male participants had more than 3 years blogging experiences.

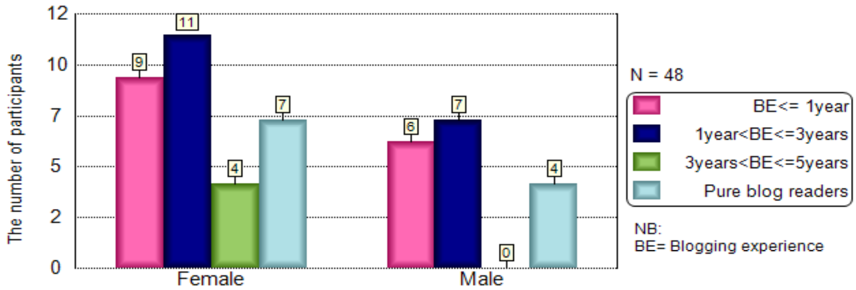


Figure 3.8 Blog use experience and gender distributions

There were no obvious data to suggest that longer experienced bloggers are longer Internet users. Figure 3.9 reveals that most 1-3 years blog users were centred on 5-10 years Internet users. It seems that there were no distinct relationships between blog use experiences and Internet use experiences.

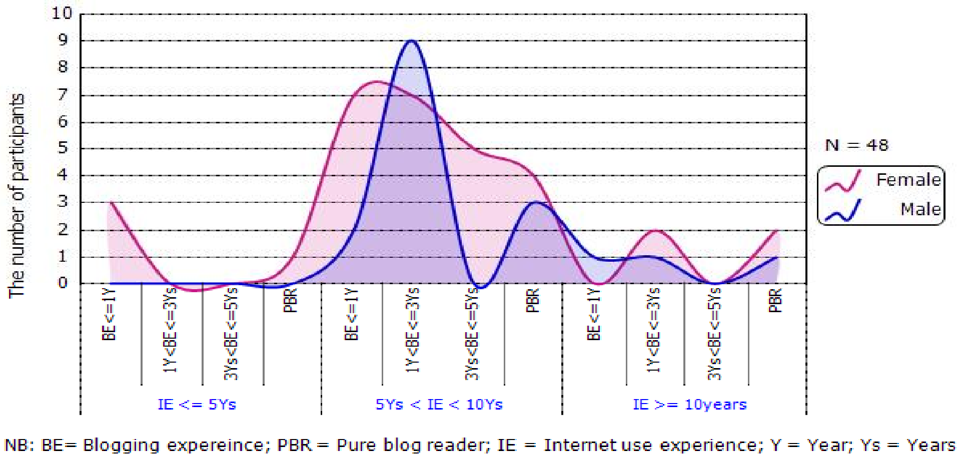


Figure 3.9 Blog use experience, Internet use experience and gender distributions

3.4.2 Interviews

In GT, interviews normally utilise semi-structured, open-ended questions, which allow individual variations, for helping the researcher gain rich data, forming and refining theoretical categories as well as generating a theory (Hoepfl, 1997). In this study, the researcher employed a semi-structured, open-ended, face-to-face, in-depth interview method as the main way of collecting data, and developed a series of questions to address the research problem. This decision was made based on the agreement that "interviewing is a basic mode of inquiry" (Seidman, 1998: 2). It provides "access to the context of people's behaviour and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behaviour" (Seidman, 1998: 4), which conforms to the research aim of exploring the blog phenomenon. As Law et al. (1998) claimed, "interviews can be done relatively quickly, with little expense, and are useful when a particular issue needs to be explored in depth". Open-ended questions require the respondent to reply with more information than a "yes" or "no" answer. Although Newman et al. (2002) argued that face-to-face interviewing may be affected by so-called "psychological distress" (e.g., the level of information revealed by an interviewee is positively related to the level of privacy of the interview), there is hardly any doubt that the interviewer usually has some latitude to ask further questions in response to what are seen as significant replies.

Although it would be possible for the researcher to use the participant's blogs as data resource in this study and to have potential directions for the analysis, the researcher decided to use the interview transcriptions as empirical actual data and constantly compared with relevant materials in the literature. This decision was made in terms of three main points: firstly, not every participant's blog was accessible. Some bloggers who set up a password for the blog and selected specific readers were unwilling to provide blog addresses to the researcher. There were 16 participants who provided their blog URLs voluntarily. The researcher read these blogs to make sure that she did not misinterpret the participant's expression in the interview.

Nevertheless, those blogs were not enough to provide the entire data set that fairly includes every participant's blog. Secondly, as discussed in 3.4.1, the researcher had developed theoretical sampling and the collected interview data were enough to allow main categories and their interrelationships of a theory to emerge. Thirdly, the interest of the research topic mainly focused on understanding the perception of the blogging experience and comparing students' views of blogs. It was not intent to observe how participants wrote or expressed their experience, like an ethnographic content analysis does.

Therefore, according to the research purpose, there is no doubt that 'individual interviews' rather than 'focus groups', 'group interviews', or 'analysing blogs as primary data sources' is an appropriate method that helps the researcher investigate the blog phenomenon from the user's point of view. As noted in section 3.4.1, the researcher became aware of her weakness in undertaking interviews, and improved her interview techniques during the data collection procedure. The following sections will present the interviewing steps and how the interviews were conducted.

3.4.2.1 Research questions in relation to interview questions

To explore the nature of blogging, the basic interview questions were designed following Patton's (2002) suggestions, to ask value questions about behaviours, opinions, values, feelings, knowledge, sensory, background, and demography that reflect on the issues that will help answer the research questions.

In the above sections, it showed how the theoretical sampling was conducted. During the development of sampling, the interview questions were refined and developed, from defined open-ended questions at the very beginning to more alternative flexible questions. Table 3.11 presents the major research questions which served as the foundation on which the subsequent interview questions were based. More detail of the interview questions can be seen in Appendix 5, 6, and 7.

Table 3.11 Research questions in relation to interview questions

Research questions	Relevant interview questions
Blogging experience	
▪ What are the motivations for blogging?	P1.1, P1.2, P1.3, P1.4, P1.6, P1.8, P1.10 M1.2, M1.4, M1.6, M1.7, M1.8, M1.30 D2, D3, D17, D18
▪ How do bloggers think of their own blogs?	P1.2, P1.12 M1.2, M1.24 D5, D7, D10, D12, D14, D15, D16
▪ What are bloggers' learning needs when they blog?	P1.3, P1.4, P1.9, P1.10, P1.12 M1.1, M1.2, M1.3, M1.5, M1.7, M1.8, M1.9, M1.23, M1.30 D6, D9, D10, D11, D16, D18, D19
▪ What is worthy of blogging?	P1.2, P1.8, P1.13 M1.7, M1.8, M1.9, M1.18, M1.19, M1.22, M1.29, M1.30 D1, D11, D19
▪ What have they learned through blogging?	P1.5, P1.12 M1.20, M1.21, M1.25 D13, D14, D15, D17
▪ What are the attitudes of bloggers to comments?	P1.6, P1.7 M1.15, M1.16
▪ What are the constraints for blogging in help learning?	P1.5, P1.9, P1.11, P1.12 M1.21, M1.24, M1.25, M1.26, M1.27, M1.28, M1.29 D6, D10, D19
Blog reading experience	
▪ What are the motivations for reading blogs?	P1.5, M1.10, M1.13, M2.5 D4
▪ How do pure blog readers think about blogs?	P2.1, P2.3, P2.5, P2.6 M2.4, M2.6, M2.8, M2.9, M2.11, M2.12, M2.16, M2.17, M2.18
▪ What are blog readers' learning needs when they read blog?	P2.2, P2.4, P2.6, M1.11, M1.12, M1.13, M1.17, M2.1, M2.2, M2.3, M2.4, M2.7
▪ What is worthy of reading blogs?	P2.2 M2.1, M2.2, M2.3, M2.8, M2.9, M2.10 D8
▪ What have they learned by reading blogs?	P2.2, P2.7, P2.8 M2.10, M2.11
▪ What are the attitudes of pure blog readers to comments?	P1.6, P2.4 M1.14, M2.7
▪ What are the constraints for reading blogs in help learning?	P2.5, P2.8 M2.13, M2.14, M2.15, M2.16, M2.17, M2.18 D8

NB: P = questions in the pilot phase, M = questions in the main phase, D = developed additional questions

3.4.2.2 Preparing for the interview

In accordance with the sources from Patton (2002: 382), Brenner (1985: 19-20) and Mack et al. (2005: 48-49), as well as her own experience, the researcher developed a checklist for interview preparation, conduction and management. The practical guide is unfolded below:

- Contact with a participant, arrange an interview according to their convenience;
- Book an interview room on the campus where it is quiet with little distraction;
- Confirm with the participant the interview time and location;
- Send out email to the participant to remind him/her the interview the day before, highlighting the time and location (with an electronic location guide map, in case the participant does not know the interview location);
- Check interview package (labelled documentation materials):
  - A copy of the interview guide (Appendix 2)
  - Two copies of consent form (one for the interviewee; one for the interviewer) (Appendix 8)
  - A copy of the informant sheet (Appendix 9)
  - A copy of interview questions (for the interviewer)
  - A copy of alternative-questions list that can be used for prompting responses (this is often for new/inexperienced researchers)
- Being familiar with the interview equipment and check them:
  - Prepare two good-quality recorders (either tape recorder or digital recorder). One may have an internal microphone and another has an external microphone which can be worn on the participant's clothes (this depends on the researcher's research condition);
  - If use batteries, check them regularly and carry spares;
  - Prepare two good-quality blank 90-minute cassette tapes per interview and take along extra cassette tapes if using the tape recorder;
  - Test recording system and cassette tapes;
- Bring filed notebook and good-quality pens;
- Prepare a bottle of water for the respondent because they may feel thirsty because of talking;
- Carry your authority card with you at all times and produce it when necessary;
- Arrive early at the interview site to set up equipment;
- Record and note down the interview time and place before the interview.

3.4.2.3 Conducting the interview

For conducting a smooth interview, the researcher should conduct all the interviews in as similar a way as possible (McNeill and Chapman, 2005) and remember that "your role is to listen and to learn, not to preach, praise or condemn" (Gorman and Clayton, 2005: 130). Adding Mason's (2002) recommendations into the sources mentioned in the above section, a checklist for guiding to interview conduction was developed:

- Set the recorder on a stable surface and close to the interviewee;
- Briefly describe the purpose of the interview, the steps of the interview process (e.g., format, how long it would take) and address terms of confidentiality (has already been written down in the consent form); and tell them how to get in touch with you later if they want to;
- Ask the participant if he/she has any question; if not, then ask them to sign the consent forms;
- Ask the participant's agreement to start recording;
- Turn on the tape recorders and verify that it is working;
- Over the interview, occasionally verify the tape recorder is working;
- Speak slowly and clearly, using a matter-of-fact tone of voice;
- Approach every participant "positively", pleasantly, with a smile and the confident expectation of obtaining his/her full cooperation;
- Show an interest in the answers given by the participant;
- Ask all the necessary questions, and make sure that each answer is adequate and make sure you have understood each answer adequately before the end of the interview;
- Ask one question at a time;
- Do not give directive information about question meaning;
- If there is any answer that is not clear or you contain any words not understood, do ask the participant to repeat or request further explanation;
- Clarify any factual errors expressed by participants during the interview;
- Repeat the question if a tape change is necessary;
- Be sensitive to the interviewees, to their needs and rights, in accordance with your ethical position and moral practice;
- Make notes using brief writing;
- At the end of interview, give the participant opportunity to add in more information about the interview specifically, ask questions and note their ideas of any points that the interviewer had not covered;
- Thank the participants and make them feel the interview was mutually beneficial;
- Turn off the tape recorder and remind the participant about how to get in touch with you later if they want to.
- Reimburse the participant in accordance with study procedures.

3.4.2.4 Sequencing the interview

After an interview, the researcher should do the following work:

- Listen to the start, middle, and end of the tape to check if the interview was recorded; if it was not, expand your notes immediately;
- Label tapes (serial number and time), or save and label the digital file in your computer if using a digital recorder;
- Keep tapes and recorder in good and safe conditions;

- Type the interview information into your database (e.g., ACCESS);
- Expand the notes, write down brief but detailed ideas as much as possible that you can remember within 24 hours if possible;
- Check if there are any statements you have failed to highlight;
- Make any changes if necessary;
- Double-check if you have completed all forms and materials, and they are labelled with the archival number;
- Assemble all materials of the interview into one pack;
- Transcribe the interview within 24 hours if possible.

In this study, the interviews ranged in duration from forty minutes to one hour and fifty minutes. The researcher fully transcribed all the interviews herself according to Gorman and Clayton (2005: 137-138) put it, an interview should be transcribed the very day, because it is fresh in your mind,

> "if at all possible – and then simply listen to the tape recording of the interview. This will give you the opportunity to correct any mistaken impressions, enable you to transcribe any short, highly pertinent observations, and not preclude later transcription – or partial transcription – if required".

3.4.3 Ethics issues

Ethics issues arising from the use of human subjects in research are common. Leedy and Ormrod (2005: 101) claimed that "any participation in a study should be strictly voluntary" and defined four categories of ethics issues: protection from harm; informed consent; right to privacy; and honesty with professional colleagues. Wellington (2000: 57) outlined eight rules to check ethics in a study, such as "no parties should be involved without their prior knowledge or permission and informed consent", "relevant information about the nature and purpose of the research should always be given", "all participants should be treated fairly, with consideration, with respect and with honestly", "confidentiality and anonymity should be maintained at every stage, especially in publication" and so on. Also Patton (2002: 408-409) provided an ethical issue checklist, which highlighted ten aspects: explaining purpose; promises and reciprocity; risk assessment; confidentiality; informed consent; data access and ownership; interviewer metal health; advice; data collection boundaries; and ethical versus legal.

Therefore, undertaking research with humans, such as their perceptions, feelings and opinions, the researcher needs to apply research ethics approval. Considering the definition of personal data in the Data Protection Act 1998, the researcher applied "research ethics approval" according to the university regulation.

> "Data which relates to a living individual who can be identified from those data, or from those data and other information which is in the possession of, or is likely to come into the possession of, the data controller, and includes any expression of opinion about the

> individual and any indication of the intentions of the data controller or any other person in respect of the individual." (University of Sheffield, 2003: 6)

On 6th December 2005, the researcher submitted the necessary research ethics application forms. These forms included a Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix 9), a Participant Consent Form (see Appendix 8), emails for recruiting participants (see Appendix 1), an interview guide (for participants) (see Appendix 2), the interview questionnaire (for researcher) (see Appendix 5), and a University Research Ethics Application Form (see Appendix 10). Particularly, the Participant Information Sheet covered the ethics issues, such as the research purpose, right to withdraw, sensitivity representation, confidentiality, anonymity, protection and support, etc., and the participants were asked if they agree to the interview being recorded to enable the researcher to transcribe and analyse. At the end of January 2006, the researcher obtained the department's ethics approval and started data collection. This permission was just the first part of ethics approval. Over the main study, the researcher completed a series of ethical approval applications to grant permission to be "on site" collecting data, including obtained authorisations from the departments at the anchoring phase, obtained authorisations of using the University CiCS special-list service at the centring and the forming phases.

3.5 Data analysis procedure

Based on the discussion in section 3.3.3 and 3.4, this section aims to provide detailed discussion about stage outcomes in the GT process. As mentioned before, at the end of the pilot phase, using ALTAS.ti, the researcher created two hypotheses and five tentative models. These were based on 217 codes, plus 22 memo codes and 12 categories (called "code families" or "network" in ALTAS.ti). The 12 categories were intent on grouping categories as follows.

- **Awareness of blogs**: How do HE students become aware of blogs?
- **Credibility of blogs**: Do HE students trust the information on blogs? What do they trust? What are their criteria?
- **Features of blogs**: The physical features of blogs which are particularly different from other online tools.
- **Importance of blogging**: How important blogging is and the issues related to this importance.
- **Individual factors**: Individual factors that may affect learning and attitudes to the use of blogs.
- **Information quality on blogs**: How do HE students feel about the quality of information on blogs?
- **Learning**: What have HE students learned through reading blogs or maintaining a blog?
- **People's mood**: People's feelings or standpoints when different actions happened with blogs (delete, create, maintain, read, leave comments, receive comments, lose, etc).
- **Bloggers' online behaviours**: What do HE students do by using their blogs?
- **Pure blog readers' online behaviours**: What do readers do through reading a blog?

- **Purpose of blogging**: Why do HE students blog?
- **Tendency of blogs usage**: HE students' viewpoint of the trend in the use of blogs in HE settings.

The researcher developed five tentative models from different dimensions. After using categories to answer the research questions, the researcher found that the data reflected that, largely, HE students blog for leisure or relaxation purposes rather than for academic or formal learning. Meanwhile, unplanned learning happens when a blogger learns something unintentionally or unexpectedly in everyday activities. The researcher tentatively sorted the categories under dimensions: from bloggers' self-consciousness of learning (unplanned or intentional) dimension and blogging purposes dimension leisure vs. academic (see Figure 3.10).

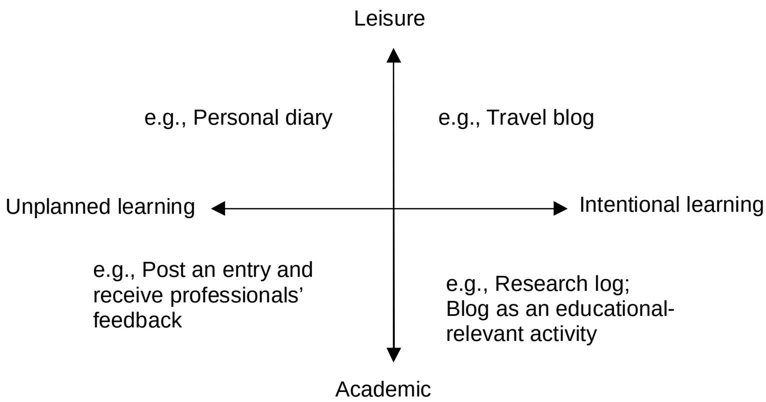


Figure 3.10 Dimensions: leisure vs. academic and unplanned learning vs. intentional learning

In this early model, leisure means students blog for non-academic, entertainment or relaxation purposes. Academic refers to the participant self-identifying his/her blog for academic use. Unplanned learning is related to the participant's perception of learning after a series of unexpected or unplanned events or activities. Intentional learning refers to the participant felt learning after a series of purposeful actions, such as asking questions through their blogs.

From another perspective, the relationship between the blogger and readers was an emerging element that helped explain why people read blogs and their views of a blog. Many participants regarded blogs as an information source; they trust the information on a blog because they read for fun (not seriously) or they know the author. Some participants had their own ways to validate information on the blog or justify them according to their priori knowledge and experience. Some bloggers were seldom concerned about the credibility issue because they only opened their blogs to friends and family rather than everyone. Based on the reader's purposes of reading blogs, credibility judgment, and the relationship dimension, a tentative model was drawn down as follows (Figure3.11). In this diagram, strangers and friendship/authority represented the most important dimensions in the relationship between bloggers and readers at that stage.

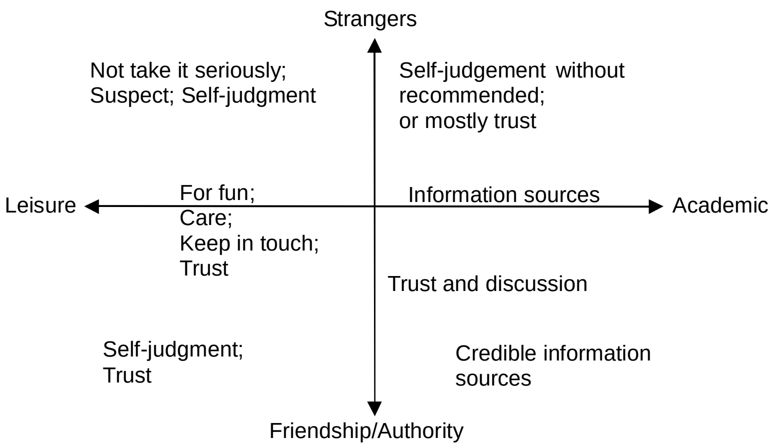


Figure 3.11 Dimensions: leisure vs. academic and strangers vs. friendship/authority

(1) Care: the reader reads a blog to maintain the relationship by leaving comments (e.g., encouraging, comfort sentences). They do not think about that the information on the blog is credible or not, and its use orientation.

(2) Credible information sources: the reader trusts (accepts) the information on a blog and regards it as a useful information source if the blog from an authority and for an academic use. They keep reading the blog.

(3) For fun: the reader reads a blog for fun because of the interaction between people who live in different places remotely. They do not think about that the information on the blog is credible or not, and its use orientation.

(4) Information sources: the reader tends to trust (accept) the information on a blog and regards it as an information source if it is a friend's blog and for an academic use.

(5) Keep in touch: the reader reads a blog to track friends and maintain the relationship. They do not think that the information on the blog is credible or not, and the use orientation.

(6) Mostly trust: the reader trusts (accepts the information on a blog largely if they do not know the author of the blog but the blog is academic use oriented; they do not often think about that the information on the blog is credible or not.

(7) Not take it seriously: the reader does not take the content on a blog seriously if they do not know the author of the blog, or the blog is leisure oriented; they even do not think about that the information on the blog is credible or not.

(8) Self-judgement: the reader tends to judge the credibility of the information on a blog according to their own knowledge and experience in certain cases: if they do not know the author of the blog and the blog is leisure oriented; if it is maintained by an authority but for a leisure use; and also where there is no recommendation by people who they know.

(9) Self-judgement without recommended: the reader judges the credibility of the information on a blog according to their own knowledge and experience if the blog is academic use oriented but they do not know the author of the blog, and it is not recommended by people who they know.

(10) Suspect: the reader may be suspicious the information on a blog if they do not know the author of the blog, or the blog is leisure use oriented.

(11) Trust: the reader trusts (accepts) the information on a blog in some cases: if the author of the blog is a friend; if the blog is academic use oriented and they know the author (or the blog is recommended by people who they know); or if the author of the blog is for leisure use but is created by an authority.

(12) Trust and discussion: the reader tends to trust (accept) the information on a blog and leave comments (then communication, discussion) if the blog is academic use oriented and they know the author (e.g., friends, a friend's friends).

Also, there was a sense that some participants blogged for themselves, wrote for themselves and used it for themselves, whereas other bloggers maintained a blog for other people, such as friends, family, a group online friends or a group of members in a community of interest. At the same time, the data suggested that Entertainment, Identity definition, Keep in touch with people, Repository, Communication, Friendship and Community were core categories. Further analysis revealed that some participants contemplated on their own thoughts, feelings, and sensations, critically reflected the content on blogs, or gradually built communities by personal interests. The usage of blogs therefore was sorted under a social and reflective direction. According to this sense, three tentative models were emergent. Figure 3.12 shows blogs usage grouped by bloggers and pure blog readers separately. It can be seen that Identity, Self-communication and Memories were the distinctive categories between a blogger and a pure blog reader. Figure 3.13 describes the relationships between categories from social use and reflective use dimensions. Figure 3.14 attempts to provide an abstract theoretical model present the categories based on purpose of using blogs dimensions (personal orientation and community of interest orientation) and forms of blog usage dimensions (social use and reflective use).

Figure 3.12 The use of blogs – bloggers and pure blog readers

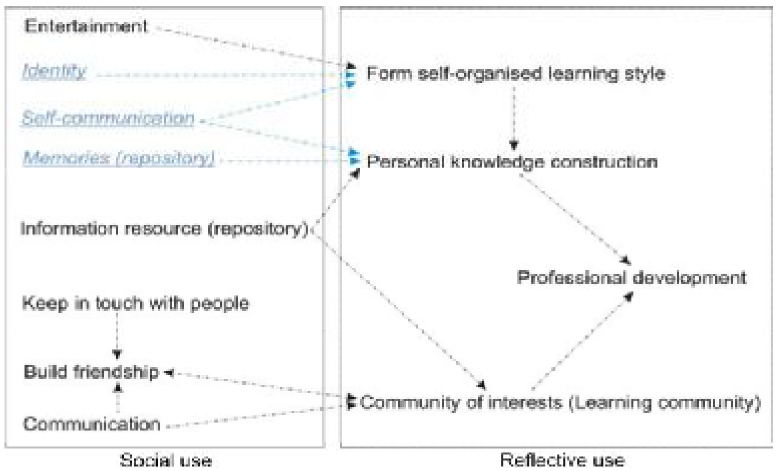


Figure 3.13 The use of blogs – social use and reflective use

NB: Identity, Self-communication and Memories are three distinct categories between bloggers and pure blog readers.

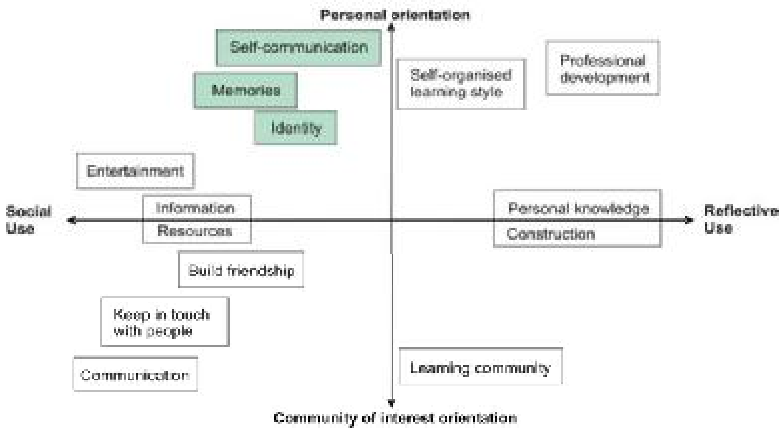


Figure 3.14 Dimensions: personal vs. community of interest and social use vs. reflective use

NB: Identity, Self-communication and Memories are three distinct categories between bloggers and pure blog readers.

(1) Social use: blogs are used at a superficial level and seemingly, people blog without an explicit intent on personal learning or personal development. For example, record daily life things, make friends or have a personal online space.

(2) Reflective use: blogs are used at an embedded and deep level and this kind of usage has latent and significant influence on personal learning and self development. For example, by blogging, it forms self-used information source or learning community.

(3) Entertainment: people write or read blogs for a relaxing aim.

(4) Identity: a blog is a reflection of the author. It reflects who they are, what they are interested in and so on. Differently, for a pure blog reader, they do not have this factor. This is a different category between a blog reader and a blogger.

(5) Self-communication: bloggers use blogs as a self-expression and self-liberating platform. They not only communicate with people on the web but largely communicate with themselves. Up to this point, because a pure blog reader does not blog, their self communication process will not be recorded or reflected in a blog. This is a different category between a pure blog reader and a blogger.

(6) Memories (repository): a blog is space for people to keep their life things and it is a memory for later use. Similar to the points "identity" and "self-communication", a pure blog reader seldom uses blog as their own memory repository. This is also a different category between a pure blog reader and a blogger.

(7) Information resource (repository): blogs are interlinked and could be purely as information filters of certain topics.

(8) Keep in touch with people: to maintain relationships and to notify people what is going on.

(9) Build friendship: friendship is a key and clear factor that affects the credibility. By blogging, a blogger will build friendship started his or her own blog and will gradually form a community of interests. By keeping reading certain blogs, a reader feels that they become know the blogger and gradually see the author as a friend.

(10) Communication: communication is a studied and clear aspect of blogs use. The blog is an online communication tool, like email or chat, but it has different features such as personalised design, updating and chronological archived entries to support communication.

(11) Form self-organised learning style: people use blogs by their own preferences and expectations. Thus, by long time blogging, they may form a kind of self-organised learning style which is suitable for themselves.

(12) Personal knowledge construction: people may use blogs for accumulating information and expending their own views. It may be a process of gaining knowledge. Blogging may help people construct their own knowledge. The data have not revealed very explicitly a pure blog reader's knowledge construction on this point.

(13) Professional development: people who use blogs for academic communication or subjects interests are intent to develop their own ability and professional experience. This may be a process of knowledge sharing and knowledge creation.

(14) Community of interest: bloggers are likely to find people who have similar interests or experiences with them on the web. With developing a blog and interacting with people, they build their own interests-centred community. The pure blog readers are involved in the community by reading blogs; they may contribute to the community but they are not the core of building the community.

According to these early senses, codings, assumptions, and tentative conceptualisation, the researcher continued with more interviews, open coding, constant comparison and memo writing in the main phase. She realised the problems during coding: (1) it was difficult to distinguish between properties and sub-categories in many instances, (2) one paragraph or even one sentence might have different codes attached to it, (3) sometimes a code constituted two elements: a main category and a specification of that category. In addition, data analysis process in GT was neither linear nor with a clarity beginning. Thereby, the researcher immersed herself into data, moving forth and back among the data time and again. She read, sorted, unravelled, created, selected, simplified, abstracted, transformed, resembled, recombined or renamed codes, memo codes, categories, subcategories, properties, and their relationships in the main phase until she had an idea of the story which the data told. To make explicit thoughts and focuses, she expanded the data analysis corpus and then refined it. Table 3.12 shows a record of this process.

Table 3.12 A snapshot of data analysis corpus in ATLAS.ti (Main phase)

Time line	Codes	Memo codes
2006/07/17	217	22
2007/05/02	230	31
2007/05/15	259	40
2007/06/28	343	49
2007/10/30	266	30
2007/12/18	273	30
2008/02/15	259	28

Slowly, especially over the forming phase (Figure 3.2), the researcher could literally "see" what mistakes were done in the early data analysis. She found that if worked quickly, without too much ruminating, she could come to some "first impression". However, she knew this would lead to a forced theory. Thus, over a year (January 2007-Febuary 2008), the researcher analysed the in-depth interview data.

She first found that the blog use from leisure and academic dimension (see Figure 3.10) was difficult to expand in-depth analysis because of a shortage of academic bloggers in theoretical sampling. She developed the second tentative model (Figure 3.11) into a model to explain the purposes of blogs, credibility, privacy and the relationships between bloggers and readers. This model (Figure 5.5) will be explained in Chapter 5, section 5.4.

The three tentative models (Figure 3.12, 3.13 and 3.14) had been rewoven into one model (Figure 3.15) that includes both categories from the bloggers group and pure blog readers group.

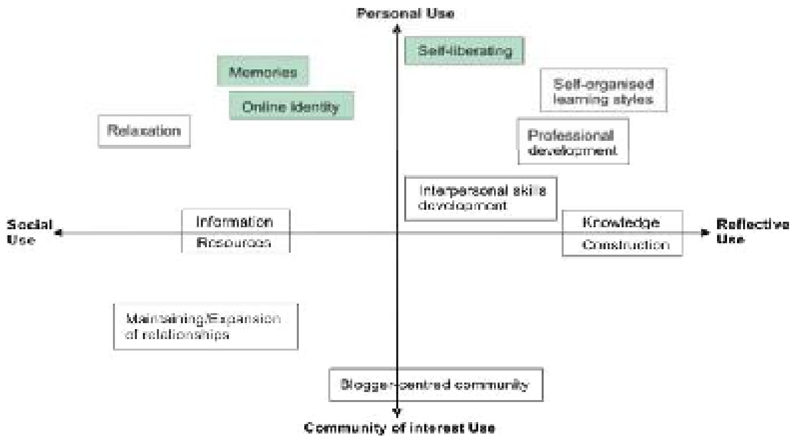


Figure 3.15 Blog usage orientations

NB: Online-identity, Memories and Self-liberating are three distinct categories between bloggers and pure blog readers.

There are two dimensions: (1) Personal orientation and Community of interest orientation and (2) Social use and Reflective use, and 11 core categories: Memories; Online identity; Relaxation; Information sources; Maintaining/Expansion of relationships; Self-liberating; Interpersonal skills development; Self-organised learning style; Professional development; Knowledge construction; and Blogger-centred community. The researcher will illustrate this model in Chapter 5. Also later, the researcher realised that the inquiry focus actually shifted from the impact of blogs to the motivations for using blogs perceived by the participants during the main study. Her focus on analysis had moved from "How does blogging impact HE students personal learning and sharing?" to "What are the motivations for blogging? How is HE students' personal learning being constructed and facilitated?". As a part of the axial coding, she eventually developed a conditional matrix of relationships among emergent categories and corresponding conceptual dimensions through identifying related phenomena, causal conditions, context, facilitating or restraining conditions, action/interactive strategies and consequences of actions. The final operation in the analysis was to identify the core category or categories, explicate the story line of the phenomenon under study. Following an abstract high level analysis, at the end of the study, the data corpus consisted of over 2,000 pages of transcriptions, memos and reflective writing. The researcher eventually synthesised the two models (Figure 5.6 and Figure 6.1) into an integrated theoretical model (see Chapter 7, Figure 7.1), which formed a standpoint for the story of this blogging phenomenon study.

The researcher will illuminate the story from four parts, starting with the next chapter:

(1) Drives and trajectory of using blogs (Chapter 4)
(2) Strategies for using blogs (Chapter 5).
(3) Consequences of using blogs (Chapter 6).
(4) Towards an integrated theoretical model of using blogs for facilitating learning and knowledge sharing (Chapter 7).

3.6 Trustworthiness

As discussed in section 3.2, qualitative research has become more influential and widely adopted in sociology since the 1990s. Judging the quality of a qualitative study is of vital importance. In this section, the researcher explores the notions of "validity" and "reliability" in qualitative research and discusses the quality criteria for conducting GT. It then presents the strategies employed by the researcher in order to establish trustworthiness in this empirical study.

3.6.1 Validity and reliability in qualitative research

Quantitative research aims at generalisability and uses validity and reliability as two key criteria to examine methodological appropriateness. In general, validity addresses whether the researcher explains or measures what they said they would be explaining or measuring. Reliability addresses how accurately the research methods and techniques produce data (Cryer, 2000; Fink, 1998; Kumar, 1999). In contrast, because qualitative inquiry is inclined to focus on the co-construction of meaning between the researcher and the informants (Lietz *et al.*, 2006), Silverman (2004: 362) argued for the use the generalisability criteria in qualitative research:

> "in qualitative research, working with smaller data-sets open to repeated inspection, you should not be satisfied until your generalization is able to apply to every single gobbet of relevant data you have collected."

In recent years, "it is widely accepted that qualitative researchers should adopt a rigorous and self-conscious examination for bias at each stage of the research process" (Goulding, 2002: 18). Without treating reliability and validity separately from those terms in qualitative studies, terminology that encompasses both such as credibility, transferability, and trustworthiness occur in the literature broadly (Golafshani, 2003).

As far back as 1985, Lincoln and Guba proposed alternative criteria to traditional reliability and validity, consisting of four factors: credibility (truth value); transferability (applicability);

dependability (consistency); and confirmability (neutrality). To enhance the rigour of qualitative research, Padgett (1998) developed these criteria into six strategies: prolonged engagement; triangulation; peer debriefing and support; member checking; negative case analysis; and auditing. In 2000, Creswell and Miller reiterated these six verification procedures and identified two more: clarifying researcher bias and thick description. It was recommended that qualitative researchers engage in at least two of the eight verification procedures in any given study (Creswell, 2003). Furthermore, Anfara et al. (2002) based on Lincoln and Guba's strategy, proposed four additional factors: time sampling; purposive sampling; code-record strategy; and practice reflexivity to add to the criteria for assessing qualitative research quality and rigour. More recently, Lietz et al. (2006) conceptualised the idea of rigour using seven strategies: prolonged engagement; triangulation; peer debriefing; member checking; negative case analysis; audit trail; and reflexivity. Flick (2006: 378) claimed that researchers should critically assess the study by questioning:

- the validity, reliability, and credibility of the data;
- the plausibility, and the value of the theory itself;
- the adequacy of the research process which has generated, elaborated, or tested the theory, and
- the empirical grounding of the research findings.

All in all, as Patton (2002: 51) noted,

> "Any research strategy ultimately needs credibility to be useful… Both qualitative/naturalistic inquiry and quantitative/experimental inquiry seek honest, meaningful, credible, and empirically supported findings".

The qualitative researcher works to control bias through the practice of building trustworthiness, and "moves back and forth between design and implementation to ensure congruence among question formulation, literature, recruitment, data collection strategies, and analysis" (Morse *et al.*, 2002), and focuses on how meaning is constructed and how well the design "fits" the circumstances of construction (Holstein and Gubrium, 2004).

3.6.2 Quality criteria in GT

Ground theory approach has its own criteria for judging the quality of research. Based on a constructivist perspective, Charmaz (2006) proposed four criteria (credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness) for judging a GT study process. Moreover, Sandelowski and Barroso (2003: 804) developed a guide to evaluating GT studies and argued that the researcher should "know specifically what to look at and for in a study to judge the value of its findings". More originally, in several publications by Strauss and Corbin (e.g., Corbin and Strauss, 1990: 17; Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 269), they provided seven criteria to direct reasonably good grounds for judging the adequacy of the research process.

- *Criterion 1:* How was the original sample selected? On what grounds (selective sampling)?
- *Criterion 2:* What major categories emerged?
- *Criterion 3:* What were some of the events, incidents, actions, and so on that indicated some of these major categories?
- *Criterion 4:* On the basis of what categories did theoretical sampling proceed? That is, how did theoretical formulations guide some of the data collection? After the theoretical sample was carried out, how representative did these categories prove to be?
- *Criterion 5:* What were some of the hypotheses pertaining to relations among categories? On what grounds were they formulated and tested?
- *Criterion 6:* Were there instances when hypotheses did not hold up against what was actually seen? How were the discrepancies accounted for? How did they affect the hypotheses?
- *Criterion 7:* How and why was the core category selected? Was the selection sudden or gradual, difficult or easy? On what grounds were the final analytic decisions made? How did extensive "explanatory power" in relation to the phenomena under study and "relevance" as discussed earlier figure in the decisions?

They also suggested seven criteria for answering the questions of the empirical grounding of findings and theories (Corbin and Strauss, 1990: 17-18):

- *Criterion 1:* Are concepts generated?
- *Criterion 2:* Are the concepts systematically related?
- *Criterion 3:* Are there many conceptual linkages and are the categories well developed? Do the categories have conceptual density?
- *Criterion 4:* Is there much variation built into the theory?
- *Criterion 5:* Are the broader conditions that affect the phenomenon under study built into its explanation?
- *Criterion 6:* Has "process" been taken into account?
- *Criterion 7:* Do the theoretical findings seem significant and to what extent?

These criteria helpfully guided the researcher to confirm the findings at the forming and consolidating stages (Figure 3.2).

3.6.3 Strategies to establish trustworthiness

In accordance with Strauss and Corbin (1998), Lietz et al. (2006), and Patton's (2002) suggestions, the researcher employed multiple strategies to establish trustworthiness and to minimise the risk of avoidable errors in this study. These strategies consisted of: audit trail; member checking; peer debriefing; triangulation; and reflexivity.

3.6.3.1 The use of audit trail

The audit trail also refers to the confirmability audit. It allows an external reviewer to view and inquire the process to determine whether the evaluation procedure was dependable and confirmable (Morse and Richards, 2002). It often follows the six Halpern[13] audit trail categories including: (1) raw data (2) data reduction and analysis products (3) data reconstruction and synthesis products (4) process notes (5) materials relating to intentions and dispositions, and (6) instrument development information (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

In this study, the researcher maintained an audit trail relating to three aspects. Firstly, all interview records were kept in both hard copy and electronic format, for instance, the informants information was saved and managed using an ACCESS database. The interview cassettes and formal interview materials were kept in a safe place in the researcher's office. The transcriptions of the interview (raw data) were kept and managed using ATLAS.ti software. Memos were saved in ATLAS.ti, Word documents, and hardcopies (with archival number). Secondly, data analysis products were presented through meeting-discussion notes, stage analysis reports, and memo writings about possible tentative models, hypotheses and relevant ideas in both hardcopy and electronic format (with archival number). Thirdly, a research log about the blogging phenomenon was recorded from September 2005 through an online personal research blog and the researcher's book diaries. As an indispensable part of employing the GT approach, it reflected the researcher's thoughts and recorded relevant resources over the research study.

3.6.3.2 The use of member checking

According to Lietz et al. (2006), member checking refers to asking participants and other researchers to check the accuracy of findings and confirm which aspects of data analysis best fit their perspectives. The researcher made an effort with eight participants who were still contactable at that time (16^{th} April – 12^{th} December 2007) to confirm the transcriptions and the analytical description about their views of blog usage. Five of them were confirmed through email, and the other three informants were confirmed in separate face-to-face informal interview (half an hour for each one). Also, the researcher randomly selected one transcription, with its codes and categories to ask three experienced colleagues to check her analysis. This procedure guaranteed the analysis is grounded in data as well as having consistency and credibility of the coding process.

3.6.3.3 The use of peer debriefing

"Peer debriefing involves the process of engaging in dialog with colleagues outside of a research project who have experience with the topic, population or methods being utilized" (Lietz ***et al.***, 2006: 451). The research was openly judged and viewed throughout the procedure of the study in two ways. Firstly, the researcher presented the work through department seminar presentations, conference poster presentation and paper publications. This made the study peer reviewed and discussed by colleagues and professionals inside and outside the university. Secondly, during the research process, the researcher talked with experienced staff in the LIS

[13] Halpern, E.S. (1983). Auditing Naturalistic Inquiries: The Development and Application of a Model. Unpublished doctoral thesis. Indianna University, IN, USA.

area and submitted articles to present research findings. This helped her to confirm the study and to develop better strategies to establish research credibility.

3.6.3.4 The use of triangulation

The purpose of using triangulation is to establish consistency among the data, that is, to establish credibility (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that triangulation of data can come from four different sources: theories; methods; sources; and investigators. This study did not adopt the methods triangulation and investigators triangulation. However, the researcher employed a variety of sources and theories to triangulate the study. In addition to a large volume of empirical data, the researcher also collected secondary data through reviewing literature, observing blogs and taking notes. Although in GT, knowledge of prior theories and concepts is not necessary, the existing literature is not ignored. It can help the researcher know the history of the research area, pre-existing studies, latest research findings and so on. Furthermore, it helps categorise, make comparison, and refine and validate tentative models. At the same time, blogs are selected randomly and observed for obtaining a general sense of the blog phenomenon. During the late stages of the study, the researcher compared the emergent theory in this study with several existent theories (see Chapter 2, sections 2.4 and 2.5) and analysed the linkages (see Chapter 7 and 8).

3.6.3.5 The use of reflexivity

McGhee et al. (2007: 334) stated that “reflexivity is viewed as the explicit quest to limit researcher effects on the data by awareness of self…”, whereas Lietz et al. (2006: 447-448) pointed out,

> “Reflexivity involved considering the multiple identities and perspectives of the researchers in consideration of ways in which these factors could both support the process of data analysis while also acknowledge the potential for reactivity and bias”.

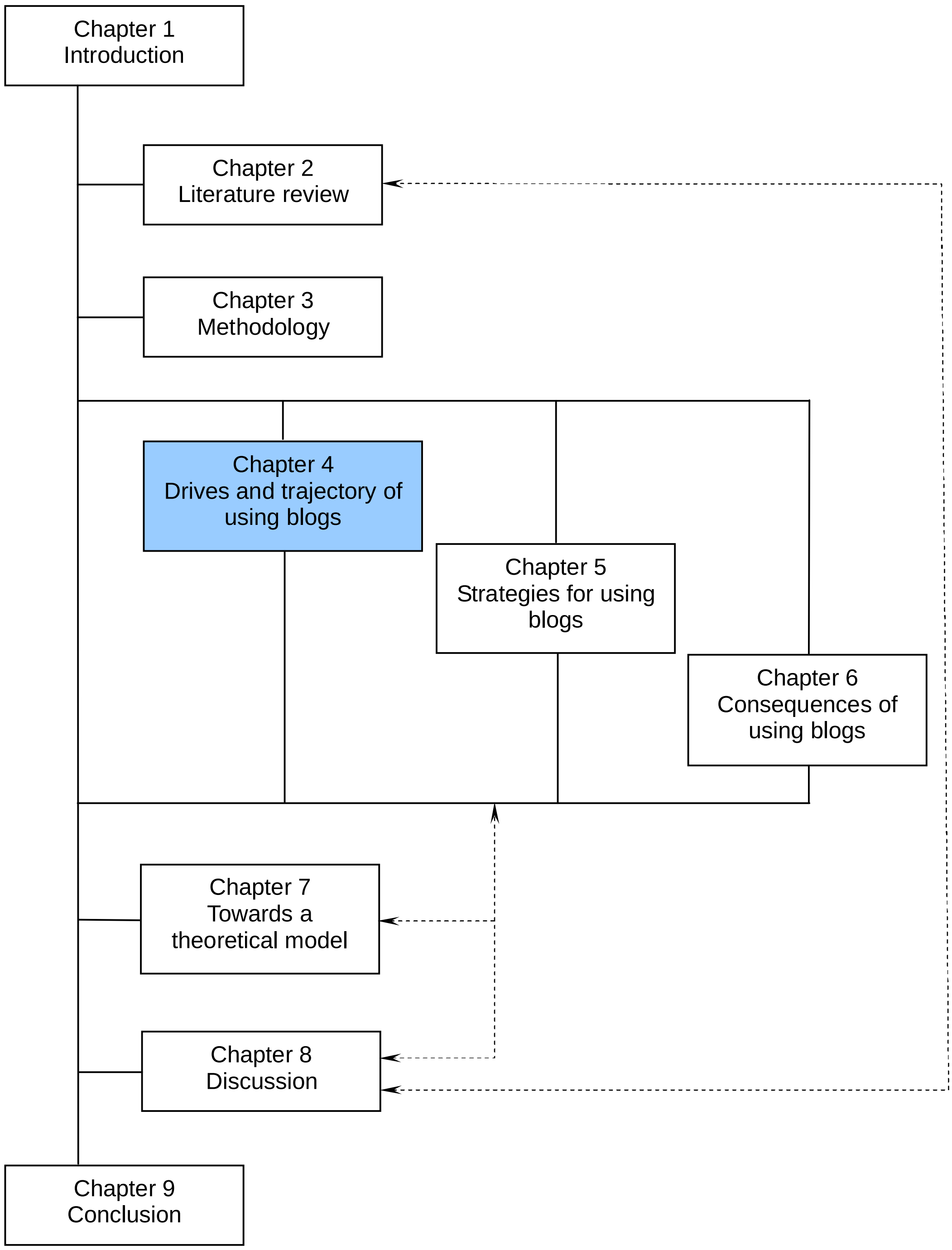
In previous discussions (see section 3.3.3 and 3.4), the researcher has acknowledged that her decisions in data collection and analysis would inevitably impact on the interpretation of the experience/perception under investigation. According to Mills *et al.* (2006: 7-8), she realised that,

> “Researchers, who first identify their ontological and epistemological position, are able to choose a point on the methodological spiral of grounded theory where they feel theoretically comfortable, which, in turn, will enable them to live out their beliefs in the process of inquiry”.

As Glaser and Strauss (1967) emphasised, the importance of generating theory is that the analysis grounds in empirical data rather than existing materials. They suggested that reviewing literature at the beginning or the researcher’s previous knowledge of a study topic is not the most crucial factor in a GT study. The researcher therefore used her prior knowledge and those perspectives from the literature as data and sources for helping comparative analysis. She used wide resources to develop her theoretical sensitivity, and agrees that the sensitivity is subjective, and the awareness was throughout the study, especially in data analysis procedure.

3.7 Summary

Methodology is "the philosophical and theoretical underpinning of research that affects what a researcher counts as evidence" (Balnaves and Caputi, 2001: 52). Choosing a methodology was a primary part in this study. This chapter presented the rationale of using a GT approach according to the research aim, i.e., not to verify theory or test hypotheses by numbers but to discover, conceptualise and explore the meanings of blogging, learning and sharing by words. It also presented the research processes in detail, covering how sampling was designed, how data was collected such as recruiting and interviewing, and how transcriptions were analysed by using ATLAS.ti. As a methodology to create theory through the concurrent data collection and analysis, GT calls for qualitative tradition built on compared concepts and suggests that similar data is grouped and conceptually labelled (i.e., relates to theoretical sampling, constant comparison, theoretical sensitivity, and coding). Concepts are then categorised, linked and organised by developed relationships, conditions and dimensions (i.e., involves constant comparison, coding, and theoretical sensitivity), and finally a theory emerged by using theoretical saturation and theoretical sensitivity (Scott, 2004). These final concepts, interrelationships and theoretical models will be discussed in Chapter 4, 5, 6 and 7.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CHAPTER 4

DRIVES AND TRAJECTORY OF USING BLOGS

"Our aspirations are our possibilities." – Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)

4.1 Introduction

As mentioned in Chapter 1, both pure blog readers and bloggers have experience of using blogs. Pure blog readers have reading blogs experience and bloggers have both publishing and reading blogs experience. This chapter intends to explore the motives of using blogs. It starts identifying the attributes of blog users and blogs. It then analyses the effects that cause HE students to start blogging, maintain a blog, stop blogging and read blogs in terms of the incentives from both internal and external aspects. Meanwhile, it sets forth the contextual dimensions of blog usage. At last, it presents a conditional matrix to show a basic trajectory of using blogs by investigating a range of concepts.

4.2 Attributes of blog users

As mentioned previously in Chapter 3, the informants are HE students, ranging from undergraduates to research students. The blogger's age was ranged from 18 to 32; and 20 participants were between age 18 and 21, and 14 participants were between 22 and 24 years old. According to Sutherland's edited book, *Adult Learning: A Reader* (1997), it can be seen that traditional-age students (aged 18-22 years) has not been grouped with mature students. That is, most informants are adult students but not mature students. However, as participants Lisa (19 years old) and Cliff (24 years old) pointed out that HE students should have abilities of self-regulation, judging information sources, and learning new digital technologies. They are not as immature as adolescents and not as mature as mature students, but they are digital generation according to their physiological age. By analysing the interview data, the researcher identified three aspects of the blog users' attributes: (1) being "addicted" to digital technologies and sources, (2) high demand for individualisation, and (3) need of getting peer acceptance. The first aspect fits in both bloggers and pure blog readers, the last two aspects fit in bloggers particularly.

First, blog users are likely to be "addicted" to digital technologies and sources. They use new technologies often, adapt technological applications fast, and apply mobile and network tools heavily. Using computer and the Internet becomes one of the digital generation's routines and typing becomes one of the most representative behaviours. To most participants, typing is easy and surfing online for entertainment and acquiring information is normal. Most blogger participants mentioned that if they were not busy (e.g., not in examination time), they spend 0.5-1 hour on average every three to five days on updating their blogs and an hour on average on reading blogs every day. Half of the pure blog readers (5 out of 11 participants) spend 0.5-2 hours daily on reading blogs and another half mentioned that they read blogs on a weekly basis. It seems that bloggers are more likely to read blogs regularly than pure blog readers. A couple of examples showed this orientation.

> "… because I had touched typing, I found it's better than writing things up by hand. I can type faster. So I started using it a lot." (Rose, 21 years old)

> "I like writing, but if you mean writing, I prefer typing, because I'm too lazy to write." (Ellen, 20 years old)

Five participants explicitly used the word "lazy" to describe their ways of contacting with people on the Internet. As Flora (a 24-years-old international Masters student in Architecture, with 1.5 years blogging experience) said:

> "…because people get so lazy nowadays, they don't want to leave a message. When I write down something, maybe only one or two friends will give me messages and the messages just, say, 'I saw it' or 'I know', very simple."

"Lazy" represents the cases of "putting short description, even no title, just put pictures, let people see" (by Lucy), "talk becomes short in conversation, but more happens in Facebook" (by Kent), and "too lazy to meet up often" (by Alice). In a sense, it implied that the social connection of people was becoming less; but the connection was moving to be online and virtual. Even though there were no statistical data in this study to prove the change of social connections between different generations (e.g., 1960s, 1980s, and current generation), some participants did express that they felt that the social connections lessen (see Wendy's opinion below); whereas some participants noted that they kept their old relationships in real life as well as also met new friends through blogs, and expanded the online relationship to a real relationship (see Vicky's words below).

> "It's quite depressing to know that the world was stolen, [become] so virtual. It becomes such a small place through things like Facebook, — network things inside. I hate that, because you are accessible to everyone… you just become obliged to keep in touch with everyone [online] and you don't really have a choice…" (Wendy, a pure blog reader)

> "Most of my friends now, we actually met through weblogs. When I went back Malaysia, I met one friend, and I would meet another friend, and then we go out together." (Vicky, a 5-year blogger)

Second, individualisation is a crucial attribute that emerged from the data. It reflects that the blogger has a strong sense of his/her identity through emphasising "It is me" and "Who I am".

On blogs, their personalised needs were shown through amusement, design external appearance and writing styles. A few examples showed this clearly, Rose addressed the importance of using "graphics" on blogs to identify the blogger him/herself and to show a unique individual. From Judy's and Don's definitions of their blogs, it presented the individualised demand.

> "… that's [graphics] such an important part in weblogging, I think, because it's not just about the text and the content, it's really like a double thing. I mean, I think if you don't use graphics, images, then you're losing part of the nature of weblog… there are lots of people who use photographs themselves as well, so it's very visual." (Rose, age 21, 1-year blogging experience)

> "… I can go onto the web and say, 'this is me and this is my weblog'. This is part of my identity, I suppose, and it almost gives me a base on the web…" (Judy, 23 years old, 4 years blogging experience)

> "I know I cannot change the world, but I like my weblog to be also one of those blogs that try to say things in a different way, to see and to say things in a different way." (Don, 27 years old, 2 years blogging experience)

In comparison with individualisation, it also showed that bloggers have explicit demands for achieving peer acceptance through sharing their opinions and experience. Most bloggers are likely to seek for a sense of belonging on the Internet. From two examples below, it can be seen that this sense is possibly acquired from interaction through blog commentary, using personalised writing style to draw others' interests, or contributing/involving in discussion of social issues. To gain peer acceptance, to some respect by contrast, provides assurance to the blogger about his/her own value and further reinforces the blogger's sense of his/her identity and individualisation.

> "…[for example, I] just watch if they have dinner tonight. It's nice that you can get involved with that. So I do try to leave comments because it's a way of telling people that you're reading and you appreciate what they're putting down." (Betty, 22 years old, 2.5 years blogging experience)

> "… maybe someone answers what you expect to, or if I'm sharing another life experience, I suppose, let people know that they are not the only person who is feeling in a certain way, undergoing a certain thing. I hope it's sort of, a thing that people can relate to." (Nancy, age 18, about one year blogging experience)

In this study, the findings of the attributes of blog users did not suggest plenty of evidence to support "personality" as a predominant concept, rather it displayed that certain personal traits do affect their blog use behaviours (more discussion in section 4.5). It is clear that blog users, especially bloggers, are likely to apply digital technologies and online sources heavily. They are accustomed to typing instead of writing on paper. They show the demand both for achieving individualisation and peer acceptance. Gaining peer acceptance further helps the blog user to confirm their individualisation.

4.3 Attributes of blogs

In Chapter 2, the researcher listed the primary features that have been published by some research studies. In this study, the attributes of blogs have been conceptualised into four key categories: Convenient accessibility; Flexible operability; Standardised structure; and Personalised communication style by a functional level and an applicable level. These emerged largely from the participants' answers to the question, "What are the advantages of blogs?" and from the comparisons between blogs and other thirteen different communication styles proposed by the participants: (1) email (2) journal (3) book (4) diary (5) online chat (6) mainstream media (newspaper/TV/magazine) (7) community (8) forum (9) normal website (10) personal website (11) phone and message (12) other current social software (e.g., Facebook, Tagging), and (13) face-to-face conversation. An original relationship diagram based on the participants' opinions is shown in Appendix 14. It presents that the blog has its distinctive factors which combine the 13 communication styles. Table 4.1 below summarises the emergent categories after open coding and axial coding.

Table 4.1 Attributes of blogs

Levels	Features of blogs		Dimensions
	Key categories	Subcategories	
Functional level	Convenient accessibility	Expenses	Free / Economical
		Availability	Open / Online / Government moderation
		Spam	
	Flexible operability	Control	Personal / Editable
		Request skills	Basic / Easy
		Space	Unlimited
		Integrating technologies	Visitor counter / Multimedia / Advertising
		Syndications	RSS / Feeds
		Hyperlinks	Unlimited
		Speedy	
		Blog service	Reliable / Selectable
	Standardised structure	Sequence	Reverse chronological order
		Comments	
		Blogroll	
		Categories	
		Archives	
Applicable level	Personalised communication style	Information & content	Individual selected / Text-based
		Language	Colloquial
		Update	Individual-paced
		Publishing	Personal
		Contributions	Individual
		Moderation	Individual
		Audience	Selected / Everyone
		Interaction	Not instant / Indirect
		Duration	Ongoing
		Profit aim	None / Less

Convenient accessibility means that there are few limits to using a blog. As applying an email account or accessing to a website, "it was easily accessible" to blogs too, said by Jack. Almost every participant positively confirmed that many blog services are free, easy to start, and open to everyone on the web. Particularly, Betty explained that "the only reason I could say myself stopping with [blogging] — if I didn't have Internet access — which I also can't see happening."

Although most blog users agreed that blogs are handy to use, four participants mentioned that sometimes spam occurs on comments and are difficult to prevent. They either allow everyone to leave comments, people who have a blog account to leave comments, or use a filter to select who can comment. Todd, a 1.5 year experience blogger, pointed out that government occasionally mediates the information on blogs as follows.

> "… last year there was a small problem in the Department of the Tech-Communication in India, the government. …they had to block blogs… because some blogs had been used for anti-social purposes… So many blogs have been blocked. My blogs are also blocked for quite some time, because it's a mastering. Nobody has a blog in India for quite some time…"

Flexible operability refers to the easiness of using blogs. Blogging does not need particular IT skills as creating a person website.

> "It is one of the easiest facilitates on the web, to be honest…and is very accessible. You don't need to know any technical things. It's very easy, as easy as email for me." (Antony)

The blog space has less size limitation and it is quick to publish a new entry online. It can easily combine various multimedia technologies, such as video, music, RSS, and nowadays the popular blog services (e.g., LiveJournal, Blogger.com) are stable and reliable.

> "I get a kind of subscription to my friends' weblogs. If they haven't posted it, then I just don't get anything. So I don't have to physically go to each separate weblog to look at it. I just get sort of an amount of list of recent posts, which makes it a lot easier." (Betty)

Due to its flexible, personalised control and management functions, the blogger is able to write, edit, or remove information conveniently according to their preference, and even plays multiple cyberselves.

> "You can manage all the things yourself… I could post music, video, anything. It's interesting. It's also like — experiments." (Lucy)

> "…it's easy to use, like having a hotmail account. It's like writing an email to somebody and you add pictures. It's pretty straightforward and you just post it and it goes up, and everybody can read it. So it's all very simple." (Frank)

> "Because it is a virtual world, you can play as your best performance, you can also play the worst performance. It depends on you. Sometimes it's a disadvantage." (Bob)

Standardised structure of blogs helps users to manage and present information simply. As Don suggested,

> "… all blogs are almost the same kind of thing… the date, the post, the system, to each posting, so even though they change the template, the colours, the font, they still have the same structure."

It always displays the latest entry first. It provides commentary function, and archives old entries by different time lines so that the blogger is able to check previous entries.

> "I think it does quite be the fact that I can go onto my blog and I can search back two years and like — I've read articles and things, I've written from two years ago." (Kelly)

Moreover, there are category and blogroll functions for the user to categorise information and link to other relevant blogs, and further make it possible to easily expand.

> "… from that [the blog he read], I expanded into other blogs, — got into this blog and followed links to other blogs, and they link to other ones, and it becomes a web." (Kent)

In addition, supporting personalised communication style is the foundation of the rapidly increasing use of blogs. In accordance with the flexible operability attributes, blogs provide people a communication channel. People are able to find a suitable communication style in terms of their own preference. They can put images, emoticons with textual description to help express, use informal language, update when they have the feeling of writing, or select readers through checking subscriptions and so on. For example, Tina expressed it is a good and flexible way of communication; Dick said it is easy to distribute information; and Dora felt that the colloquial language helps the distribution.

> "… they [friends] will argue some matters on the blog, and give their approvals or disapprovals. I read their blogs, which I thought it's quite good because you can just get your viewpoint across in a textual form and you do it in your own time." (Tina)

> "It's almost liberating. You can write your own little journal without necessarily having to write it, then physically with stuff for people to see as well. … I suppose it's like — just benefit my friends really as well… we are all over the country, cannot always be in touch with each other all the time. Just a quick and easy way of letting people know what happened." (Dick)

> "…it's an easier way of hearing about this [news], it's less technical language, I guess. Yeah, it's more colloquial language, it's enough, can be a lot easier to read." (Dora)

Meanwhile, Frank argued that personal blogs have less profit purpose compared to normal websites. The blog services largely offer people a space for individual use, such as communicating with a group of people or self-expression. He pointed out,

> "If you read a website about a place, then it depends on what this source is. Generally a formal source, they try to sell you something, whereas somebody's blog has got nothing really to gain from that. They're just writing about it, aren't they? They're just reflecting on their experiences. So in general, you wouldn't expect that they got anything to gain,

> so they are going to be honest about it. But maybe misinformed, but at least they're going to be honest about their experiences."

According to Table 4.1, it must be stressed that convenient accessibility, flexible operability and standardised structure represent the blog technology, its fundamental functions; whereas personalised communication style is a concept that at a micro level, reflects the blog user's individuation use in practice. The attributes at the functional level support the attribute at the applicable level. In contrast, the attribute at the applicable level does not support the ones at the functional level.

4.4 Extrinsic incentives

Extrinsic incentives refer to HE students using blogs (keeping blogging or keeping reading certain blogs) as well as stopping using blogs by external influences. In a sense, it varies on motivation and de-motivation dimensions. The researcher discusses this category from five aspects: (1) following social trend (2) preventing unwanted readers (3) breaking away from social taboos (4) reducing geographic distance, and (5) effects on people. The last aspect is a major element that negatively influences HE students to maintain blogging, and the other four elements are positive incentives that impact HE students to use blog. All five aspects are suitable for bloggers, and the first, third and fourth ones fit pure blog readers in particular.

4.4.1 Motivation – Following social trend

Eight out of forty eight participants reported that they started to realise blogs around 2000-2002, while 33 out of 48 participants were initially aware of blogs over 2003-2005. The data denoted the rapid popularity of blogs over 2000 to 2005 shown in Figure 2.2 in Chapter 2. Meanwhile, 28 participants mentioned that they became aware of blogs by friends' recommendation, and 16 participants through online searching, the blog service advertisement or news. However, only two participants initially realised blogs in education and the other two participants were through their workplace. Thereby, trend is a key factor that affects young generations' attitudes to new technologies. As discussed in section 4.2, young people always follow fashion and are pioneers of trying new IT products. With the rapid growth of blogging all over the world, more and more HE students have started to experiment with blogging. They try it and continue using it, or dislike it and forsake it. Likewise, they experience other Web2.0 applications, such as video sharing (e.g., YouTube), photo sharing (e.g., Flickr) and social networking (e.g., Facebook, Bebo). When these technological applications become popular, HE students who do not use them are influenced to have one for gaining peer acceptance. For example, as Susan expressed,

> "…it's an information age. People get information anywhere. This is just a trend of having a blog or keeping on the web; people are freely able to get information anywhere."

Lynn, who thought she was not good at computing, indicated how she became aware of blogs.

> "Might everyone has MySpace. Celebrities got MySpace. Even in the news, some cartoons made jokes about it. So everyone just like — 'oh, they got MySpace'. My sister is really good at web design. She said, 'you should try MySpace because it's easy to use', because I'm not really good at computer, and I said, 'ok', and now I really like it, and it tends that all my friends had a Facebook and I didn't. 'You must have a Facebook'. So that's now how I got that… I started because everyone had MySpace and Facebook, and I didn't want to have something different. I ended up having High5."

From a comparison between WebCT and Facebook made by Bess, it also reflected the important role of social trend in influencing HE students' experience of using social software.

> "…Facebook has become a wide phenomenon of all students because it's such a social thing. So almost everyone I know is on there and because everyone is on there, it's easy. A lot of people go on it every day. It's a good way of making sure that a message has been crossed for everyone."

4.4.2 Motivation – Preventing unwanted readers

There were seven bloggers said similarly that family members (e.g., parents) always read their diaries. To avoid this, they used blogs as an online diary without worrying about people reading whom they did not want to. Also, five bloggers mentioned that they prevented people who knew them in person to read their blogs. They selected readers. As Lynn explained,

> "… they have to ask 'can I be your friend?' and then you say 'yes'… you have some privacy settings, so you can say, 'yes', the person can be my friends and read my profile, and see my friends and the other friends I have. 'No', they can't read my blog, or yes, they can read my blog. So you can decide what they have access to, which is good. On both Facebook and MySpace, you can set it to different privacy settings."

Hence, to prevent privacy or personal true feelings from being observed by people is a crucial reason why HE students have a blog. A blog enables HE students to write online anonymously, open to whom they feel comfortable with, or share their personal opinions or concerns with peers. This indicates a strategy of the young generation to react to privacy being observed in real life. They move into the virtual world to find a "safer" place for themselves because online is faceless and people will not know who they are. Two typical examples are below.

> "But I prefer doing it [diary] online. It's more private because my mum wouldn't find it and read them if I write it. So I decided to do it online when I was about 15 and has been keeping it ever since." (Bess, 4 years blogging experience)

> "I don't [have a normal diary] because that's sort of my mum could read that. She could literally walk into my room and read it, whereas on my computer, it's a bit safer. She has to search for it, whereas my diary, would be in a drawer or under my bed, maybe it's easy to be found." (Kelly, 4 years blogging experience)

4.4.3 Motivation – Breaking away from social taboos

Due to the features of blogs, flexible operability and personalised communication style, a blog is basically controlled and managed by the blogger. The blogger decides what information put on the blog and whether make his/her real name visible to the public. There were seven participants similarly noted that blogs provide a free space for people to express opinions of certain sensitive topics, especially about political stands, religious beliefs, or personal affairs, which they may not often talk in a face-to-face conversation. For example, Don, a two-year blogger, an international student from Italy, defined himself as an information hunter, a thinker and a contributor to the society. He said,

> "… my blog is not only a place to publish and post, but also an aggregator of news with the same issue, for example, about the world, discommendation, about the things that I consider unfair… basically, … I would say antagonism. That is not a clear political idea, because I don't consider myself belonging into a party, but I consider myself belong to the journal of the party, which is against the mainstream. It's not always against, but sometimes there is something different… [I blog] to be more contribution to these amount of bloggers, to change the way of our information that is developed in the world. When we talk about freedom information, this is a really good way to develop freedom information. There were cases in which the blog has been censored…"

In addition, Carol who is Polish, explained why she read blogs from a pure blog reader's point of view, and Debby, an international student from Malaysia, felt that blogging helped her to express certain views that she would not say in normal conversations.

> "I just found them [blogs] on the Internet, because they concern, they write about the political situation in my country, but they write in a funny way — the way that you can read it without any consequences [worries]. That's very nice." (Carol)

> "…or let's say, I have a very strong view on a certain issue that I find it's hard to share with friends, then I just blog it, my opinions and views… like — maybe political views or issues on that. It's hard to talk in a conversation [sometimes]." (Debby)

4.4.4 Motivation – Reducing geographic distance

Eight pure blog readers and all blogger participants positively described that blogs help them to keep in touch with people who live in different places. By blogging, HE students, especially international students who leave far away from family, or who travel distantly, reduce the isolated feeling, easily inform people about their life as well as know other people's life. It is apparent that the blog provides a supplementary communication means which is easy, cheap, and flexible. For example, Susan, an international Masters student in Journalism said,

> "Just let them know how my life here is. It's sort a way of contacting each other and knowing each other's life, since we have been away..."

Similarly, Neil, a second year undergraduate, does not use blog as a diary but to stay in touch with friends at home. He noted,

> "Generally, the most important thing of blogging for me — we both study aboard, you know, if you keep contact with your friends in your home country, it's very expensive to use telephone, of course. It's not very convenient to email to everyone with the same content. So the blog is very important in that sense."

Another prime example of HE students who use blogs because of geographic distant between people is Lauren. She was a third year undergraduate in Dentistry. She stated,

> "The main reason that I created my blog is my brother lives in Australia … I want him to be able to find out what I was getting up to rather than phone me, just because it's cheaper really and he could do it on his own time and just leave me a message… So I wrote my blog. I used it for about 6-7 months, but I haven't updated it recently. …Why didn't I? … If I'm honest, because my brother tries to move back to the UK, he started to ring me up more than he used to. That's probably why I stopped blogging."

4.4.5 De-motivation – Effects on people

One of the main reasons that weaken HE students blog or cause them to rethink their way of blogging is that they experienced or are concerned that the information they put on blogs may affect or had affected people, such as family, friends, or the person they wrote about. Kent was a typical example. He was a Masters student in politics. He provided two negative cases of online information dissemination that he encountered (see below) to explain why he decided to give up blogging after three months of trying it. He emphasised that the decision was made to protect himself as well as his family.

> "…a friend of mine got fired of his job. He was working in the Home Office, because he was accessing this forum of friends, they [his colleagues who work in the Home Office] went through it and they found there were a lot of insults through people… there was one piece, calling Hilary Clinton, some horrible things, because she changed stances on abortion and they thought this is unacceptable. So I think that was also one of the things made me think, it's just a fact that this sort of information out there forever, maybe it's the best not to put this information out there, full stop."

> "I said, my family member is in politics, and there was a thing on this blog, someone reported something which happened and they have been mistaken and they reported it, and it's looked, dodgy, should we say. Nothing should have happened. It was misreported. A week later they put it right and qualified, but naturally the qualification where they said 'we messed up there, we apologise. We never report on the blog, the only report which is something has been done which is wrong'. The blog comments on there were really nasty, some really nasty stuff I never heard before, and I went on and I wrote something which I shouldn't have written, under pseudonym, but being pseudonym isn't entirely divorced from me — and that's one of the things as well which made me stop …"

Moreover, Jack, a third year undergraduate, usually wrote about events that involved him as a Christian and his life. He provided an example which warned him to think about what he should blog and what should not, and then he made a decision to less write about political matters.

> "… It's a potential electing candidate, who I knew… it wasn't any negative comments or anything like that, and I just basically wrote. What happened was, I was searching for information about this person on the Internet, and I realised there was nothing out there, — information that I wanted — so I decided to write about what I did know, because I thought that's an advantage, people like me, searching for this person and wondering who they are. So I started to write about them, and I got an email from this person's office, saying 'I work so and so, please would you remove what you're writing? It's not we don't like it. It's nothing against you, or we don't disagree what you're writing. It's just some people using against her in the process of getting elected', and things like that. Then I actually kind of looked at other people's blogs, what's really well-known, political blogger, who's been on news that kind of thing, automatically, googled this person… and my blog is on the top, and I was thinking 'oh, my goodness, so I was kind of offending this person.' From my view, it's only a point of view of this lady. So I think in that sense, in that situation, for example, it did provide people information. But that was a lesson in what you made public, and what you made private."

In summary, Following social trend, Preventing unwanted readers, Breaking away from social taboos, and Reducing geographic distance are key elements that from external influences, explicitly motivate a blogger to create and continuously use a blog, whereas Effects on people is a vital factor that lessens a blogger to maintain a blog, or affects the information they publish on the blog, which may further affect the orientation of using blogs. As a pure blog reader, they keep reading blogs largely because of first "following social trend"; like reading stories, many people read them and spread information through blogs. It is easy and free for a reader to have access to a various amount of information through blogs. Secondly, some blogs provide different perspectives, voices or views that people do not often talk in normal conversations; people become interested in these differences. They read those blogs because of a similar belief, feeling or view of those issues or some social taboos. They felt their specific ideas are established by those blogs. Meanwhile, although they do not blog, continuing reading certain blogs (e.g., a friend's blog) helps a reader to know what is going on with the blog author and to decrease the isolated feeling caused by geographic distance.

4.5 Intrinsic incentives

Apart from the major external influences listed above, the analysis also showed that many bloggers keep writing blogs to follow their own inspiration, understood as a "strong feeling of worthy for me"; whereas pure blog readers keep reading blogs because the information occurs in a blog format. As Ben and Hugh portrayed, if it is presented in another format, such as a newspaper or book, they will read it as well. The researcher therefore categorised this sense of inner feeling that drives people to use or give up a blog as intrinsic incentives. It was reflected through three aspects: (1) desire of being visible (2) anxiety of being visible, and (3) keeping writing habit. The first and third aspects are positive effects; whereas the second one is de-motivating. Bloggers fit into all three aspects; whereas pure blog readers reflect the second point in particular.

4.5.1 Motivation – Desire of being visible

Liking being visible or a satisfactory feeling of being online is a personal inner desire that reflects the individual's traits, such as like to be noticed, responsive to interpersonal transactions, communicates appreciation and so on. These traits may motive bloggers to create a blog and keep blogging. As Antony defined, "I like to be on the web… I don't want to be hidden. I want to be visible. I want people to see me. I want people know what I'm doing". Similarly, Bob expressed "I don't know why, I want to share some ideas, information to guys or I want to express myself. That is the most important motivation, I think". They intrinsically want to speak out (e.g., their experience, concerns, emotions, opinions) on the web. They felt that it is good to share with people.

In the data, more than half of bloggers, especially female (16 out of 24 female bloggers), clearly used blogs as a space to express feelings, personal problems and experiences, and further to get interactions (e.g., support, suggestions or encouragement). This orientation of showing self-expression information online does not only reflect the egocentric orientated characteristics of the bloggers, but also imply a way of young generation used to confirm their identities. By blogging, they felt the enjoyment and satisfactory feeling, and this feeling assures their ways of blogging. Thus, they follow the inner voice that "I want" and "worthy for me". For example, Emily, a blogger with three years blogging experience, explained why she will carry on blogging as follows.

> "I usually blog about my daily life, so — my daily life is quite eventful, isn't it? As long as my life events keep happening — events that I'm interested to write about, so — I keep on blogging since those events keep happening."

Cliff, an international student, maintained a blog about 3 years, mentioned that he kept a blog because of "a desire to communicate", he said:

> "On the blog, there is something that I want to show people. That's not very personal, I think. [It's] something I feel free to show off, or share with my friends, with those people who are interested in my topics."

4.5.2 De-motivation – Anxiety of being visible

HE students may stop blogging or even do not want to try blogging (e.g., pure blog readers) because of a strong inner anxiety of individual matters being observed by others, or a strong unconformable feeling, such as "not good to be visible". For example, Wendy, a third year undergraduate in Biochemistry and Genetics, defined herself as "anti-blogging". She blogged two months and then gave up because of an unpleasant feeling of putting personal writing online. Here is her explanation about it,

> "I started going to write about myself, my experience and my days. After about two months, I was still not very comfortable with that other people read it, because I thought if somebody wants to — I mean — if a friend wants to know me, I think they should be through me, but not through the medium of the Internet or something… I just dislike the idea of putting down things on the Internet, where WWW, World Wide Web, that's access to everyone. I'd rather have something, — I mean I can write more traditional post — still writing on paper. So I'm still not comfortable with the idea of typing. … My friend has a blog, so I still read them sometimes other than [have my own blog]…. It's a personal choice. I mean I know there is a factor of anonymity that it's obvious no one knows who you are, things like that. But at the same time, even if you don't mention who you are, still you're writing something that is quite personal. I'm always not very comfortable with it… For me, I quite like the traditional method of writing."

Moreover, Kent was similar to Wendy, had a short blogging attempt and then gave up. As discussed in 4.4.5, he had negative effects on blog usage. However, his decision to stop using blog is also in relation to his personal traits such as deeply committed to his values, have a long range vision, anxious and realistic. A series of descriptions reflected his concern about the impact of blogging on his life and his future (see below). He worried that people become know him by reading his blogs and they may take a wrong image of him. He worried that people may think he used the blog to show off his intelligence, and even worried that a blog may distort his identity. But at the same time he also wanted to provide accurate information on the web and be himself. This paradox made him eventually give up blogging but keep reading blogs. He felt safe and comfortable when he followed his inner voice and got rid of this anxiety.

> "… it was a construction of online identity, I think, I had problem with. I was uncomfortable for the notion of, when you start to blog, you start with just small thing, but be an author of the character its own, and that character reflects on you, and that's going to be odd. I started having — people from other blogs are acting like — they knew me on my blog, even though they only read something I put. It seems quite odd. I mean this is also psychological, but it was just what I thought. I stopped all this. It's going to be weird."

> "…if I just put that [what he wrote on a normal diary] online, it's a bit too much like — I'm trying to be clever, 'oh, look at mine, look how much I've read, look the smart ideas', people may think that. That's a bit worrying. Obviously, everyone I suppose has that part of personality, because that's not what I want to feel I need to pander to, I suppose. …It wasn't I expect to be… Maybe I'm still very paranoid… I just don't have that mentality."

> "…it's a hard decision. If I have to choose when I'm going to make it anonymity and say what I want, or if I am going to put my name down and be very careful of what I say. But I think the blog is a lot about just express out what you think. It's not always as well thoughts out. I mean, I think it's a half of the fun, and you take away a lot of the fun when you have to be careful to think. I want to be qualified, I think that takes quite a funny way. Right now, I don't think I have a will [to blog]."

In addition, this anxious feeling was more clearly demonstrated by pure blog readers, Harry and Jenny. Harry stated that he is always a lurker and invisible online to reduce being noticed by others, while Jenny did not want to have a blog nor even a private diary. To her, getting the latest information about her subject and friends is the key reason for reading blogs, but worries of privacy is a crucial reason for not blogging. She said,

> "No. I don't [have a private diary]. Because I think someone would find it. That's why I don't blog. I have to look the organised diary where I write down my appointments and my deadlines are. But I don't keep like — a private diary, thoughts, because if it's private, someone is probably going to find it and read it. And if it's not private, it's not a real diary, it's more like an organised, and again just what you did. Yes. That's why I don't blog as well. Because I think if I've blogged about something, forgetting that it was so public, and might forget somebody may read it, somebody may take it a wrong way…"

4.5.3 Motivation – Keeping writing habit

In the data, 10 out of 37 bloggers mentioned that they like writing. Blogging is a way of writing. Cliff was an international Masters student. He had blogged in English about 3 years. To him, blogging is a way of practicing English writing. He expressed:

> "It's very useful, I think, keeping an English blog. Because I can write in English, because I have the motivation — I want to write in English. It makes my study of English more interesting, much easier. It's a good way, effective way."

Elsa, an international undergraduate in Information Management, used a blog as her diary. She explained that a blog is a new version of diary.

> "When I was a child, my parents encouraged me to write a diary to basically keep notes of what I was doing every day. As I grew older, I found it's very difficult to write down in a book [diary] what I was doing every day, because I'm always in front of the computer, I thought it's easier for me to type something down, because I can type a lot quicker than I write. So I got used to use that [a blog] as a formal diary. Just write down what I was doing every day."

Daisy was a British doctoral student and studied in Mathematics. She had two blogs, one was a personal diary and the other was for writing fiction and stories. She used blogs for retaining her writing habit.

> "…I do enjoy writing. It's fun, and when I was younger, I used to start diaries. I wrote so often and the last few weeks, I lost the book that I kept in. So having something online, you cannot really lose a website. So it's a good way of keeping a diary and it's easy to just go online and write something quickly."

All in all, in terms of exploring internal feelings, personal traits, such as a desire of being online and showing personal thoughts online, and preferences, such as "like writing" and "want to write" are two important incentives which positively lead to blogging. An anxious feeling, such as worry of privacy or a misconception of his/her identity, is an essential element that negatively hinders a student from using blogs.

4.6 Contextual dimensions

A clear distinction between blogs and other learning tools in the classroom has been made by the participants according to their purposes of blogging. Every blogger stated that they blog for relaxing, fun, leaving away from study. For instance, Harry said below,

> "The presentation is over a humorous nature. He [the blogger] does try making you laugh and keep it entertainment. It's nice to have that sort of focus. You come there and amuse, you come with a light heart…"

Although the entertainment purpose was defined clearly by the participants, through looking into the data about motivation in-depth, there were four orientations of blog use emergent. It ranged from: for self use, such as an online diary for recording the blogger's life (e.g., Elsa); free online liberating space (e.g., Kelly, Caorl); a communication way (most bloggers); to for community of interest use (e.g., Cliff, Vicky and Alma). Moreover, it ranged from: social use, such as maintaining and expanding connections (e.g., Don and Jack); to reflective use, such as self-censorship and reflecting on their progress (e.g., Nancy and William). Therefore, in this sense, the researcher classified the orientations into two dimensions: personal use orientation versus community of interest use orientation; social use orientation versus reflective use orientation. The four orientations are not mutually exclusive to each other, for instance, a participant may use the blog either for personal or for reflective. The orientations are varying in terms of the effects of extrinsic and intrinsic incentives, and impact the strategies and consequences of using blogs, which will be discussed further in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

4.6.1 Personal use orientation

Personal use orientation denotes that the blogger uses a blog for him/herself rather than aiming to share information, influence others, discuss topics or write for readers. Those bloggers who maintain a blog as an online diary have a distinct tendency towards a usage of "the blog is for me". From Antony's perception below, it can be seen that they regard the blog as a personal online place and belonging.

> "Actually, to be honest with you, if nobody reads my weblog, I still have an interest to write because at least I am the only reader of my weblog. I write myself, I read it later on, and I enjoy that. So it's not a deal, if nobody reads it, I read it. No problem."

They are likely to remove entries in terms of personal criteria (e.g., feel regret writing something, mood). They are also likely to self-expression and have lesser expectation of comments than those who use blogs for exchanging ideas. There were many similar expressions to this point. It is worthy of looking at an example. May was an international Masters student and 2-year blogger. Typically, she used the blog as a self-liberating place, and opened her blog to friends and family. She mentioned that "… just to write something to express my feelings, or make myself feel better if I suffer from something" and her attitude to comments connoted the sense that "the blog is for me rather than others" (see below).

> The researcher: "Do you use your blog for communicating with your friends or family?"
>
> May: "Not really. Although I do receive some feedback, it is not the main thing that I used it to communicate."
>
> The researcher: "So only your friends read your blog, not everyone?"
>
> May: "Yeah, not everyone. I don't really want to let everyone know who I am, what do I look like... For me, I don't think it's necessary to show my blog to others because they are strangers. They don't really know me. I think it's not necessary to let them know my life. So only my friends [can read my blog]. It's ok."

4.6.2 Community of interest use orientation

Community of interest use orientation refers to bloggers who are likely to discover new people who have similar interests, experiences or opinions with them through writing, reading, and commenting on blogs to develop their own interests. The bloggers who are "nosy", "curious", "communicates appreciation", "interested in others' ideas" have the orientation of using blogs for interaction, exchanging views, sharing and gradually forming a community of interest. Their blogs often focus on certain topics, such as personal interests or social issues that concern them. Those bloggers have aims of widening perspectives and improving their interest-based skills.

Figure 4.1 draws together the concepts that rise to the formation of a community of interest. As the diagram indicates, bloggers who have similar hobbies, or meet on the web because of publishing interests-relevant information are likely to share their interests, experiences and opinions. For example, Cliff not only used his blog for practising English but also for discussing football. He met new friends from other countries who have a similar hobby to him and exchanged opinions with them.

> "…I wrote something about football, because I'm a football fan. I wrote football comments on my blog and to share them with my friends, who like football…. I have some friends from other countries besides England, and they are football fans… Some of them, we support the same football team, for example, I support Argentina and my friends, some of them are from South America, some of them are from the Middle East, they support the same team, they support Argentina. On February, last week, it was a game, Argentina played against France, and we discussed it on the Internet."

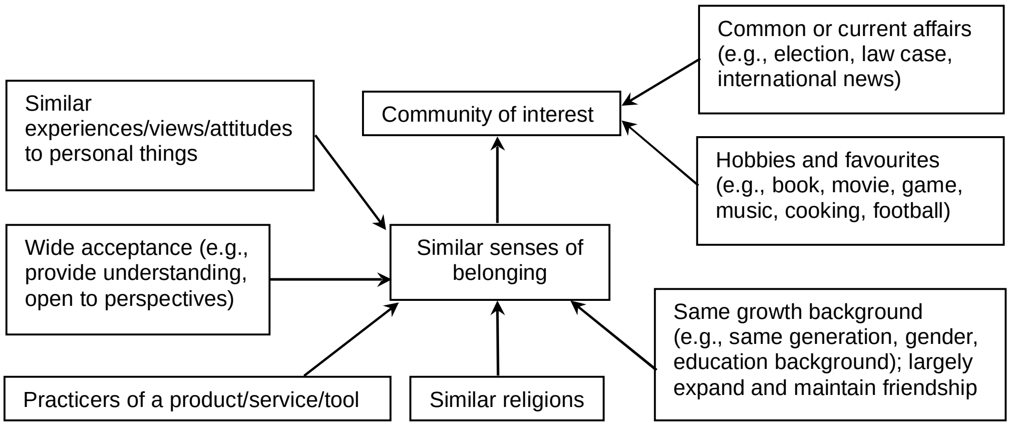


Figure 4.1 Forming of community of interest

Vicky, a 5-year blogger, who likes fashion, graphic design and online shopping, met many friends based on her interest. She highlighted that blogging is not only for personal expression but also for communicating with a community as well.

> "… in my opinion, blogging is not just about personal diary. It's like a community tool. It really takes blogging to a whole new level, because sometimes, people, from my experience, they set — their own blog — they blog to the whole community. Usually people say 'today I went out to this place', stuff like that, and 'I work this', a picture, and 'I went for tea', a picture. [Previously they] just use blogs for their own, but now they blog for the whole community, say 'oh, look, I went today, I work today, I eat today'… From very a personal side to a very socialised side, open, but it's online. Because when people mention blogs, they always think a personal diary online, often updates or news, but they don't really think that blogs could be more than that. It's much flexible now, and has more tools."

There was also an emergent suggestion that the blogger published a blog and gradually form a community because of a feeling of "belonging" or "involved". This sense can be gained from meeting people who have similar background, for instance, similar religion (e.g., Todd, Jack), similar generation (e.g., Nancy, Neil), similar views of social issues (e.g., Bob, Don, Daisy), similar game playing interest (e.g., Dora) or similar business ideas (e.g., Rock). Meanwhile, this sense can be acquired from reading blogs and feeling him/herself are in the similar situation or having similar experience. For example, Bess opened her blog on Opendiary website to about 40 people and she felt other bloggers were related to her in certain sense.

> "If I read other girls' [blogs], same ages as me, doing same kind of things as me, I will not compare myself [with them], but relate to them… if they are going through problems similar to me, it makes me feel a little bit reassured because it makes you think that it happens to everyone… I do read some of them, like film community, depression community… I just do it, because I enjoy it." (Bess)

Furthermore, there was not enough evidence to prove the life cycle a community of interest, for instance, how long one will exist and how long will it take one to be formed. It can be formed, expanded and die out rapidly or slowly. Nevertheless, as Bob indicated, "…when you write a blog for longer time, there would be a community; we always read each other's blog and you leave your comments on it. It's just like community". It needs the blogger's effort and continuing interaction between the blogger and the reader.

4.6.3 Social use orientation

Social use orientation refers to bloggers who are likely to use blogs for entertainment, communication, social activities and connection. The data show that the bloggers do not write blogs for learning or academic purpose, nor have an explicit intent on personal development, but for relaxation and social life outside of study. For example, make friends and organise events (e.g., Dora), write a travel journal for sharing experience (e.g., Frank), or keep in touch with friends (most bloggers). A couple of statements clearly reflect the orientation.

> "… with MySpace, if I have a very bad day, I just go and type very quickly, like a crazy person, 'oh, this is annoying me' ... all my friends got MySpace. They're all very creative and crazy looking. It's really good fun. We have a competition about who has the best background and things like that. So it's quite good fun." (Lynn)

> "Especially now, I'm studying abroad, and my friends are all back home, we keep track each other by blogs… if I want to talk to my friends back Malaysia, I just create a post and then only my friends in Malaysia can see that…" (Vicky)

> "…it's a fantastic way of keeping in touch with people. Also lots of things you can keep private if you want to. You can keep it as private or open as you like. I've met a lot of people through it. It's good for organising things… like — when I go conventions … when they get several different times, different places, they can put down the room numbers that they are in the hotels to recognise, if you did not meet them before. You can organise a place to meet up, what time and stuff. It's good for long-distance organising." (Dora)

4.6.4 Reflective use orientation

Reflective use orientation means that the blogger is likely to use blogs for personal learning and self-development, such as to reflect on changes in themselves, their development, their interaction with readers, or to develop a self-used information source. Typically, as discussed previously, some bloggers likes writing, therefore, blogging helps them to improve writing skills. In addition, some bloggers stated that they learn how to express thoughts and how to communicate with people on the Internet. Thirty out of thirty seven bloggers explicitly stated that they thought over what they should put on blogs and how they changed through blogging. Prime examples are as follows.

> "…every day I would like to think about, especially during the night. I would like to think about what I should write down for today, any special things happened around me or around the world even…" (William)

> "…it could be like — I want to catch my own progress. I want to see how I am growing as a writer. What mistakes I have made when I start writing, and I would like to improve my presentation and using language better." (Todd)

> "… I think the way which helps you is a kind of helping personal development. Let's say, how's your personal development, how's the changes in yourself as you grow up … It's not really help me academically. But, yeah, personally…" (Lauren)

It is important to note that in all four contextual dimensions, the above interpretation is based on bloggers. By investigating, it was found that pure blog readers have similar orientations in reading experience. They may read blogs for developing their own interests (e.g., Harry, Jenny), contributing to a community of interest (e.g., Hugh), knowing a friend's life or for fun (e.g., Annie), or reflecting on self-development (e.g., Lisa, Kent). Therefore, the researcher did not provide statements of pure blog readers.

4.7 Trajectory of using blogs

After analysing the drives that affect HE students to use blogs (blogging and reading blogs) and the use orientations, this section will identify a basic process of using blogs according to the statements by the participants. Although each participant has a personal inspiration of using the blog, such as accepting social trend or inner feeling, the researcher created a conditional matrix to present the basic trajectory of blog use (see Figure 4.2). A more descriptive account of each element in the diagram and how they were emerged from participants' descriptions are provided below.

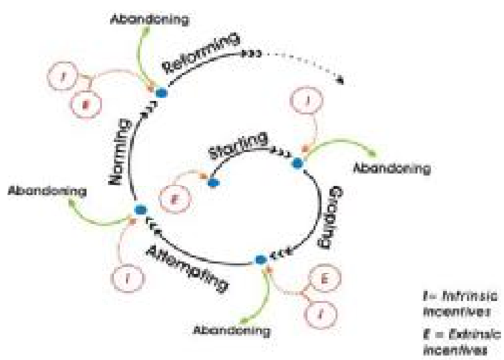


Figure 4.2 A conditional matrix representing the blogging trajectory

At the beginning of being aware of blogs, many participants (21 out of 48) showed an interested or excited feeling, 9 participants felt incredulous, 12 participants said just accepted without clear impression, 4 participants were not very interested in, and 2 participants felt “egoism” of bloggers. It showed that most blog users initially were excited to see the idea of using informal and personalised writing (e.g., Betty); they felt the idea was acceptable (e.g., Neil); they were curious why people wrote personal things and put it online (e.g., Nancy); but at the same time, they also did not understand why people read it (e.g., Lauren) (all examples see below). They started to touch blogs with an ambivalent feeling. The researcher names this period of inquisitive time as “Starting”. This beginning was largely impacted by extrinsic incentives, such as peers use it for contacting each other, being mentioned in press, came across a personal blog, and so on.

> “It’s quite exciting really. It’s like email but better. You can do more things with it … it could have my own style. I could design what it looked like and also I could post whatever I like. I could post things for everyone to read or just for my friends to read.” (Betty)

> “I haven’t got any specific feeling. I think just — accept it. I don’t think it’s very good or bad. I think it’s just ok. That’s funny.” (Neil)

> “I thought it was very strange [feeling]. I couldn’t really understand why people were willing to share the things about themselves, about their thoughts and feelings to potential audience of millions… [I created a blog because] part was curiosity, and another part was to keep updated with my friends, to keep them updated about me very quickly, because it takes a while to text everybody that I know; it takes a while to email everybody that I know. But if I keep my weblog updated, then people can look at it and can instantly see how I am doing, and they can see chronologically how that changed. So I am able to keep up with a lot of people, and they keep up with me in a very compact and efficient manner, and I can share thoughts and feelings in more depth, because I have the ability to write more in a short space and time. I would say for a text, or an email, which is limited.” (Nancy)

> “I thought it’s strange really. Because it does seem like, — particularly personal blogs, — do seem like an online diary. You think, well, everyone is allowed to see, aren’t they? … I thought to begin with, a lot of people are putting quite a lot of personal information on there, that everyone is free to read and I thought that was quite brave, to begin with. Also I think it makes a lot of people who perhaps shouldn’t look at it may look at it.” (Lauren)

After experienced a short Starting stage, some people felt that the blog was not an interesting thing. They soon forgot it or had a negative attitude to creating a blog, for instance, Hugh felt that he had many ways of exchanging his opinions with people and it was no need for blogging (see statement below). Thus, they abandoned the blogging experience. Also, many people started to try to having his/her own blog. They wanted to see if the blog is useful. This stage that is mostly driven by intrinsic incentives is coined as “Groping” by the researcher. It reflects that with a provisional feeling, the blog user experienced blogging for him/herself before he/she passed an opinion of blogs. For example, Kelly felt the benefits after she tried out using it.

> "I dislike when someone's feeling is often important and — just putting their things about their life, and their viewpoints of life, that doesn't make sense to me. I cannot see why people read that..." (Hugh)

> "The first time I realised what they were, — it's quite confusing, I don't really understand how people could like — just write down stuff and everyone to see. I don't know, I didn't think I can do it almost. But then the most I started using, it's really like — handy, really enjoy doing, so I carry on." (Kelly)

"Attempting" stage follows the Groping stage and the blogger still has an idea of testing it. However, it is different from "Groping" because in this process, the blogger felt enjoyment and made more effort to blog. This movement is largely driven by extrinsic incentives, such as receiving encouraging comments; meeting people who have similar experiences, or felt someone is interested in their writing. Those external drives thus positively cause the blogger to continue updating the blog. Two examples are outlined below.

> "Sometimes I get lazy. I don't want to keep my blog. After a certain time and some people may go into it and say 'oh, the place is so cold, you should warm it up', Most people say, 'put more writings, more pictures, we want to see that'. I suppose people expect me to say something, so I will keep writing." (Flora)

> "I think it took me a little while to get interested enough to actually set up and use it, because I've never really been a person to keep a diary, or anything like a journal. I might have done when I was younger, but I am not good at doing it every day… I think the first time I really got interest in using it was when I became more interested in the community aspect, where you can join in and talk to other people about the same thing you are interested in, whether or not using your blog as a diary." (Barbara)

In spite of receiving comments and having interactions, over the Groping stage, a few participants expressed that they gave up writing blogs finally due to a strong intrinsic feeling (e.g., "uncomfortable" or "it is odd"). They would rather keep reading blogs than publish their own blogs. Typical examples (e.g., Wendy and Kent) have been discussed in section 4.5.2.

Through the Attempting stage, some bloggers stopped blogging due to lacking intrinsic motivations. For example, Lisa who used a blog during a difficult period, Mike and Frank who used blogs for sharing particular experience, e.g., game, travel, all expressed that they became busy with study and felt that they did not have special topics to publish. However, largely with the satisfactory and enjoyment feeling, many bloggers gradually formed their own blog using styles. Some of them realised what people are interested in and developed their own writing style; some of them felt readers support and understand them; some of them felt that they broaden views and expand perspectives, and others felt blogs are informative and kept reading them. The researcher calls this period of time as "Norming". It reflected that bloggers did not question themselves "why do I blog?" or "why people blog?". They became accustomed to blogs. Many participants similarly stated that, "like a habit" (e.g., Judy, Cliff), "I get used to doing it" (e.g., Betty, May), "I am quite enjoy doing it" (e.g., Elsa, Dick, Scott) or "I am addictive of it" (e.g., Antony, Lynn, Don). Meanwhile, the following statement provides an example of how pure blog readers start to read blogs regularly.

> "The first time I was a little bit suspicious. I thought the information didn't have all that much credence, because you never know who is writing it, but as I kept visiting the site, I started reading this person's information, and at first I was rather dubious, but he didn't seem to have any ulterior motives, that gave me a certain amount of trust, they're all through the blog. So now whenever he does link to another blog, or when he has some extra information, I take it account that measure of trust I've built up him as a source. That information he is linking or to a certain degree or authority as well. So, yeah, that's how I've kind of come to trust that source of information… I check them about 4 or 5 times a week." (Harry)

At the Norming stage, there is still a possibility of abandoning blogging because of external and internal effects. For example, four participants mentioned that they will probably give up blogging when they graduate and start a job. They pointed out that students have flexible time. Blogging does not affect their student status and life, but may influence their professional development and career (see Lynn's statement below).

> "…when I'm in the university, I will blog, because I think it's easy. But I think once I graduate and go to work, I need to be very careful, because obviously, my employer could access to my blog. I don't know, definitely when I am in the university. I continue to blog because it's fun. If I work, I don't know. I might change." (Lynn)

In another sense, many participants noted that they will carry on blogging and develop its usage. The results were in a sense of improving the usage. This stage therefore is named "Reforming". It implies that the blogger has confirmed the benefits from using blogs, starts to take into account how to better utilise it, and further benefits themselves or the reader in terms of their purposes, such as personal use, community of interest use, reflective use or social use. The following statements of Nancy and Jack provide the evidence of further promoting blog use.

> "… I like to keep people informed. Because I'm so curious to different areas, I can explore using my weblog. …But I think there are potential — that may get massive resources for a lot of things, including education, and I like to have somewhere where I can write basically whatever I like, but there is an opportunity for other people to read it. So I get instant feedback on something rather than just writing it down. It's a nice way — it takes me to write something, but it takes other people to look at it, read it and leave comment, and make them own opinions about it… I've shown my blog to other people… they seem to be quite impressed with the nature of the blog, and that's gone with few limits." (Nancy)

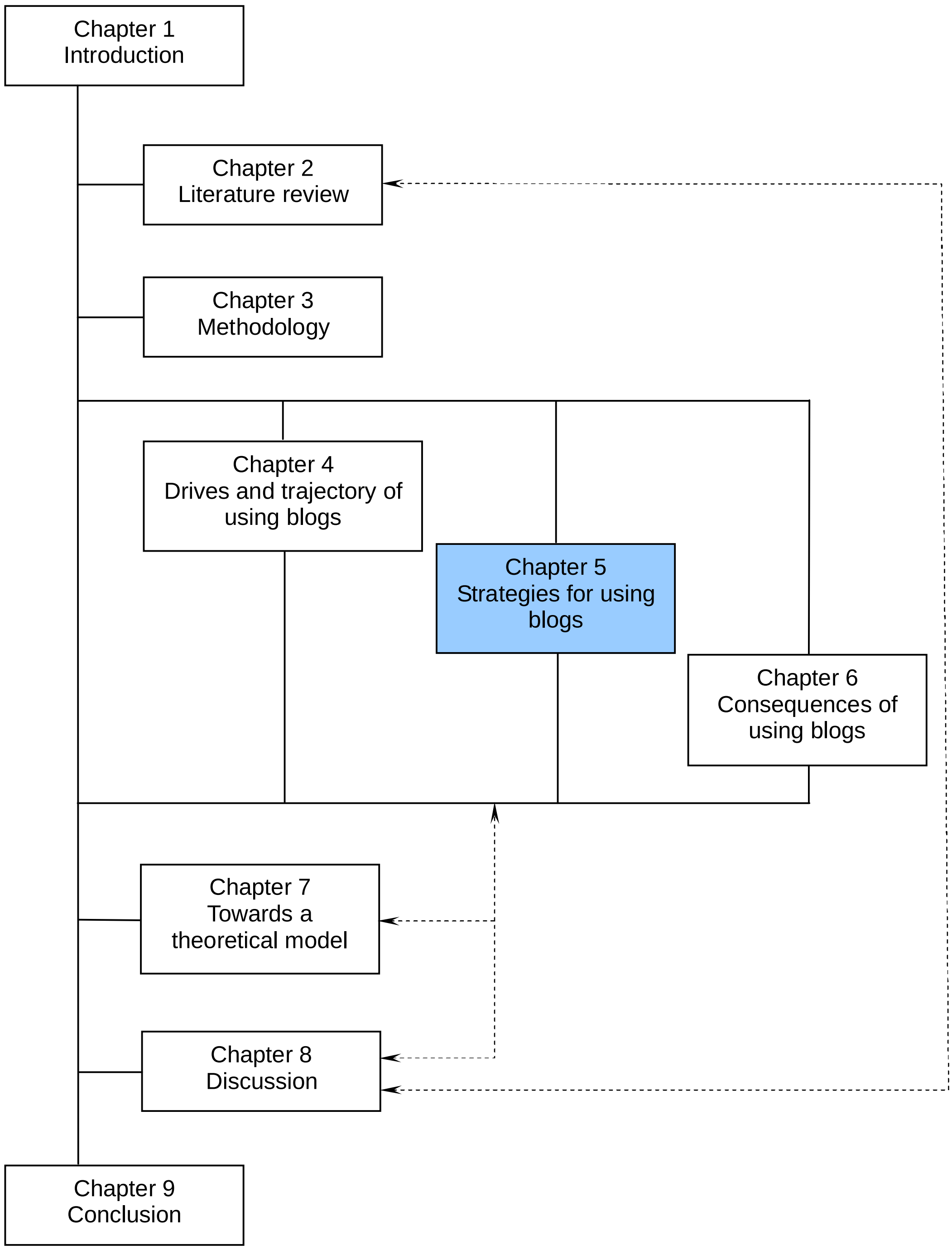
> "I've been wondering how it [the blog] will fit into my life style, because I know the student's life style is very different to working until 5… Well, I will definitely keep on blogging. I don't know what shape or anything that will take, but it's not really something I would want to give up. I think there is a desire like — people I know to — have more people blog, so for example, particularly related to my blog, if you have people who make decision in the university, for example, like Pro-Vice-Chancellor or something, if they had a blog, could kind of writing about what they are doing today, or

> write about why I made the decision, I think that would really help, and there is a space for that, students particularly will be really open to that. I think so. For example, leaders in the churches, I think there is definitely audience in my generation for them to be writing thing on the blog, which will be very well received. So I think that's why I wouldn't stop, because I know that, in myself, I am hungry to see what other people are going to write. So I want to continue to be part of that, I think." (Jack)

The interpretation of the trajectory of using blogs was mainly based on bloggers' blogging and reading blog experience. It did not present many statements from pure blog readers. However, their reading experience also showed a similar process. They started browsing blogs (similar to the Starting stage), found interesting topics and useful information (similar to the Groping stage), expanded and built trust of the blog sources (like the Attempting stage), and read them in a regular basis (like the Norming stage). The findings did not show explicitly that pure blog readers will experience a Reforming stage because few expressions imply that they will promote the use, such as to read it more frequently, or to create a blog for him/herself.

4.8 Summary

This chapter provides an analysis of the HE students' motivations for using blogs. It firstly demonstrates three common attributes of HE students as blog users and highlights four elements of the blog, as a technology, which is distinctive from other social software. In particular, it attempts towards conceptualising users' perception of what drove them to start, maintain, read or abandon blogs. Five extrinsic incentives and three intrinsic incentives emerged in the study provide a valid account of the participant's experience. These incentives act together or singularly, and impact the use of blogs, which is shown on four key contextual dimensions: personal use; community of interest use; social use; and reflective use. It follows a conditional matrix to modelling users' experience of blog usage. The discussion of the conditions in this chapter provides a whole context for further analysing users' strategies for using blogs and consequences of using blogs.


Chapter 1
Introduction
Chapter 2
Literature review
Chapter 3
Methodology
Chapter 4
Drives and trajectory of using blogs
Chapter 5
Strategies for using blogs
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Consequences of using blogs
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Conclusion

CHAPTER 5

STRATEGIES FOR USING BLOGS

> *"The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity." – Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889 - 1951) (1968, para 129)*

5.1 Introduction

In the presence of the contextual conditions and drives described in Chapter 4, three overarching phenomena (needs satisfaction, entertainment and egoism) led to the development of eight primary strategies for using blogs: (1) Relaxation (2) Self-liberating (3) Online identity (4) Memories (5) Blogs as information resources (6) Maintaining and expansion connections (7) Professional development, and (8) Knowledge construction (see Figure 3.15). These strategies were emergent by analysing the participants' descriptions which were internally oriented and individual principles focused. By constant comparison through multi-cycled open coding, axial coding and selective coding procedures, Table 5.1 shows the categories at a conceptual level and an abstract conceptual level. This chapter will interpret these strategies and pertinent phenomena in detail in terms of the conceptual level displayed in Table 5.1. Moreover, the three core categories at the abstract level (Self-therapy, Interpersonal skills and Intellectual abilities) and three categories at the conceptual level (Self-organised learning styles, Interpersonal skills development and Blogger-centred community) emerged as consequences of using blogs will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

To interpret the findings better, the eight strategies are discussed separately from bloggers' and pure blog readers' point of view, and later it is integrated together towards a strategic model of using blogs. Due to "information resources" is a fundamental category that affects these three categories at an abstract level, the researcher will particularly put emphasis on the discussion of it in section 5.4.

Table 5.1 Major categories at a conceptual level and a higher abstract level

<table>
<tr><th>Abstract level</th><th colspan="4">Conceptual level</th></tr>
<tr><th>Categories</th><th>Categories</th><th>Subcategories</th><th>Property</th><th>Dimension (Context)</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Self-therapy</td><td rowspan="2">Relaxation</td><td>Low priority</td><td>Strategy</td><td rowspan="4">Needs satisfaction; Beneficial to mental health</td></tr>
<tr><td>Entertainment</td><td>Means</td></tr>
<tr><td>Self-liberating</td><td></td><td>Strategy</td></tr>
<tr><td>Memories</td><td></td><td>Means</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="6">Interpersonal skills</td><td rowspan="3">Maintaining & expansion of relationships</td><td>Keep in touch with people</td><td>Strategy</td><td>Beneficial to mental health</td></tr>
<tr><td>Communication channels</td><td>Strategy</td><td>Blog use</td></tr>
<tr><td>Think about readers</td><td>Perception</td><td>Learning experience</td></tr>
<tr><td>Online identity</td><td></td><td>Perception</td><td>‘who I am’</td></tr>
<tr><td>Interpersonal skills development</td><td></td><td>Consequence</td><td>Beneficial to the user</td></tr>
<tr><td>Blogger-centred community</td><td></td><td>Consequence</td><td>Blog use</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Intellectual abilities</td><td>Professional development</td><td></td><td>Strategy</td><td>Beneficial to the user</td></tr>
<tr><td>Knowledge construction</td><td></td><td>Perception</td><td>Learning experience</td></tr>
<tr><td>Self-organised learning styles</td><td></td><td>Consequence</td><td>Beneficial to the user</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Information resources</td><td rowspan="2">Information resources</td><td>Information repositories</td><td>Means</td><td rowspan="2">Blog use</td></tr>
<tr><td>Information quality</td><td>Criteria</td></tr>
</table>

5.2 Bloggers’ strategies

Bloggers have more blog use experience than pure blog readers, that is, they have both maintaining and reading blog experience. The discussion in this section focuses on the findings after analysing the blogger’s perspectives, experience and the comparisons with pure blog readers. Eight categories are included: (1) Relaxation (2) Self-liberating (3) Online identity (4) Memories (5) Maintaining and expansion of relationship (6) Professional development (7) Knowledge construction, and (8) Information resources.

5.2.1 Relaxation

The blog participants have their own principles of using blogs. It showed that blogging has a low priority on their everyday to-do list, but rather a routine-oriented and relaxing act, especially reading blogs. Thirty of thirty seven bloggers expressed that they used blogs for entertainment and relaxation and they enjoyed writing and reading blogs. “Relaxation” emerged a category, reflecting by two aspects: “low priority” (i.e., time spending tactics in writing and reading blogs) and “entertainment”. It denoted that using blogs is a way of relaxing the mind.

The data revealed that most blogger participants spent 0.5-1 hour updating their own blogs each time and the frequency of updating depended on their feelings of writing. Two extreme examples were Bob who spent 3-4 hours on writing and reading blogs daily and Todd who spent 4-5 hours on updating and reading blogs daily. Whilst comparing with updating their own blogs, one half of the blogger participants (19 of 37) spent an hour or more each time on reading blogs. Eighteen bloggers said that they read blogs daily; twelve participants said they read blogs when they update their own blogs, or about one to three times weekly; and seven bloggers said that it depends on their free time. To an extent, it did not display that the bloggers spend a lot of time on blogging. They had a personal principle of when to write blogs and how much time will be spent on blogs. For example, Antony, who wanted to use blogs as a personal academic blog mentioned,

> "…I stopped doing that [maintaining a personal diary blog] because it took me longer time… I didn't want to spend time on something which is not related to my study … [I thought] if you spend time on this weblog, and it is about your research, — so I didn't feel guilty… I have some other strategies to spend — possible time — and developing weblog. So I won't spend a lot of time on that. But I definitely keep it in my to-do list. I won't throw them away, probably because I addicted to it… [When] I need to relax, I put music on. I listened music and read some weblogs. But not for a long time, probably I spent, — half an hour every day on reading weblogs… and some days that I am busy, I don't read any weblog, no".

Some participants (e.g., Don, Lauren, and Jack) expressed that they have fairly fixed time to blog, such as at weekends, in break time, or on evening. Debby who was a 2.5 years blogger, said that she wrote blogs "less than half an hour and maybe once in a few days", and read blogs every day "less than an hour". She noted that "I guess evening, like after dinner, when the day is about end, and I can reflect on my day, and if there is anything interesting, I just blog". By investigating the frequency of using blogs, it found that the longer experienced bloggers had regarded writing and reading blogs as a habit. As Judy, a 4-year blogger described that checking blogs is like checking email; "it's just a part of routine really because I suppose kind of reading people's entries on their blogs… It's like email updates on their lives really". Meanwhile, those users, who are relatively less frequently using blogs, for instance, Frank, who used to have a blog to write travel experience, addressed "time" element and explained, "I should have going to write something then, I didn't. I wanted to actually, I just got run out of time and I've got studies now, so I can't do it".

Without doubt, the bloggers wrote and read blogs in their leisure time and largely for relaxation. To them, writing and reading blogs is not a high priority. Using blogs is an act that they enjoy doing and voluntarily spend time on, but not an act that is essential or they have to do, for instance, write an essay, or review the literature. It is worthy of quoting Rock's expression as follows. Although clearly he used two blogs for doing online business, he remained blogging as a low priority.

> "I make my living online. I make full-time income online, but I also study full-time. I only spend maybe half an hour or one hour per day using the Internet, but sometimes more… sometimes three hours, because I enjoy it as well. I enjoy using the Internet, but I only need to spend maybe one hour per day to maintain my websites." (Rock)

In addition, entertainment is another outstanding category that reflects "relaxation". It has been discussed in section 4.6.3 that most participants separated using blogs from study and formal academic use. Jack typifies the idea,

> "I suppose I see my blog more as a kind of outlet from my studies, more than something which is kind of healthy… something which is to get away from my work rather than to, kind of, improve it."

Largely, they write a blog not only for self-expression, but also for amusing readers. As Bess stated, "I don't write about everything in my life; there is a lot of missing out. But it's usually silly, funny things. I like the ideas of making my readers laugh. So I'll write silly stuff usually". Whilst they also read blogs for fun, entertainment and getting away from study because of the personalised, amusing and colloquial writing on blogs. Ellen shared the idea, "…it's interesting. I like their writing, some people will use very funny sentences, and you will feel, you laugh just by reading the blog".

Again, hardly any doubt, it reflects that as a blog writer, blogging is people's voluntary action. In some respects, bloggers voluntarily share their interests and experience in leisure time as well as in amusing styles. At the same time, as a blog reader, the blogger gains mental relaxation from reading blogs.

5.2.2 Self-liberating

Not only regard blogging as an alternative means of relaxation, bloggers also use the blog as a place where they can get their personal voice across, for instance, to recount individual stories and experiences, to express their own sentiments, thoughts and ideas, that is, a space for self-liberation and self-expression. The data showed that a blog provides such a place for the blogger to express moods (e.g. excitement, sadness, annoyance and complaint) without needing to be overly concerned about the social communication elements in real life, such as good manners, appropriate words, interpersonal relationships, offending friends, etc. Furthermore, to some extent, by liberating themselves, blogging helps young people get through a difficult time in their life (e.g., disease, concerns, or family affairs). For example, Kelly and Lisa similarly felt this.

> "When I was younger, I went through quite like — a difficult time, because this friend introduced it to me and said, it's really good way, just like — express your ideas and like — keep checking how your feeling is, you can look back on it. So I just thought I gave it a go, and then after a few weeks I do find it did really help. So that, kind of, changed my mind, I guess." (Kelly)

> "… because I was a little depressed for a while and I went everything by writing a blog. I wrote poems, and have all the secrets read between the lines, kind of meaning. Then I stop writing so much, because I don't need it any more…" (Lisa)

More important, it emerged different strategies between female bloggers and male bloggers at this point. Seven out of thirteen male blogger participants mentioned that they wanted to present their own views, exchange views with people and are likely to adopt a way of "this is my opinion; let us discuss", whereas 16 out of 24 female bloggers leaned towards venting out personal emotions by using a means of "this is my feeling; let it go". By a few typical explanations from interviewees below and previous sections (e.g., May in section 4.6.1 and Cliff in section 4.5.1), it implies that female bloggers are more likely to self-express personal matters, irritating, worry or sadness feelings through blogging. As Lucy noted, she may not be very concern how other people think about them, or need people's opinions; rather, she just wanted to release the feelings.

> "Post your feelings… you talk to yourself on the blog… Sometimes just because I felt angry with someone, you know, it should be a private space where I could post some evil things." (Lucy)

On the contrary, it seems that male bloggers express this kind of emotions much less through an open blog. They are likely to present opinions about social issues or interests, and expect to discuss and exchange ideas widely, for instance, Dick expressed this typically.

> "It seems I use that for social purposes. It's just feeling — I enjoy that really. It's almost liberating. You can write your own little journal without necessarily having to write it, then physically with stuff for people to see as well." (Dick)

Also, like Mike, although he posted things that annoyed him, he always wrote in a sarcastic and interesting style, and he knew that people read it. Neil explained that he had a separate personal diary that traced back to 1998, but did not open to anyone.

> "… it's good to know that people are actually reading. [Otherwise], you are just wasting your time, aren't you? That's why I didn't really get keeping a book diary, which no one reads. I thought if you post it that, if no one is going to read that, why are you writing it? But if you keep it on an online blog, and then anybody can read it." (Mike)

> "Actually I haven't got a book diary, but I keep another Word document as a diary every year. That's more specific and more detailed, but it's only for my personal references. Actually everything on my blog is mostly a copy from that personal diary, but it's more in a personal version... It's for my friends, but because I know it's very simple, I don't expect my friends to leave detailed comments. If that comment is longer than your original blog [entry], I think that's abnormal." (Neil)

Hence, "self-liberating" implies that bloggers apply the blog as a less limited individual place to speak out their thoughts, interests, or topics that obsess them, and further to acquire a satisfactory feeling and an emotional release. In a broad sense, blogging helps the blogger's mental health. Female bloggers may be inclined to use it as an approach to self-expression and emotion releasing; whereas male bloggers may be inclined to use it as a broader communication and view-releasing space.

5.2.3 Online identity

The emergent category “online identity” refers to a perceptive process of identifying “who I am”. It is different from a real identity because it is presented in a virtual world and people do not often check it. It largely depends on the person’s own definition. In this study, the point is displayed by being themselves as well as choosing anonymity or their real name. First of all, there is no doubt that the participants regarded their blogs as a personal space, even though they are concerned that it is open and their words will be censored by the public. The blog thereby to an extent reflects the blogger. Anonymity is a way that a blogger uses to protect him/herself online as well as satisfy his/her needs of expression, particularly, for instance, discussing sensitive topics, secrets, or personal issues. Bob who used a blog to present his viewpoints on social issues, illuminated that he did not use his real name because

> “…some of my topics are sensitive. Because it is a virtual world, you can play as your best performance, you can also play the worst performance. It depends on you… Somebody doesn’t dare to speak in their real life; they dare speak something on the web… So if a weblog is for academic uses, of course, I will use my real name. Why not? ”

Similarly, Rose told us that using pseudonym is a way of protecting herself and reducing effects on her real life, such as her career (see below).

> “It’s advised not to [use a real name]. Because we received an email from the university very recently, say, it’s an extremely bad idea, because perspectives and employers run your name through search engine and if you put your weblog in your own name, then they will read through anything concerning personal information, and if they don’t like what they read, then it can come against you get the job. But also I think … in a way, it’s because anyone can access to the blog and anyone can read that information — so you don’t want people knowing — being able to trace you, or things like that, because you don’t want them to read what you’ve written, because a stranger could read, and you don’t know the person.”

Ellen and Daisy were two typical examples that showed in the same way of separating online self and real self, which also provided a sense of preventing bad effects on themselves. Both of them made friends online and did not let friends in real know their blogs. As Ellen said, “…something I don’t want to tell my friends in real life, I will write on blog, because they don’t know each other and I didn’t use my own name”.

Furthermore, being similar to the above two participants, through blogging, Emily felt that she can be herself and see other people’s secrets and emotions that they do not usually share (see below).

> “Because when you are blogging, you are being another real you. You actually don’t pretend to be someone else. So it’s nice, knowing a real person who is not pretending to be someone else. It’s very interesting, quite entertainment… I can be myself, as I said, most bloggers that I know, they can be themselves online. Because they are faceless

> completely… so you can be your real self, which about blogging, it's fascinating, can be yourself."

Nevertheless, Emily did not hide her name. She believed that whether using a pseudonym or her real name, her blog will not influence her real life because she only opens her blog to a group of people whom she trusts. It was possible for her to select readers because she used a blog functionality to check the IP address of the reader, which showed where the reader was from, and also as she explained as follows, they met randomly, chatted and built a sense of trust first.

> "… most of the people, who I have added, they are people firstly I got to know through blogs, or for example, chatting site … I don't know them face to face, I just know them through the Internet, but they are kinds of friends. They are not real life friends."

In contrast, a couple of bloggers' blogs are personal use orientated, for instance, Scott blogged for recording student life; Lauren blogged for informing family and friends of her life; and Frank was for recording travel. They used their real names because they thought that there was no sensitive topic on their blogs and they used blogs to share personal interests with friends. In their opinions, it is few possibility that what they blog will affect their status or future. The blogs are theirs and reflect the blogger's unique life, experience and preferences.

Moreover, the purpose of blogging is crucial in identifying a blogger's online identity. If a blogger uses his/her blog for e-business (e.g., Rock), for communities of interest (e.g., Don, Vicky and Jack), or for potential academic discussion (e.g., Antony), they put their real name, whereas as talked above, relating to the personal use oriented blogs, some bloggers are inclined to use real name, others are inclined to use a pseudonym. This difference is related to both the relationships between the blogger and readers and the major purpose of the blog. The researcher will discuss the emergent "online identity" category in depth, conjoining with the relationships between bloggers and readers, contents on blogs and credibility, based on the idea of using blogs as information resources in section 5.4.

It must be stressed that "online identity" is not discovered as the blogger's purpose of using blogs, rather a perceiving process of reflecting on who they are and whom they feel comfortable to be. It is a self-regulative strategy for using blogs over the interactions with people, exchanging different viewpoints, or thinking over the influences on people by blogs. Therefore, the researcher did not categorise "online identity" as a consequence of blogging, but a blogger's strategy to maintain blogs for being him/herself as well as not affecting their identity in real life. Similarly to "self-liberating", this category is bloggers related but not pure blog reader linked.

5.2.4 Memories

By "memories", the researcher means that the bloggers use blogs as an online space for recording events, feelings, opinions, or emotions and even for reading back to check certain things that they have written. As stated earlier, blog services provide bloggers a free and large enough online space, and its features, for instance, reverse chronological order, date-stamped entries, blogroll, and searching function, allow bloggers to store and manage information flexibly. Blogs therefore can be used as a documentary of the blogger's life. In the long run, like a computer memory, a blog helps the blogger to store part of their memories. Three examples reflect this point.

> "I can keep documenting my progress in my research." (Antony)

> "I suppose just because it's somewhere that I can put things or otherwise I forget. It's a nice way to store my memories." (Betty)

> "[I read back my blog]… suddenly just think that how can I forget that I have gone through this… so it's a good way of refreshing a memory." (Alice)

There is hardly any doubt that most bloggers adopt blogs as a space to keep topics that they would like to write down and as a memory for later use.

5.2.5 Maintaining and expansion of relationships

As interpreted in Chapter 4, to reduce geographic distance and to talk about certain matters which are difficult to talk with people face-to-face are vital elements that drive HE students to blog. Many participants therefore used blogs as an additional way of communication. In the literal sense of the phrase, the researcher named "maintaining and expansion of relationships" as a category because it has been generated from three subcategories: Keep in touch with people; Communication channels; and Think about readers. Most participants used blogs to keep in touch with fiends and family. It is a strategy for keeping existent relationships. Some participants met new people and made friends through blogs. This reflects a way of expanding relationship. Also, some participants initially created a blog for themselves; but with receiving comments from readers, they were encouraged to write more and started thinking of how to attract readers. In a sense, it implies a potential possibility of broadening relationships.

At first, as discussed earlier, blogs provide a way of keeping in touch with family and friends. Although it is not synchronous or face-to-face, it is cheap, updated, traceable and easy to access. It helps the student who is far from family to reduce feelings of isolation and easily stay in touch. It also helps to reduce the information invisibility and communication postponement which are caused by distance. In addition, it helps to keep a social connection and further to expand the connection. For example, as Jo said,

> "…I show my experience here in the UK. People will respond me and people will know how I have lived here. I think it's good, because now my friend and my relatives are so far in different countries, it is a good medium for us to communicate."

Some bloggers read blogs in order to know what is going on with friends who are not nearby. For example, Dick expressed, "…the initial reason for getting on [blog] was to keep tracking people... It's lot cheaper than ring them". Betty said, "Some of them [her friends] might don't talk at all, but I know what's going on because I read their blogs".

Second, as a technical device, blogs provide an alternative channel of communication by satisfying people's preference in communication, such as shy people, or a fancy either for literal or for multimedia. For instance, Rose expressed that blogging helps her communication in terms of her personality,

> "I quite like that [blogging], because I'm quite shy. I often find it's difficult to talk about myself or how I feel… I found it was a way of really dealing with that [her personality]… If someone is very isolated and didn't talk to people in everyday life, they can use that [blog] as a substitute… to fill up space."

Some users were inclined to use text and words rather than to express face-to-face verbally. For example, both Nancy and Vicky suggested that words on a blog make things clearer than words in conversation, and it was archived, whereas normal conversation is not.

> "I guess the advantage that the blog has over conversation as that when you write something on a blog, it's there, and that's it. In the conversation, people can say things and you get missed or they don't hear or people forget things. But in a blog, it's like sort of — a hard copy. It's there and unless it's the author to change and edit it." (Nancy)

Some participants thought that pictures, music sound and animation may disturb the readers and further affect the content conveying. In this regards, Cliff said,

> "I think people who put some photos on their blogs; the reason is that they don't like writing. They don't think that the words can express their ideas effectively. But for me, the words can express my ideas."

In contrast, there were a few participants (e.g., Emily and Daisy) who supported that talking is much easier than expression by writing. According to Daisy,

> "It's harder because it's so easy to use one sentence to mean two different things. I think if you're saying it, you can put some reflection in your voice, should make your voice sounds happy, or sounds sad. But if you're writing it down, you really got to think, 'Does this mean what I wanted to mean?' Particularly if you're trying to use sarcasm… and if I was to write that down, they might read as 'oh, she is going to think it's very nice', whereas with accent say it, I can say, like that and shake my head as well, and wave my hands, maybe to say 'no'. But if you're writing down, you don't have that extra language."

Whether verbal or textual, all these orientations of using blogs for communication reveal that blogs are able to support different communication styles.

Moreover, the feeling of care, encouragement and exchanging ideas through blog comments are key reasons of maintaining and expanding online connections. Many bloggers believe that there are readers who listen, help and understand them. According to the bloggers' explicit descriptions, those potential readers can be grouped into supporters (e.g., Daisy), listeners (e.g., Judy, Emily), similar-experienced people (e.g., Kelly and Lynn), like-minded people (e.g., Emily), advisors (e.g., Alma), criticisers (e.g., Ellen), and pen pals (e.g., Judy). The feelings of having readers lead bloggers to maintain a blog and to write down thoughts more carefully. As May expressed,

> "I know if my friends tell me that they found, or discover something I've written on my blog, then maybe I will want to do more because I know really someone wants to see it or somebody notices it."

Without doubt, commentary is a crucial element that reflects interactions and communicative connections through blogs. Most bloggers mentioned that people usually give friendly comments either in agreement or critically, but rarely nastily. As discussed in Chapter 4, bloggers may have a strong sense of blogging for self. To them, receiving comments is pleasing, but not essential. Nine female and three male bloggers expressed that comments are not important; whereas nine female and one male blogger clearly expressed that comments are important. But because of blogging for self, they may not accept people's views, continue their old ways of blogging, or sometimes delete comments if they dislike them. For those bloggers who do not have a strong feeling of blogging for self, they largely accepted comments and often responded to the comment. As Barbara said below, they positively confirmed the role of comments. In a sense, comments do not weaken people to blog, but inspire them to keep updating.

> "…it's a little less worrying than being talking almost instantly with someone else you don't know… Often I'll learn things from comments that people make about things I've written, and kind of — makes me realise something about what I've written."

Despite this, because of having readers, bloggers gradually become more discerning about what to publish, what the reader's interests are, how to write interestingly, and further widen their online connections. Jack typified this point. He told us his original idea of using blogs, his awareness of readers and changes to blog for the public,

> "I only started doing little small things, like — funny quotes, for example, on the blog. I think I always had in mind to write about more substantial things, but I knew I can do that until I had some people who're reading my blog. So I don't really want to do that 'well, it's just me', kind of thing."

Then he had more awareness of readers,

> "…so I started to kind of — think about what I wanted it to do, so now I suppose, it's partly a personal updating kind of thing, it's not really personal, so it's more kind of things I would be happy for anyone. I am very aware that it is public, so I wouldn't be putting things too personal on there".

Now, he started to retain his readerships,

> "… when I write something, I am a lot aware of what other people are thinking, and a lot aware of the fact that what they think is valid as well as me, and that probably helps me to be more understanding other people by comments on the blog… so in terms of getting readers and also in terms of just enjoying interaction with people, it is probably more likely to happen if you have different blogs on different themes. That's the only thing I can think of in terms of information, like the way I would blog".

Moreover, Dick's explanation further supported the idea,

> "In fact, probably make you think a bit more about what you put down. To be honest, I don't — sometimes I think I want to write that, and then I think if I write that, then actually will be offended or I might be offended or someone might be offended. So I won't say it's easy to express your thoughts because you have to think about it more. Because you can if you post it yourself, you can delete it, but again, there's always a chance somebody sees it. On that point, you are always thinking".

Furthermore, there is a sense that blogging may help the blogger expand online connections but reduce the social connections which surround them. Some participants pointed out that blogs make it possible to meet more like-minded or common-interest people. They made more friends. As Todd demonstrated,

> "…I met quite a few people who are bloggers in person as well. Like — if we introduce to each other through blogging… I don't think I'm making friends with so many people like — who I have never met before".

Yet, Kent argued that social connections have lessened between digital generations in reality,

> "…it's [blogging] very relaxed. But I suppose the point is that it's not the real world, it's so comfortable that the comfort controls you, to an extent, I think, and you can almost escape into it… In the world where already we don't communicate with each other, and we don't talk each other and we don't have social clubs, we already spend too much time alone, and I think blog is almost another way for spending even more time alone. Because you don't have to talk to people, you can just write it".

From a long term view, there is no evidence to say that online connections will replace social connections. It implies that social connections are transferring from connections in real life to online/virtual connections, spreading on the Internet, and also expanding from online/virtual back to real connections again. This trend has been indicated by Jack,

> "… if you never met each other before, I think it's really a good way of bringing together, people who have interests in a similar field or have a similar job, or have some comments who wouldn't necessarily be put together in real life… I suppose it helps globalisation… I can communicate with somebody in America or Canada, who I wouldn't even know, who is existent from someone's weblog… you then feel kind of, a sense, kind of an affinity with them, something in common with them, which I wouldn't do if I was just talking to people in England… You need sometimes go back into the real

> world, and realise the blogosphere was sort of not that real, it's escape, to some extent, it's escape into a happy place where you can debate things that you want to debate, but you're still in reality".

To conclude, the participants largely used blogs to maintain their social relationship as well as build potential new relationships. This is a key strategy for developing their interpersonal relationships, which will be indicated in depth in Chapter 6.

5.2.6 Professional development

"Professional development" refers to the participants used blogs to develop their professional abilities, such as IT skills, writing, organising, collaborating and judgement skills. It is an approach that the bloggers applied to improve their own capabilities.

Firstly, clearly, IT skills are the most important one. To improve IT skills is not an initial aim of using blogs, but a means that users gradually realise that they can use blogs for improving their skills. In particular, blogging helps HE students who are not in IT-oriented subjects (e.g., English literature, Law, or Politics) gain more practical experience of applying computers and the Internet. For example, Jo, Kelly, Scott, and Mike similarly expressed that their typing speed increased a lot and they learned techniques of the Internet, such as programming and HTML. A typical example, William, a doctoral student in Automatic Control and System Engineering, explained that his subject is not computing but he wanted to use blog to improve his IT professional skills (see his expression below).

> "Because I am interested in IT, and I'm interested in webpage things, and that's why I tried to learn to create the blog. I mean the blog system, and still I need to put some contents into it… It actually is to practise my IT techniques through the blog… especially I built a blog system, so I suppose I learn some techniques of programming, scripts … I've used my blog to find out more, because I can extend my system for many, many features, whatever I want to, I add into it, because there are huge resources on the Internet that I can add into my blog. That's the way. I've learned a lot… It's a great thing for me to practise both my IT techniques and my English."

Secondly, a group of participants mentioned that they used blogs to practise their writing. Some detailed examples have been provided in section 4.5.3. With different blog use orientations, some of them were in Arts or Social Science subjects and expected to be good at writing, such as becoming a good writer or journalist (e.g., Rose, Dora, Todd); some of them were from Pure Science or Engineering subjects and expected to improve writing skills (e.g., Elsa, Don, Daisy, Jack); and some of them were international students and expected to improve English writing and the ability of using language (e.g., Cliff, Lisa). Here, Don offered a representative description:

> "I also learn how to cut news, how to prepare. I mean, after two years writing, — I've been also writing for a local newspaper in Italy before. I've been working on a radio as a speaker, — so I mean, I like to share information. When I was a child, I dreamed to be a

> journalist. Now actually I'm a journalist without being. This is a kind of activity that actually fully fills in my expectations."

Thirdly, information judgement skills, such as awareness about copyright, service reliability and a balance between privacy and public, are relevant to credibility of information on blogs. These skills are HE students used and improved in blogging. In section 5.4, the researcher will discuss it more according to different relationships between bloggers and readers, and the use orientation of blogs. Here, Sally provided an example which implies that as a blog reader, they realised the importance of information judgement skills.

> "We're often warned to be very careful about Internet resources, because — you've got to make sure you are in a credible website. If you're going to take information, it's got to be an academic website, and even if it's a person from an university posting a blog, you got to be very careful — but it's not just their opinions, as a post being presented as information. So we've got to be very aware about what we read on the Internet, as it is, we've never really been advised to use blogs in our studies."

Fourthly, there is little argument that content management technique is one of the professional skills; however, few participants directly stated it. Only Todd explicitly highlighted that he learned content management skills by blogging.

> "You can learn a lot about content management, because unless your post is properly written, proper structure, no one will read it. It can be one writes whole bad 5,000 words. It will not be like that. If you have a good structure, then you can focus on the content, then you can focus on the style, so it's a structure of writing, it's very useful."

Furthermore, organising capability and collaboration are more learning community required skills. Dora's statement in section 4.6.3 has given an example of how she used blogs to organise events.

In addition, there are a few participants (e.g., Annie, Judy, Nancy, Flora) indicated that they found out some useful blog sources which they kept reading for gaining broad views of their disciplines. These sources are alike other online sources, but more interesting, relevant and updated. For example, Flora explained that,

> "I saw someone's blog; the opinion is very useful for me, for my dissertation, but only a part of it is useful, another part maybe just the author's own opinions. But I saw that; it gave me some ideas of how I should write my dissertation. I think this is useful."

The view that both writing a blog and reading blogs helped the participants develop their professional capabilities has been shown through the analysis above. At the same time, it reflects how participants use blogs to benefit themselves, such as professional writing, IT skills, or broaden views in their subject areas and so on.

5.2.7 Knowledge construction

"Knowledge construction" means a perceptible process of learning that was identified by the participants. It emerged as a strategy category because it suggests that it is possible to facilitate personal learning through certain ways by using blogs: (1) broaden perspectives, (2) self-censorship, and (3) arouse creativity and imagination. At first, most participants expressed that they used blogs to broaden views, which may or may not directly relate to their professional knowledge, but help increase their own knowledge of the world. Nancy suggested that blogs provide wide information sources and reading blogs widely will help students acquire knowledge and judge the online information. Her statement can be seen in section 5.2.8.

This experience of gaining wide views does not only refer to having more information sources that a person is able to view, but also reflects that the reader needs to use them, compare with his/her own views and to become part of their own knowledge. Likewise, Judy mentioned,

> "I mean it offers kind of information on experience really. Because I know I have some people who read my blog because they are interested in the experience of a postgraduate student or the experience of somebody who is doing librarian studies … I mean it's an interesting way to transmit information very quickly, updating way, like, current awareness, sort of situation."

To a certain extent, expectations of looking for peers, being involved, having interactions, or knowing other people's opinions about certain issues are all related to humanities. Some of the participants clearly stressed that self-censorship is important with blogging, because they learn about themselves and their friends, clarify their thoughts, and share experiences. From Emily's expression below, it can be seen that the realisation or perception of self changing is a primary element in constructing their own knowledge.

> "I can see my development through blogging, because I used to be very much, — say, last year, and I'm different, so — I keep on changing, so does my writing, and I keep on tracking how I'm changing, and what I used to be before, and what I'm today."

Next, arousing creativity and imagination were found to support knowledge construction as well. Representatively, Lisa, who had a short blogging experience and now reads blogs regularly, mentioned that by reading blogs, she improved imagination.

> "…the blogs that I choose to read, they actually pay attention to English. So I am not worrying that my language will be destroyed, and they actually help me with my imagination. So some people can be really magic, and their lives happen to be so interesting everyday. It kind of motivates me to keep smiling, be happy, stuff like that."

Lynn addressed that blogging promotes bloggers' creativity.

> "I mean if I didn't create any background and being creative on MySpace for 2 hours a week, whatever, what else I've been doing, I really do a lot of sports and things like that.

> It's [blogging] just something creative to occupy your time. I think that's quite good, keep you doing things. If keep things just like watching TV, it's just not that productive."

Speaking about "creativity", according to the analysis about questions "what have you learn from using blogs?" and "do you compare your own blogs with other people's blogs?", the researcher generated a graph (Figure 5.1) to present the knowledge constructive procedure of a blogger through creativity. It presents that a blogger individualised the blog by his/her preference, such as the layout, the colour, and the font. They decided what they would like to publish on their blogs. Sometimes they present their own ideas; sometimes, they reproduced the information that they found on the web and posted on their blogs; and sometimes they presented personalised design and writing which they felt was different to others'. They may find more interesting ideas from other blogs, which may lead them to have new ideas. They started to have similar, different, or new ideas which can be used to improve their blogs.

In Figure 5.1, there are two loops. It shows that the blogger who always follows their own design or writing is unlikely to use the ideas that they saw from other blogs, that is, fewer borrowed ideas; whereas those who are likely to be inspired by other people's ideas are improving information presentation by adding their personal ideas, that is, borrow and convert ideas. Yet, this presentation is not a thorough model of creativity but an attempt to show how bloggers used blogs to help creativity and further constructing knowledge. The researcher did not explore the relationship between creativity and knowledge construction in-depth because it is out of the key task of this study.

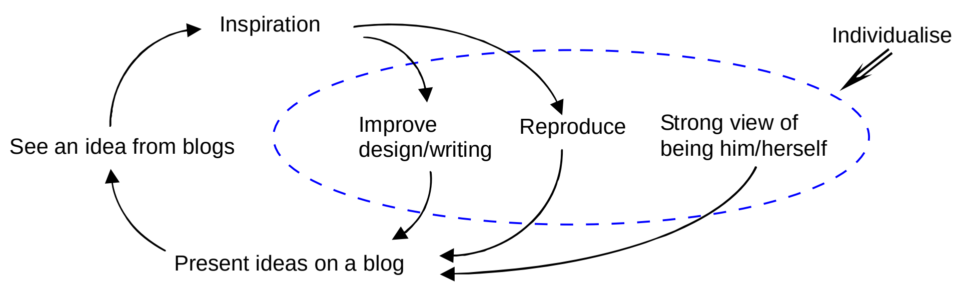


Figure 5.1 An explicit process of creativity in blog use

In a nutshell, "knowledge construction" appears to be a category that supports personal learning in blogging. It is a complex one because it involves the participant's preferences, blog use orientation, relaxation, feelings of satisfaction, self-expression, and reflection on him/herself. The category is not independent. It has intertwined relationships with other categories, which will be discussed further in section 5.5.

5.2.8 Information resources

Almost every blogger mentioned that the blog is an information resource. For those participants who blogged for self, especially whose who only opened up the blog to friends, they may use their own blogs as an information repository, where recording their life matters and some sources that they put there. As Antony elaborated,

> "…it was a big chunk of information on my blog, and all about my research, and the interesting thing is sometimes when I wanted to find a reference about my research, I went to my weblog and searched for it, because I knew I already retained something there. So I search my weblog, I use my weblog as a sort of information for myself, you know. So it was useful for me before anyone else".

Yet, to a large extent, this statement was manifested according to their reading experience. A typical description is as follows:

> "I think it's a real possibility [to use blogs], as a bigger resource for learning. But again, you get the same kind of problems, people using different sources, so you get different interpretations of the truth. I think if you look at a lot of blogs, you get more information, so you are more informed on a wider scale about a particular issue, or a particular subject or maybe how someone's feeling. I think a single weblog by yourself learning might not be the best resource. But if you take one, maybe compare with another, or use alongside as another, I think then they become very useful and a good learning resource. I think people would be careful to find one, sort of — tailors their needs…" (Nancy)

It has showed that blogs are widely used by bloggers as a channel of gaining information. Nevertheless, the quality of the sources is an arguable issue. It relates to other elements, such as how they judge the information and to what extent they use the information, which will be further analysed in section 5.4.

5.3 Pure blog readers' strategies

Pure blog readers have reading blog experience but not writing blog experience. As noted previously, the researcher chose them as informants to investigate how they use blogs, what their experiences of reading blogs are, and further to help analyse the nature of the blog phenomenon. This section will base on the data from this group. Five categories are included: (1) Relaxation (2) Maintaining relationship (3) Professional development (4) Knowledge construction, and (5) Information resources.

5.3.1 Relaxation

Similar to bloggers, the pure blog readers also have their own principles of using blogs. Without distinctions, the data showed that reading blogs is in a low priority on their everyday to-do list. Seven out of eleven pure blog readers mentioned that they enjoyed reading blogs because they felt relaxation and the blogs make them laugh. "Relaxation" is also a category emerged in pure blog readers.

In the sense of "low priority", five participants mentioned that they spent less than 0.5 hour on reading blogs every day and six participants said that they read one or two times a week. To an extent, it displayed that the participants did not spend a lot of time on reading blogs. In the sense of "entertainment", most participants regarded reading blogs as a way for fun, entertainment and getting away from study. For example, Lisa and Kent portrayed:

> "…it's far off from my subject. Nothing to help [my subject], just it helps relax my mind. You see something funny, you see something interesting. It's like, watching TV." (Lisa)

> "…it's ludicrous and it's pointless, but it's also amusing, first of all, that's mental amusing. It's also amusing people who have created this website to do this. It's nice to see, it's always interesting to find diverse ways to interest people." (Kent)

Hardly any doubt, for a pure blog reader, reading blogs is an alternative way that helps them to relax. It is a mental relaxation.

5.3.2 Maintaining relationships

Eight pure blog readers noted that they read friends' blogs to know what is going on with their life; whereas six participants keep reading certain blogs where they do not know the author. Only three participants said that they leave comments on the blog whether they know the blogger or not; whereas eight participants expressed that they do not leave comments on strangers' blogs, and four participants even mentioned they will not leave comments on friends' blogs. It implies that the pure blog readers who mainly read friends' blogs (e.g., Annie and Carol) are using blogs as a supplementary way of knowing about friends. They may not often use the blog to communicate with their friends, but keep reading and being informed. If they felt it is necessary, they often left affirmative comments. As Susan noted,

> "Sometimes when people mainly express their views on certain things, I just don't want to challenge them… because… that is your blog, you can do whatever you want on the blog, I have no right to challenge your ideas or something like that. It's mainly a place to express your personal views, and it really doesn't bother me if that's what you think, but I just read it. But for friends' blogs, you know, I let them know, like 'oh, I've been here, I saw your pictures'...".

Similarly, Annie noted that she often left positive comments on the blog she read.

> "…I used to write something like, 'oh, it's nice', 'it's brilliant', to praise and appreciate them… or give them some hope and energy…"

In the sense of "communication channel", it is not as clear as the usage by bloggers, but it is clear that they are "maintaining" the old relationship. Because of the low possibility of interacting by commentary, it is also not enough evidence to prove that the pure blog readers have expanded new relationships through reading blogs. Hence, it can be seen that the subcategories: Communication channels and Think about readers, which are crucial in expansion of relationships, are not emergent from the pure blog readers group.

In addition, in section 5.2.2, the findings have shown that female bloggers and male bloggers may have different strategic orientations in using blogs for “self-liberating”. Here, by analysing reading blog experience, it also emerged distinctions between female and male pure blog readers. Although there were only 11 participants in this group, six of seven female readers said that they read friends’ blogs, which posted their life matters and information related to their interests; whereas only one male reader (Ben) read these kind of blogs, and two participants (Kent and Harry) directly noted that they do not read personal-diary-style blogs. Again, this seems reflect that male blog users are likely to use blogs for specific interests (e.g., bands, games, photos) or topics (e.g., politics, online marketing, philosophy) discussion; whereas female blog users are likely to accept personal matters on blogs and read them. Therefore, it also implies that female pure blog reader may use reading blogs as a strategy for maintaining an old relationship, but male pure blog readers may use other means to keep relationships. It is worthy of seeing Harry’s idea as follows.

> “If I want to communicate with them, I send them emails, and again I will telephone them infrequently. But I actually go and physically visit them, that’s the time which I share my personal information, and I like to commit these things to a conversation rather than to electronic media. So it’s just a few years ago, I did try to keep people informed of what was happening in my life by sending long emails or so on and so forth. When you actually fairly come and visit these people and meet up with them, you have nothing to say, because they knew everything that happened. So I’d like to keep a few events back and being able to talk about them later on, and see some reactions.”

5.3.3 Professional development

Improving “information judgement skills” and improving “business awareness” are two strategies that the pure blog readers applied to develop their professional capabilities. Two participants Annie and Jenney mentioned that they found out one or two useful blogs related to their study areas and they kept reading them to broaden views, and further to enhance their professional background. More analysis about information judgement skills will be displayed in section 5.4. Here the researcher gives an explicit example.

Harry, a first year undergraduate in English Literature, read two gaming blogs regularly. He aimed for entertainment and kept his interests. Moreover, he positively expressed that the information from the blogs helped him to know the whole gaming industry and might potentially help his career in future (see his following explanation). During the reading process, he improved his information judgement ability and built a trust of the blogs that he read.

> "I only want to be entertained. I really wasn't — about the interesting information being presented as well, but this person does take interesting views of the politics, mechanics behind the gaming industry other than just the games being produced. You do find out there are certain tensions between companies and there are wide considerations in the corporate world as well. The games don't just occur naturally, there are people behind who seem work on them; their involvement sometimes is very great. …I think it is [helpful for my career]. Because you learn that there is more at stake than just the world you see around you. I mean it's very difficult sometimes to judge politics and ambitious, and the difficulties that large companies have with something, I mean at the moment, it's only releasing. It's play station; three are here in England. And you learn about the setbacks. As the things have delayed, you see the public opinions forming around; you learn something of the technical difficulty as well. And even though Sony is a massive corporation dealing with the advance elements of hardware, the setbacks and the trails faced by the company can be applied to other aspects of life. You can see when you are in difficulty, how you would have to react, or you can see how sometimes large company is using marketing to overcome flows or challenges in their hardware. You become more aware of the way that the world around you works." (Harry)

This denoted that it is possible to help students to form potential business awareness by reading blogs widely and the method is profitable for their professional development in a specific area. Compared with bloggers, pure blog readers have less blog use experience and they showed fewer benefits from using blogs, such as IT skills and writing skills. Nevertheless, reading blogs to some degree helped them to develop certain professional capabilities, such as having business awareness of an interest-relevant area.

5.3.4 Knowledge construction

As a perceptible process of learning, the data from pure blog readers also provided a sense of "knowledge construction". Similarly to bloggers, it suggested that from reading blogs it is possible to facilitate personal learning through: (1) broaden perspectives (2) self-censorship, and (3) arouse imagination.

Firstly, most participants agreed that they realised more perspectives by reading blogs. As Hugh described, "there are certain discussions and issues that I've been made aware of, I wouldn't be otherwise". However, they also expressed that the blog is not a unique way that they used to broaden views. For example, Ben explained,

> "Yeah, I read them… it's just a way, for me, getting a little bit of information. So whether it was on the normal website, or whether was a blog. I don't too bother, the blog itself, no … it's a quite limited tool for going on the Internet. It's not something that I used a lot."

Secondly, Tina's reflection on her short experience of reading a class blog typified the self-censorship approach to helping her own study.

> "I feel I've learned there is another way to talk into information, another quicker way, and I can keep up to date with what's going on, and what are other students doing, and

> compare my work with theirs, and help me, maybe build my confidence, believe in myself that what I've done is — maybe I'm on the right track or I'm on the same sort of level what we suppose to be doing. Just to reinforce what I probably thought I'm supposed to be doing, and what others are doing."

Thirdly, Lisa who read two blogs regularly pointed out that reading blogs improve her imagination. Her description has been presented in section 5.2.7.

"Knowledge construction" as a category did not emerge as clearly as in the blogger group. Yet, from a sense of personal learning, the three aspects indicated above manifested the participants reading blogs as a strategy to gain broad perspectives, become more open, and reflect on what they acquired, further they may develop professional knowledge or increase their knowledge in a wider sense.

5.3.5 Information resources

Almost every pure blog reader agreed that blogs provide information. In some respects, reading blogs to pure blog readers is akin to reading newspaper to people, pointed out by Kent. More clearly, Harry explained that he read blogs to update his interests because blogs provide a convenient way of gaining information.

> "It's a free source of information and regularly available. I don't have to go out and buy newspaper daily and then have to dispose them, whatever. It's always updated and current… It's interesting enough… It's kind of sharing all the information with people, you get a broad overview… if all the information you've collected yourself, you would have to spend all the time personally. Playing through these video games and reading through all the multifarious sources, so having it all condensed for you, it's very useful." (Harry)

Again, using blogs as information resources also cause some issues which are closely relevant to other categories. These issues will be discussed in the next section.

5.4 Issues of using blogs as information resources

It is apparent that on one hand, blogs can be used as an information memory by the blogger; on the other hand, according to the content on it, the blog may be regarded as an information repository by blog users.

Nevertheless, using blogs as information resources is not as simple as the participants' verbal interpretation. Because the information on blogs is personal moods, opinions, interests and experience oriented, specifically it emerged questions about the quality of the information, that is, "Since they regard blogs as information resources, is the information on blogs useful from the participant's viewpoint?", "To what extent they trust the information?", "What are effects in using blogs as information sources?". By exploring the way of adopting blogs as information resources and based on these questions, the current findings revealed that three facets are highly relevant. Figure 5.2 illustrates the three main elements: the relationships between bloggers and blog readers; concerns for privacy disclosure; and judgement of credibility.

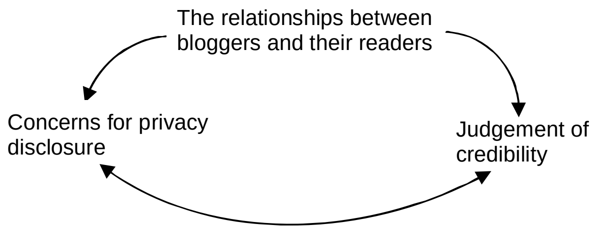


Figure 5.2 A diagram of emergent categories in using blogs as information resources

It shows that the relationships between bloggers and their readers affect the judgement of credibility of the information resources as well as the concerns for privacy disclosure; the judgement of credibility and the concerns for privacy disclosure affect each other. Each element and a generated framework of this point will be explained afterwards.

5.4.1 Relationships between bloggers and readers

The findings suggested that the blog reader has their own standards for judging information. In these standards, the relationship between bloggers and the readers is the most important one. From a pure blog reader's view, the relationship between him/her and the blogger includes: friends, family and strangers; whereas from a blogger's view, the relationship between bloggers and readers covers: him/herself, friends, family and strangers. Hence, Figure 5.3 attempts to display the relationship between two people: a blogger and a reader. Figure 5.4 attempts to synthesise the emergent relationships between bloggers and readers from a blogger's view, including a blogger is a reader of his/her own blog.

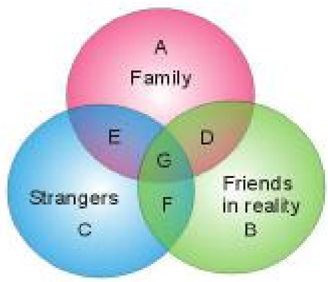


Figure 5.3 The relationships between readers and bloggers

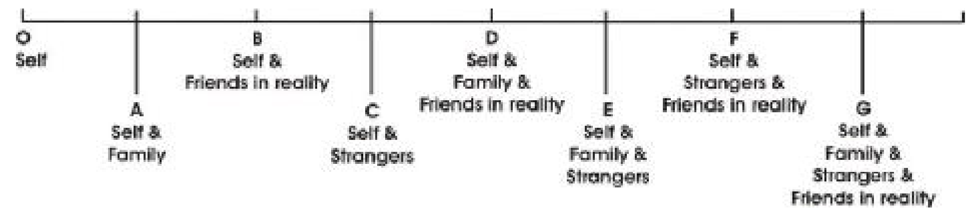


Figure 5.4 The relationships between bloggers and their readers from a blogger's view

Case O "Self" refers to the blogger reading his/her own blogs, that is, they are their own blogs' reader. The data displayed that every blogger participant reads back his/her blog, for instance, checks grammar before post an entry, but with different frequency and aims. Mostly bloggers read back occasionally for checking an event they wrote; and two participants (Antony and Kelly) particularly mentioned that they read back often because they put some useful information or resource links on their blogs. There was no participant that said they only open the blog to him/herself, but six participants emphasised that they are able to set up an entry as private by using blog functions if they do not want anyone to read it. Therefore, it showed that "self" is always a reader of the blog. In the following discussion, the researcher will not repeatedly mention it.

Case A Refers to a blogger who only opens his/her blog to family members. That is, the reader and the blogger have a "family" relationship. In a way, the participant used the blog to reduce geographic distance and keep in touch with family members. There was only one participant, Bob, explicitly mentioned that he had two blogs: one is for his family specifically and the other is for himself without informing his family, and is open to people on the Internet widely.

Case B "Friend in reality" refers to a blogger who only opens his/her blog to friends whom they know in person. In this situation, they mainly use it for keeping in touch with old friends and peer communication. There were two participants Jo and Lucy clearly in this case.

Case C "Strangers" refers to the blogger who opens his/her blog to the public, and does not know who read his/her blog. This relationship occurs online randomly because bloggers and readers cannot directly identify each other unless the blogger clearly presents their real identity. In this relationship, a blogger only opens the blog to people whom they do not know in person and the blogger is likely to use a pseudonym. They mainly use blogs for talking about certain sensitive topics, or they do not want to mix up their real life with a virtual life. In this case, the typical participants were Bob, Ellen and Emily.

Case D Means the blogger only opens his/her blog to people who they know in person, such as family members and friends (e.g., May). They think the blog is for themselves as well as keeping in touch with their friends and family; they do not aim for meeting people and sharing personal matters with people whom they do not know.

Case E This refers to a blogger who only opens his/her blog to family and strangers. Thus far, there is no evidence of this relationship found in the data.

Case F Half of the bloggers belong to this type of relationship. The blogger opens his/her blog widely to friends who they know in person as well as people whom they do not know but may have similar interests or are like-minded. They do not call them strangers but in a sense, online friends.

Case G This type of blogger shares the blog with everyone online. They have wider use of blogs and are more inclined to use blogs for "expansion of relationships" and "community of interest". There were 15 participants belonging to this group.

In addition, according to different blog use orientations, a blog can be opened to everyone on the Internet, to a specific group of people, or only to the blogger him/herself. Hence, in general, this reflects who the audiences of the blog are.

Firstly, a blogger is definitely a blog reader, because at least they read their own blogs for an original publishing purpose (Figure 5.4, Case O). Bloggers read back their own blogs because they use blogs as memories or information repositories. Antony's explicit expression can be seen in section 4.6.1. Likewise, Kelly said she often searched her blog,

> "I do find — like — if go back [to read the blog], I can look at my ideas... I always look my past ideas or my past stuff. I'm egotistical."

Secondly, some bloggers prefer to share personal stuff with people whom they know rather than everyone (see Figure 5.3, 5.4, Case A, B and D). This kind of bloggers is inclined to use blogs for keeping in touch with friends and family, that is, maintaining social relationships. As Elsa stated:

> "I just read what my friends are doing only… I don't like really make information public to people who are strangers, I prefer to keep things about myself just between me and my friends."

Thirdly, some bloggers use the blog to meet like-minded people or people who have similar interests (see Figure 5.3, 5.4, Case C, F and G). This kind of blogger is inclined to use the blog as a self-development tool, build and broaden new relationships. For instance, "…my blog provided me with some opportunities to find new people…" said by Antony. Also, there is another example from Kelly as follows:

> "Because I think if they are doing [blogging] for the similar reason to me and I don't know who they are and then I know the comments and stuff. I enjoy reading people's comments on mine, so I tried reading them; I leave them on there, give them some of my thoughts, and argue with them. That's fun."

So far, the researcher has explained the different relationships between a blogger and their readers, largely based on the blogger's viewpoints. In terms of the relationships, the blogger has different levels of privacy concern and discloses different degrees of private information on their blogs.

5.4.2 Privacy concerns

"Privacy concerns" is an emergent category related to the blogger particularly. The data showed that all blogger participants preferred to know who their audiences are and most of them were concerned with what should be posted on their blogs either not to offend others or protect their own privacy. This point especially drew the researcher's attention due to Judy's comments:

> "…it's that sort of levels of interaction. I actually posted it on my entry about this sort of situation where the more private information is, the more anonymous you prefer people to be reading to be. Because as I said, I have people who know me in real life, who read my blog, but if I have a very private entry, I make sure that they cannot read it, but completely anonymous strangers I don't mind that they read it".

This instance implied that the content of an entry may be affected by the relationship between bloggers and their readers. It happens that there is a similar case, Emily provided an explicit example that people blog anonymously and open only to strangers according to Judy's view. Emily's statements can be seen in section 5.2.3. She mentioned that she could be herself because she could speak out and express something that she would not in reality or to people in her real relationship, for instance, friends, parents, etc. She intended to separate her real life from online world. She said that she would not worry that she exposed her privacy because her readers do not know her in person and they would not meet or know her in reality.

Further looked into these instances, it also showed bloggers tried to keep a balance between their own privacy needs and their readers' needs. For example, Daisy provided her strategy,

> "Some entries I will say that only people who are on my friends list can read it, other entries only I can read it, but most entries anybody can read. So I choose if there is something I want to write about that's too personal, and I don't want anybody to read, or I don't want random people to read, then I will make it either private for me or for friends only. But most entries I make them public".

Importantly, the data presented that there were different concepts of privacy to different people. For some participants, certain information (e.g., issues about the relationship between friends) should not been written down and allow the public read (e.g., Cliff's opinion, see below), but for other bloggers, it is not a big deal, such as Lauren gave an example of her friend's blog (see below).

> "I don't like to put some real private feelings on it. For example, I don't want to mention any words about my girlfriend and me." (Cliff)

> "…she had a blog and she got split up with her boyfriend. She wrote a lot of that on her blog; she wrote awful a lot about it, and it was quite a lot of personal things, and I could read it, and a lot of my friends could read it…" (Lauren)

Therefore, the researcher induced "personal information" as a person's information (e.g., real name, address, student status, nationality, which are part of identity) which is revealed and is acceptable to open to the public in a common sense; and "private information" as an individual's information that should not be exposed to the public in a broad sense (e.g., secret, personal health information based on sensitivity or confidentiality, personal view of certain sensitive topics that they would not usually present). This classification was based on analysing the participants' definitions of what social acceptable information on the blog is.

In addition, it emerged that bloggers have their own strategies for protecting privacy in terms of the relationships with readers as well as their perception levels of private and personal information. It is no exceptionally different from the privacy concerns in reality, but because of the possibility of anonymity and blocking readers, blogs provide a more flexible choice for privacy management. However, at the same time, it does not decrease but increase the HE students' privacy concerns during the time of reading different blogs (see two representative quotations below).

> "There are stories, like — on the news about people who use the Internet to interact with people or a paedophile used the Internet to trace children. So in a way, it's — like a bank account number, — you wouldn't want to put personal information online. But if you write about your life, in a way, even though it's very personal, it's not something that makes you traceable or the person can track you down. I mean if you don't write your name, address, or telephone number…" (Rose)

> "I think if you want to put very personal things on there, you do need to think about what you are doing rather than just let everyone read it, as it can cause a lot of trouble, I found." (Lauren)

As a consequence, it generated six distinct strategies that the bloggers used to manage their privacy disclosures:

(1) No private information (The blogger clearly said that they would not put any private information on the blog). For instance, four participants explicitly addressed that they have a private diary which will not open to anyone, and it is separate from their blogs.

(2) Little private information (The blogger is less likely to put private information on the blog, but it exists a possibility for them to write private information in terms of who are their readers and what they write for);

(3) Some private information (The blogger mentioned that sometimes they put something which is related to his/her privacy on the blog because of releasing emotions or they know that it is difficult for the reader to identify them);

(4) Little personal information (The blogger said that it is very low possibility for them to put personal information on the blog, but it is still a chance of exposing information, such as gender, location, or age and so on);

(5) Some personal information (There is certain information which reflects the blogger's identity on the blog);

(6) Personal information (The participant clearly expressed that they put information such as name, gender, university, subject, location on the blog).

5.4.3 Credibility judgement

When the participants (both bloggers and pure blog readers) mentioned that they read blogs for acquiring information, it can be seen that to an extent, they relied upon the information. Hence, what are the HE students' criteria for judging the credibility of the information? The findings first suggested that it is not a matter of credibility because the information is likely to be subjective opinion and it is different from judging true or false of a fact. Nine participants clearly claimed that in general, it is difficult to say blogs are credible or not because they are reflections of individual views, and they even did not think of this question. Eight participants said that they mostly trusted the blog because it is people's real feeing; seven participants expressed that they do not believe the blog generally because it could be anyone says anything; whereas sixteen participants stressed that it depends on the author and the author's standpoint. They would not believe the blogs in general. A few examples are as follows.

> "A lot of — it is opinion. So you always have to try. If you know the person, you know where they stand on the issue, so you can understand what they've written and know they come from some perspectives, but when you don't know someone's opinions, it's a bit more difficult. So there is an issue about credibility certainly. You cannot have to judge each weblog, how much you're going to believe." (Betty)

> "…because I thought the blog that I've read doesn't have information with true or false. It would have arguments for againsting the death penalty. That's not true or false. It's just an argument… It's not like — that can be credible or not." (Hugh)

With further analysis, it suggested that most bloggers believed that they have readers and by the comments, they have a sense of who are potential readers. It follows that through continuing to read the blog, readers become to know the blogger more and understand their thoughts, especially, if they are friends. From the following examples, it appears that as time goes on, the relationships between bloggers and readers are gradually developed and the relationships then helps to form the basis of online trust.

> "I mostly trust it [the blog that she reads], because I've been read them for so long. You sort of get to know them just through their blogs, so you feel like — you understand them. So it just seems a strange idea that people would really want to blog stuff that is not credible unless it's very opinionated, in which case you can kind of tell." (Betty)

> "I say probably about 25% the people whose blogs I read; I've met them in real life. But say the other 75% spread all the coast of the world. I probably won't ever meet them but I feel I still know a little. It's kind of like — a pen pal you never meet, I suppose." (Judy)

Meanwhile, the finding shows why/why not the participants trust blogs from three perspectives. First, who to trust? Students trust blogs which are maintained by people whom they know (e.g., friends), authority (e.g., people who work in a university), or recommended by people whom they know (e.g., a friend's friend). For example, according to Elsa, "If it's someone of authority, then I would definitely believe it", and Annie's following expression,

> "… because I know the author of that weblog, they created that weblog. I believe it and I don't need to go and ask anybody else to make sure if it's right or wrong."

In general, students do not take a stranger's blog trust on face value when they first time read it. As Rose provided her way of judging credibility,

> "…the more readers you have, I would think, more consciously you would be, — that you have a readership. If a weblog has a very few readers, it's usually written for the writer, so I would think it's more likely to be honest because if something was written for a wide readership, then you have to ask why this person is doing this… perhaps they say what people want to hear…".

Next, what to trust? Regarding those entries which depict bloggers' experiences (e.g. difficult time, travel, lessons and sufferings) or interests, many participants will trust and give feedback. This point has been shown in Betty's description above. In relation to those personal use oriented blogs or social entertainment oriented blogs, participants regarded them as personal views and did not take the information very seriously, often they half trust them. As Kelly suggested:

> "It depends. They can be very unreliable. …you have to remember this: it's just people like you, behind a blog. So people get it wrong, or people are biased. It's not really the most credible thing."

Certainly, participants trust and use those academic-oriented blogs as useful information sources, for instance, Information literacy weblog[14] and Research Digest Blog[15] were two examples provided by the participants.

Last but not least, to what extent to trust? As many participants noted that they seldom question the credibility of the information on their friends' and authoritative blogs. The close relationship and the background of the blogger weaken the readers' awareness of judging the credibility of the information on the blogs. For those blogs that draw their attention, they often use prior

[14] http://information-literacy.blogspot.com/ It is a blog on events and news about information literacy, contributed by Stuart Boon (Research Associate) and Sheila Webber (Senior Lecturer), Department of Information Studies, University of Sheffield.
[15] http://bps-research-digest.blogspot.com/ It is a blog on reports and news about psychology, contributed by Dr Christian Jarrett (Writer/Editor, The Psychologist, British Psychological Society).

knowledge, search second-hand resources, or keep reading for a period of time and then come to rely on and trust them. The trust feeling of a stranger's blog is gradually developed by long time reading. There are a few remarkable examples as follows.

> "… weblogs could be anyone writes them, so you can't guarantee that the information is accurate or true." (Elsa, not trust blogs in general)

> "The first point is I only browse my friends' blogs, so I know them. But if I browse someone else, maybe I don't really know him or her, maybe I will think, 'Did they really do this? Can they do this?' But if I know the person, I will [trust]." (May, depends on who is the blogger)

> "…the trouble with the Internet is that you have to trust the people who they say they are, but very often they are not…" (Rose, depends on the purpose of blogs)

> "The information that I read regularly in the weblog that I like, I think it's credible because I've developed to trust over the time I read… you have to test… try to find secondary resources… so for me, that created a certain amount of credibility... One of the reasons that I don't read other blogs on a regular basis, because I don't have that trust for them... Is it good, is it bad, is it worth my time really? ... And you have to realise that there is bias there." (Harry builds trust by long time reading the blog)

All in all, it reflected that the participants were not usually concerned with credibility as a question although they used blogs as information resources. This is because they felt that largely they used blogs for relaxation, for life rather than study or coursework. Being different from other media, such as newspaper or journals, people accept the information according to its publisher and its origination; blog users accept blogs in terms of the individual, whom they feel are ordinary people like themselves. Without argument, most blogs that people see on the web reflect a person's life, attitudes, experiences, and opinions, but not factual information for academic use. Some academic purpose blogs gradually occur after 2003, but are still with personalised writing and opinions from the participant's view. Reading blogs is similar to watching movies, reading novels and other people's stories. In a sense, blog readers do not think they should judge right or wrong, good or bad, credible or fake. In a very broad sense, it has a low credibility of information source when it is about an ordinary individual's views of some social topics; whereas it has a fairly high credibility when the information reflects the blogger's personal experience, such as travel, working, or lessons.

Based on the participant's perception, the researcher thus categorised eight degrees of blog information credibility:

(1) Trust by the feeling of care (Blog readers trust the blog that they read because they felt the blogger concerns what they concern, or especially they felt the blogger cares of their readers and is careful of what they post on the blog);

(2) Most trust (Blog readers felt the blogger is just a person like them and the information is individual related. They cannot see why the blogger puts false information, so they trust the blogs they read in a general sense);

(3) Credible information sources (Readers thought that blogs that they read provide credible information. They not only trusted the blogs but also used them as useful information sources);

(4) Half-trust (Readers do not directly trust the blogs they read but with some suspiciousness. In a sense, they read the information with critical-thinking);

(5) Need self-judgement (Readers addressed that sometimes it highly needs their judgement of the blog. Especially when they felt the information is interesting or they wanted to use the information, they need to have a strategy of information judgement);

(6) Search second sources to prove the credibility (Readers mentioned that they often search more sources to prove if the information on the blog is credible because they are interested in it or because they have different beliefs or views of it);

(7) Suspect (Readers felt that the information on the blog seems incredible, unusual or bizarre, then they suspect the purpose of the blogger);

(8) Not take seriously (Readers may not think the blog provides valuable information because they read just for fun, for relaxation, or laugh and forget it soon).

5.4.4 A strategic framework of using blogs as information resources

As analysed previously, there is a sense that the relationships between bloggers and readers and the purposes of using blogs (from the blogger side) affect the extent of trust of the information on blogs. Many participants identified that their blogs are for personal use and for leisure; some participants said their blogs are mixed and only Antony's blog reflects an orientation of academic use. From the reading experience of both pure blog readers and bloggers, many participants expressed that they preferred to read interest-relevant and informative blogs on a continuing basis.

Thus, here the analysis suggested two orientations in using blog as information resources: academic and leisure. Four distinct types of relationships between the readers and the author of the blog that they read were emerged: (1) self (Figure 5.4, Case O), (2) friends or family (Figure 5.4, Case A, B, D), (3) authoritative or recommended (Figure 5.4, Case C), and (4) strangers (Figure 5.4, Case C). Although "authoritative or recommended" relationship can be seen as a "strangers" relationship, the major difference is that the former is from certain credible channels (e.g., friends, official sources), whereas the latter is not under guarantee. The six levels of the blogger's privacy concerns and the blog reader's eight degrees of credibility to the information on blogs vary in relation to the four types of relationships mentioned above.

Hence, those emergent elements were developed as a strategic framework (Figure 5.5) in terms of the relationships between readers (a blogger as a reader and pure blog readers) and bloggers (from readers' side), degrees of credibility (from readers' side), levels of privacy concerns (from bloggers' side) and the purposes of a blog (based on bloggers' intention).

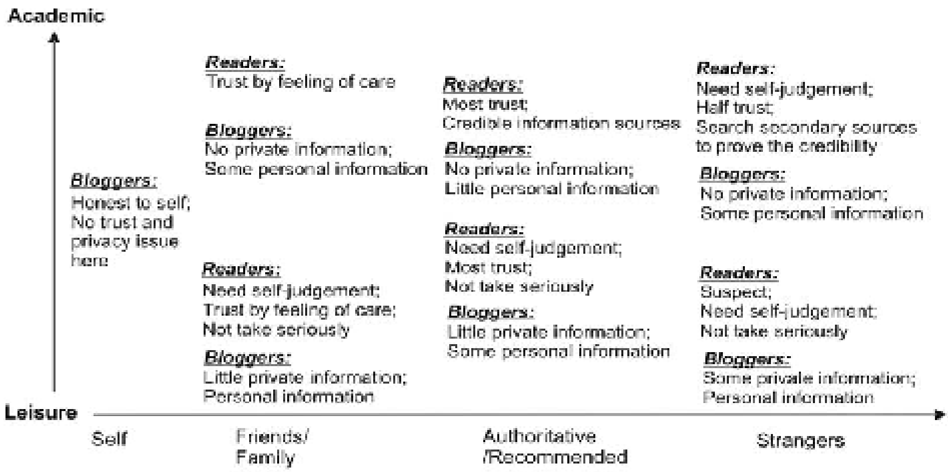


Figure 5.5 A strategic framework of using blogs as information resources: credibility, privacy concerns, and the relationships between bloggers and readers

NB: Readers refer to bloggers as readers and pure blog readers.

Leisure refers to people who write or read blogs for relaxing or entertainment use. Up to this point, it has to mention the “Online-identity” discussed in section 5.2.3. The blogger may use their real name or under a pseudonym in terms of their purpose of blogging. The data has suggested that if the blogger opened the blog to everyone online and for social connections or for friends’ communications, they are likely to use their real name; whereas if the blogger opened to everyone online and wrote for social or leisure purpose, they will use a pseudonym. Mostly, they prevent the blog from affecting their real identity.

Academic refers to people who feel that the blog is used as a platform for presenting information, sharing experiences and exchanging ideas in a specific academic topic. Readers read blogs for updating useful subject-relevant information. According to many participants, for an academic use blog, it is necessary and reasonable for the blogger to provide his/her real personal information to build the credibility of the blog.

Self refers to a blogger who is his/her own blog’s reader.

Friends/Family means that for a blogger, the audiences are the people they know, for instance, friends or family members. For a blog reader, the author of the blog which they read is a person who they know, for instance, a friend or a family member. The high trust is built on this kind of relationship, where readers and bloggers know each other in person.

Authoritative/Recommended means that for a reader, the blog is recommended by people they know or the blog is authoritative. Mostly trust is built on this relationship depending on the use orientation of the blog. For academic use blogs, readers trust them because of recommendation or because of a self-judgement strategy for a long period of time.

Strangers means that for a reader, the author of the blog which they read is a person they do not know, have never met before, or is anonymous. For a blogger, the reader of their blogs is a person they do not know, have never met before, or clearly most of time is anonymous (if they open to everyone generally). The credibility built on this kind of relationship needs high judgement of the source by readers. Whatever the orientation of the blog usage is, the readers have a kind of suspicious feeling. They often conduct more search to prove the credibility (if they feel the information is interesting or they want to use it) or not take the information seriously (if they just read for fun).

As revealed in Figure 5.5, for a blogger her/himself, whatever the use orientation of the blog, there are hardly any issues of trust nor many privacy concerns about their own blogs. Three noticeable orientations are shown in this framework: (1) the more academic oriented a blog is and the closer the blogger and the reader are, the more trust is and the less self-judgement skills are used (2) the more leisure oriented a blog is and the more alienated the blogger and the reader are, the more self-judgement skills are needed and the less trust there is, and (3) the more leisure oriented a blog is and the more alienated the blogger and the reader are, the more private information is likely to be exposed. In both relationships of “friends/family” (know each other in person) and “strangers”, personal information is inclined to be exposed. This framework attempts to present the key elements in using blogs as information resources and their complex relationships. It does not aim to explore an approach of how to protect privacy by using blogs or how to increase credibility of the blog, but helps people see what happened there when blogs are used as information resources. In a more broad sense, it may suggest an interpretation of privacy disclosure phenomenon on the web.

5.5 Towards a strategic model of using blogs

In light of the previous brief discussions in section 3.5, the findings of the pilot stage were eventually refined as a grounded theory model. As a consequence, the researcher calls it a strategic model of using blogs, which integrates the strategy categories that were driven by the extrinsic and intrinsic incentives together based on four blog use orientations. Figure 5.6 is an emerged strategic model based on analysing the data of the blogger group, and Figure 5.7 is generated based on the data from the pure blog reader group. Figure 5.8 is an integrated strategic model of using blogs. It can be seen that the categories are correlative. The relationships amongst the categories will be explained as follows and an abstract level conceptualisation based on this model will be demonstrated further in the next chapter.

From the discussion in section 5.2 and 5.3, it reveals that the blogger uses blogs as a place for “self-liberating”, a memory of recording personal matters, and an “online identity” of him/herself; whereas pure blog readers do not release ideas or emotions in other people’s blogs or through commentary, and they often are anonymous which means it is difficult to reflect their identity. Therefore, "self-liberating", "memories", and "online identity" are the three apparent distinctions.

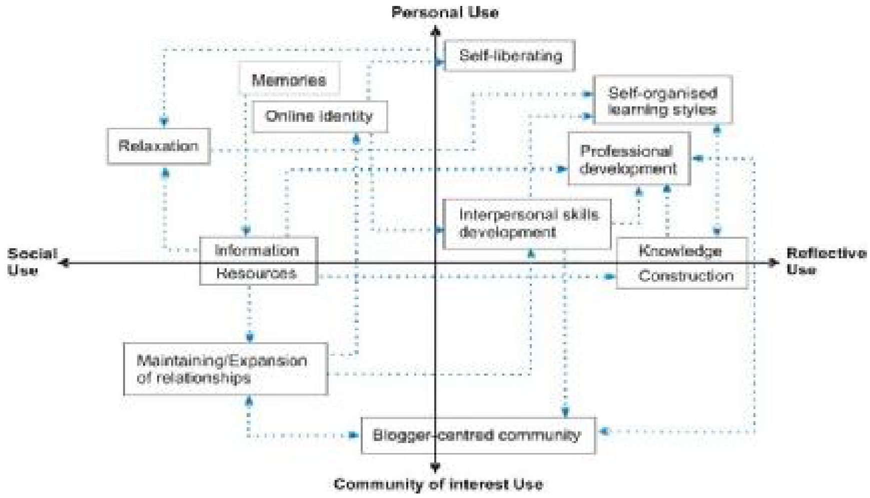


Figure 5.6 A strategic model of using blogs by bloggers (links)

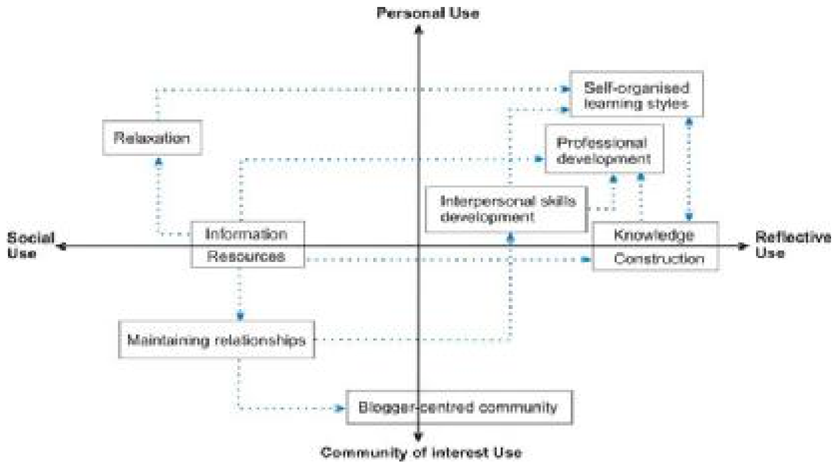


Figure 5.7 A strategic model of using blogs by pure blog readers (links)

Both bloggers and pure blog readers used blogs as a way of relaxing. Unlike pure blog readers, bloggers not only acquired relaxation by reading blogs but also felt relaxation and satisfaction by writing a blog. Both bloggers and pure blog readers used blogs as information resources to keep relationships as well as to develop their own interests. Apparently, pure blog readers are likely to gain updated information (e.g., related to friends, hobbies, interests) by reading blogs, whereas bloggers are likely to read blogs for gaining updated information (e.g., related to friends, hobbies, interests, similar views), as well as write for practising writing, presenting opinions or discussing issues. When pure blog readers develop professional skills by broadening views through blogs, bloggers develop professional skills by broadening views, improving writing, interacting with people and building new relationships. Pure blog readers felt they learn when they read certain blogs that relate to their interests to gain information for a long period of time and think over what they acquired. Bloggers felt they learn when they read back their own blogs and see their changes, receive criticism or encouraging comments, interact with people and censor what they have acquired. As discussed before, a great amount of blogs online are personal experiences, views or matters. According to what defined in section 2.6, events, news, or descriptions about people's life and ideas are information, whilst a person's feelings, concerns, or reflection on their experience is knowledge that has been codified, in a sense, it is expressed by the blogger and a conversion of knowledge by the blogger. Also, this is a knowledge construction process and it becomes apparent only when the blog users feel the sense of changes or new ideas. More discussion about it will be expanded in the next chapter, section 6.5.

There is hardly any doubt that bloggers have more blog use experience than pure blog readers. The data showed that bloggers have more strategies for using blogs according to their needs, for instance, to vent out emotion, self-expression, to show off, meet more people, share experience, discussion and so on. Pure blog readers largely read blogs as an approach to maintain old relationships and broaden their own views, and potentially to contribute to the blog they read, such as commentary and help to form the blogger-centred community. Comparing Figure 5.6 and 5.7, the data from pure blog reader group illustrate that there is no apparent relationship among "professional development", "interpersonal skills development", and "blogger-centred community", and no clear sense of "expansion of relationship". The data from blogger group reflect all key categories and their relationships. Thus, the researcher indicates the model from a holistic view by Figure 5.8 and explains the relationships as follows.

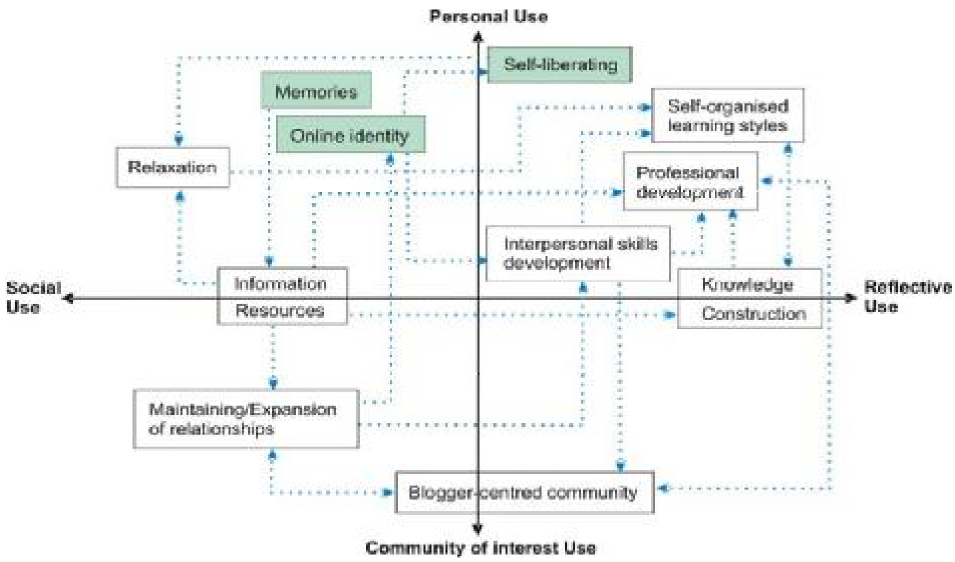


Figure 5.8 A strategic model of using blogs (links)

NB: Memories, Online identity and Self-liberating are three distinctions between bloggers and pure blog readers. These three categories are suitable for bloggers rather than pure blog readers.

Firstly, using blogs as memories is a strategy adopted by most bloggers. They put information on the blog and later check back. It is clearly displayed in the personal use orientation. To an extent, this memory is used by the blogger and at the same time provides a source for their readers. It could be an attribute of "Information resources", but considering the distinctions between bloggers and pure blog readers and its distinct role in blogging, the researcher keeps "memories" as an independent category rather than put it under the "Information resources" category.

Secondly, online identity is not a purpose of the bloggers, but is implied through the interaction between bloggers and readers. It refers to that over the interaction, the blogger started to think about who will read his/her blog and how to present his/her blog, and gradually reflect on who they are or whom they are comfortable to be. It is more personal use oriented. It is a reflection of self-liberating as the blogger uses blogs as personal space for releasing emotions and presenting opinions, which to a degree manifests the blogger's characteristics and views. Online identity is an attribute of "Interpersonal skills development", which means it is not only identified by the blogger him/herself but largely reflected in the online interpersonal relationships. As a potential benefit of using blogs, the detailed analysis of "Interpersonal skills development" will be presented in Chapter 6.

Thirdly, regarding reading or publishing blogs as relaxation is a primary way that the HE students used to reduce pressure as well as to gain a feeling of satisfaction. It implied both social and personal use orientations. As discussed in section 5.2.1, most participants suggested that blogging is not a prior thing that they need to do because they have an inner rule of the priority of what they need to conduct every day. They regarded blogging or reading blogs as a hobby or habit as they enjoy, laugh and for fun. This alternative way of relaxation may help them form a self-preferred learning style. The detailed discussion of "Self-organised learning styles", as a consequence of using blogs, can be seen in Chapter 6.

Fourthly, blogs provide sources for bloggers to compare with each other's insights and views, as well as read back their own past opinions and experiences, which leads to self-censorship and further facilitates knowledge construction. At the same time, blogs provide diverse information that the blog users can use to develop their own interests and improve their information selection and judgement skills. It is an important function for people to maintain old relationships and develop new relationships, because without this information platform, bloggers may not update a great deal of personal information to the blog and readers may not keep reading and contact each other by blogs. "Information resources" is more social use oriented, but not reflective use oriented. It is covered by either personal use orientation or community of interest use orientation.

Fifthly, many participants mentioned that they use blogs to maintain and expand relationships. This gradually helps the blogger to think about how to maintain the relationship and build new relationships, how to react to the new online people they meet and who they prefer to be in a relationship. Thus, it is a means for forming the blogger's online identity, a way of developing interpersonal skills, and a reflection of patterning a blogger-centred community and vice versa.

More explanations about Interpersonal skills development and Blogger-centred community are in Chapter 6. This point is reflected through community of interest use and social use orientations as it largely involves interactions and communications.

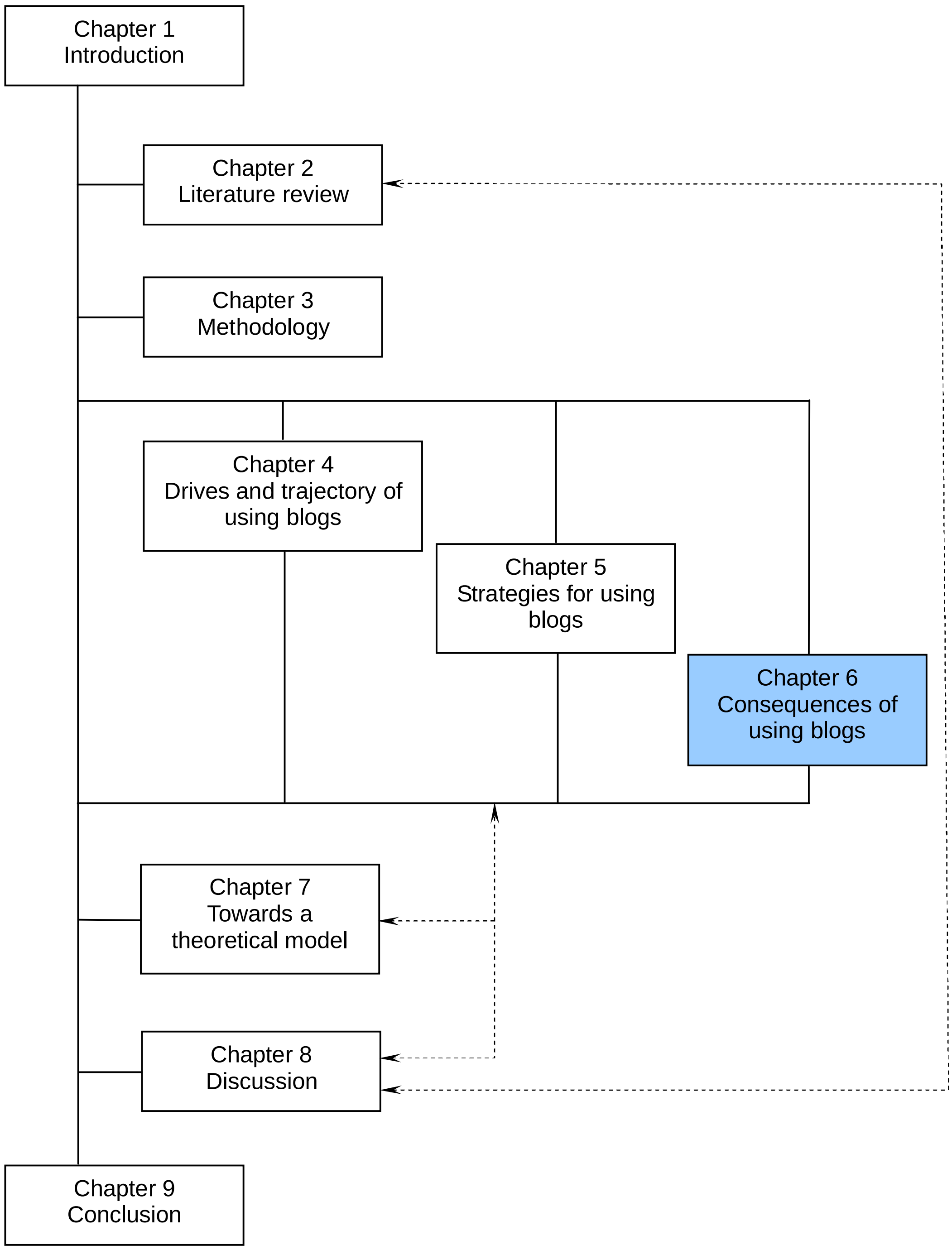
Sixthly, self-liberating refers to the blogger who uses his/her blog as a space to release emotion, opinions and thoughts. They felt it is a channel for liberating themselves, further to acquiring a free and enjoyable feeling. That is, relaxation is a result of doing so. In addition, as stated above, online identity reflects the blogger's liberation. This category is much used by an individual him/herself and is less for social interaction use.

Seventhly, knowledge construction means the blog users gradually broaden their views and construct their own understanding and meaning of the world, society and life by comparing with others' ideas and views on blogs and censoring their changes by reading back their own blogs. Knowledge construction is a step in self-organised learning styles forming and professional development because the blog users reflect on what they need, what ways of acquiring information they feel effective, what they are good at or lack of, as well as what they want to develop. Their development and reflection in reverse will help them form understandings and meanings. This category is in reflective use orientation because it stands on personal perception rather than can be observed easily during social interactions.

Lastly, in the diagram, Interpersonal skills development and Self-organised learning styles are more reflective use oriented, while Blogger-centred community is clearly community of interest use oriented. The three categories are classified into consequences of using blogs rather than the strategies of using blogs because it suggested that they are more likely to be a result of those strategic methods. It shows that Interpersonal skills development is a reflection of Self-organised learning styles, an approach to Professional development, and a way to facilitate to form a Blogger-centred community. Self-organised learning styles and Knowledge construction affect and reflect each other, and Blogger-centred community and Professional development (for bloggers) affect each other as well. The researcher will note these consequences-oriented categories in detail in the next chapter.

5.6 Summary

Taken together the analysis shown in this chapter, the researcher indicated eight primary strategies used by bloggers and five strategies used by pure blog readers. It concluded that the distinct approaches to bloggers are "self-liberating", "online identity", and "memories". The data showed that female bloggers are more likely to "self-express" and write personal matters through blogging, and female readers are likely to accept or read this kind of information. It also showed that with writing and maintaining a blog, bloggers have more experience than pure blog readers, such as writing practice, communication skills and self-censorship. In particular, to explore using blogs as information resources, it explained three elementary categories (relationships between bloggers and readers, privacy concerns and credibility) that impact on this approach, and presented a framework to demonstrate the relationships amongst them. Meanwhile, based on the contextual conditions discussed in the previous chapter, it illustrated a grounded strategic model for analysing the relationships between the strategies in terms of different blog use orientations (personal use, community of interest use, social use and reflective use).


Chapter 1
Introduction
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Chapter 3
Methodology
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Drives and trajectory of using blogs
Chapter 5
Strategies for using blogs
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Consequences of using blogs
Chapter 7
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Conclusion

CHAPTER 6

CONSEQUENCES OF USING BLOGS

"The journey is the reward." – Chinese proverb

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 has discussed how students adopt different strategies for using blogs according to different use orientations. This chapter moves towards thinking about the consequences of using blogs at a higher abstract level with relevance to the participants' conceptualisation of the value of using blogs. The most striking results to emerge from the data were self-therapy, interpersonal skills, and intellectual abilities. The researcher labelled them as the three core categories that imply why HE students blog. Figure 6.1 shows the grounded theory model that is abstracted based on the strategic model (Figure 5.8) presented in Chapter 5, and Figure 6.2 is a brief pattern of the model at the abstract level.

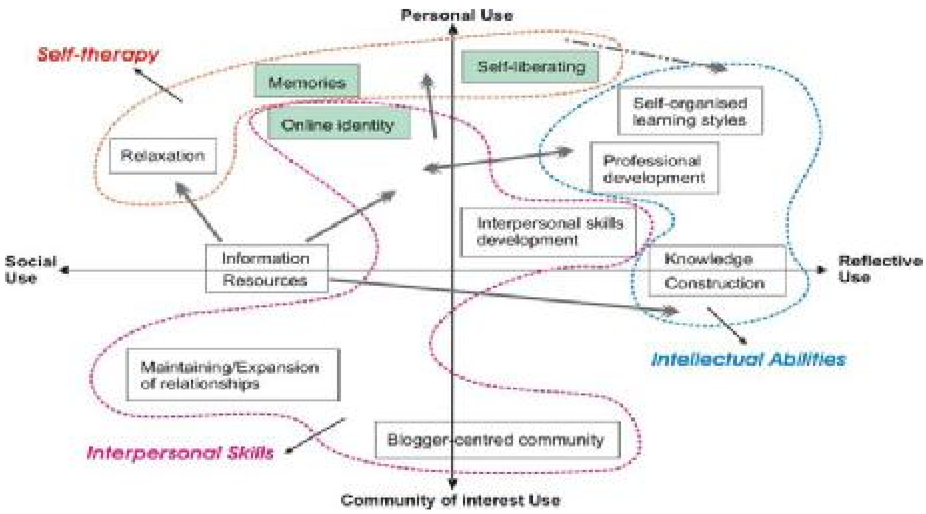


Figure 6.1 A strategic model of using blogs (abstract conceptualisation)

In Figure 6.1, it indicates that Relaxation, Memories, and Self-liberating are variations of Self-therapy; Online identity, Interpersonal skills development, Blogger-centred community and Maintaining/Expansion of relationship are variations of Interpersonal skills; Self-organised learning styles, Professional development, and Knowledge construction are variations of

Intellectual abilities. "Information resources" supports the three core categories. "Interpersonal skills" clearly affects Self-therapy; Self-therapy does not cause Intellectual abilities; Interpersonal skills and Intellectual abilities have bidirectional relationships, that is, they affect each other. This model is generated by circular axial coding and selective coding processes, that is, reducing data from many cases into concepts to explain what is going on in blogs usage by HE students.

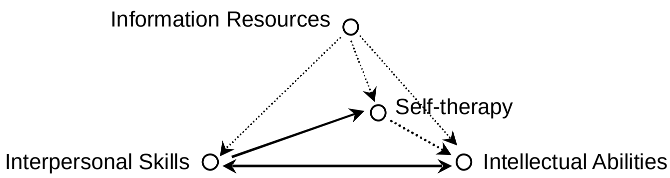


Figure 6.2 A brief pattern of the strategic model at an abstract level

These core categories were generated according to Strauss and Corbin's (1998: 146) suggestion as follows:

> "A central category has analytic power. What gives it that power is its ability to pull the other categories together to form an explanatory whole. Also, a central category should be able to account for considerable variation within categories. A central category may evolve out of the list of existing categories. Or, a researcher may study the categories and determine that, although each category tells part of the story, none captures it completely. Therefore, another more abstract term or phrase is needed, a conceptual idea under which all the other categories can be subsumed."

In the following sections, the researcher will interpret the findings further from five aspects: Self-therapy; Interpersonal skills; Intellectual abilities; knowledge sharing and narcissism; and limitations of using blogs in formal learning. As "blogs as information resources" and its issues have been discussed in section 5.4, it will not be stressed particularly again.

6.2 Self-therapy

"Self-therapy" emerged as a category that reflects one of the key consequences of using blogs. In the literal sense, it refers to the fact the blog users regard blogs as a mechanism of dealing with their own problems by themselves. In this sense, it implies that the bloggers are more likely to use blogs as a psychological therapeutic approach and gain benefits from it than the pure blog users; blogging has intrinsic remedial value, especially for female bloggers. According to the user's different preferences, Self-therapy can be explained by following six aspects: (1) a general sense of seeking for solace (2) discharge worries of growing relating to age (3) personal traits (4) treatment in different genders (5) emotion releasing as a way of relaxation, and (6) writing as a way of treatment.

Firstly, through blogging, HE students are seeking solace from specific personal problems (e.g., diseases, family affairs, isolated feelings caused by geographic distance or cultural differences). This often occurs when they encounter emergencies or unexpected problems, and especially where they feel dazed over that difficult period of time. Some examples of using blogs to reduce isolated feelings have been shown in the previous two chapters. Here, the researcher provides Debby's statement, which displayed the blogger using her blog as a memory to diminish isolation, and a quotation of Bob, who used the blog for treating homesickness.

> "[It's] just for memory, especially because now I'm overseas. I miss home, so I read my old entries [that I wrote] when I went back home, see how I went out with my friends, or whatever happened." (Debby)

> "Sometimes, you know it's for relaxation, some feelings are involved in a Chinese community or something like that. Sometimes you just want to read some Chinese characters, maybe, I don't know, homesick." (Bob)

Lynn was a typical user who used blogs to purge emotional tensions about family affairs. She mentioned:

> "…a lot of people when they have — like — pression or problem, they just, — they don't know how to deal with it. This is a way, for me, is just write down… At the moment, my parents are going to divorce. It's very hard for me, because — you know — my parents — I am 20 years old. I've lived together with them all my life. Oh, God! They are going to divorce, then I wrote a blog about it and it turned out that three of my friends had the same situation. So when they made comments back, it made it a lot easier for me to do with it."

Following this, Lynn also provided instances of how her friend used a blog to cure depression and how she, as a reader, felt the usefulness of blogging.

> "…because one of them got depression, — one of my best friends — reading her blog is quite interesting, because it really explains how she feels. If she tries to tell you in a conversation, that would be very, very hard… Sometimes that expression is very helpful …because it makes easier for us to speak to her about her feelings, because then we know how she feels, because we read her blog… I think it almost helps you to work through because you don't always want to talk to your best friend about it, you don't want to talk with family. Sometimes you want to talk to someone who you don't know. I think it's really nice for that."

Beyond any doubt, the statements showed that the bloggers wrote down their anxieties, concerns and feelings to seek for suggestions, understandings, or sympathy and further to achieve reassurance of themselves or possible solutions to their personal problems. The feedback and comments from family, friends or strangers on their blogs made this happen. It made the blogger feel that there were people who listen, support, go through similar experiences, and give advice; they help and care for them. Different from those who gain comfort from keeping in touch with people through blogging, some bloggers did not talk about their problem with friends or family by phone or face-to-face because of their personal traits (e.g., Rose's statements below and more discussion about personal traits see the third point); some bloggers did not do so because they felt the personal issue was disgraceful and embarrassing to talk. Therefore, they found blogging was a feasible way of sorting out their problems, especially their anxiety or worries. Psychologically, the blogging behaviour is beneficial to the blogger's mental health because the data suggested that it helped the participants take a positive attitude to life by facing the issue affirmatively rather than passively (e.g., an opinion from Bess below). The data also presented that the pure blog reader achieved an encouraging or reassuring feeling about themselves by reading blogs (see Lisa's expression below).

> "…it's a way of writing biographically, writing down your thoughts and say what you want to say; also you can do it anonymously. In a way, that makes you honest, gives you more freedom to say what you really think or write down how your feeling is, because you know that the only people — you know — any of your best friends — who will read them. In a way, there is a distance as well, when you write something down or when you post something on the Internet, say, they are words on the screen, not connect to you. I quite like that, because I'm quite shy and I often find it's difficult to talk about myself or how I feel and things like that. I found it was a way of really dealing with that [her personality], and also for me, in January 2006, I was having a difficult time, it really helped because I could write down how I felt. It helped me to deal with things because I've written down how's my feeling and I can read back later. It helped me to be inspective and perspectives… One of the reasons why I used blog so much was that I really needed to talk about, but I didn't want to trouble my friends, and I found that was good for that, because you could write out everything that was troubling you. And then in a way by writing it out, you got rid of it. It was there; it was public; people could read them, you hadn't trouble anyone. You hadn't got them with any problem." (Rose)

> "I thought it seems — like — a good way of just writing, like therapeutic… like — film community, depression community, or eating disorders, because so many people go on there for therapy and to get their feelings out. A lot of people who do have problems are on their groups. I personally don't have any eating disorders or depression like that. I just do it, because I enjoy it… [It's] just for my own benefit really. It's good to get feedback for what I'm writing. I get some advice sometimes if I have a problem… a lot of people are very polite to each other, and support to each other." (Bess)

> "… especially this one, the blogger 'Kennysia', he writes everything about himself there, but the way he writes is so interesting, and he comments on his family, how his life is, and his job. Yeah, I learned that he is a very determined person. A lot of people try to pull him down, but he is very strong and he is striving to work on. I really look up to him… [I left comments] Just to say, 'really go, that's good'. People feel good when you write nice stuff about them. So I'm sure, because he puts it public, the public should try answering him as well." (Lisa)

Secondly, as reported earlier in section 4.2, most bloggers are adult but non-mature students. Particularly, the researcher investigated 30 participants who were aged between 18 and 23. Among the 30 participants, 4 of them clearly said that their parents read their blogs, but 7 participants particularly emphasised that they did not want their parents to know their blogs. This data provided a clue that a participant who was in this age range was likely to use blogs to discharge worries, anxieties, and growing pains (see a few statements below) and further to gain a feeling of reassurance, or may change their attitudes to life and issues. Yet, as Vicky said (quotation see below), they do not behave as childish as they were in adolescence age because they are growing up and becoming more independent. At the same time, they were not as mature as participants aged over 25 years, who are likely to use blogs for personal interest development (see Daisy's statement below). The researcher labelled this range of age (18-23) as "becoming mature". The blog has its useful place in this process of "becoming mature" because it facilitates the blogger to trace his/her life, behaviours, insights, and further helps them to form mature thinking.

> "I used to have one. I used to write my frustrations. I wrote poems for a while. I had everything in my old blog and I wrote a lot of poems, and when my friends read it, … they thought that I need a treatment … because I was a little depressed for a while and I went everything through by writing a blog. I wrote poems, and have all the secrets read between the lines, kind of meaning. Then I stop writing so much, because I don't need it any more…" (Lisa, age 19)

> "I always feel like — once I blog or something, it's a kind of — off my chest. It's a kind of having a conversation with someone, you kind of get rid of any worries or feelings you might have, that kind of thing." (Scott, age 19)

> "It's a new hobby, which is an advantage I guess. It's given me a lot of opportunities to see how other people live. I mean, all the time in the university, I only really get to meet other students, but through LiveJournal, I have all these other friends, and I can sort of see what is life for people, who aren't students, and who are doing other things with their life, and see a lot of different attitudes, people in different places as well, which otherwise I would be kind of stuck in my own isolated little bubble… I mainly use it just as a day-to-day journal, writing thoughts, feelings, and it's also a good way to meet other people… [I read many blogs] Mostly issues to do with women... a lot of American news as well. Just issues that have affected women, comments had been made about women, and opinions about women and how they are being treated in media and society, and good things and bad things." (Daisy, age 26)

Again, Emily, a blogger mentioned in Chapter 5, kept an online diary and prevented her parents to read. She was 21 years old and only opened her blogs to online friends. She felt that the blog provided a private space for her to express true feelings that she could not do in real life. She thought that venting out her real feelings and ideas made her comfortable. In the blog, she had carers, listeners and mind-similar friends because those online friends sometimes argued with her, understood her, and even taught her about different perspectives. As she claimed below, she had seen her own growth and learned how life is.

> "I can remember there is one Swedish guy, who is 70 years old and he is still blogging. I usually don't speak to him at all, but I read his blog, because I like his writing style, his literature, and I like the content. Because he is 70 years old, he has been alive more than I have, it's like, he does the same thing as me, he blogs about his daily life as well, things like, that I grow every day. It seems I can get some advices from his blog, from his journal… Reading other people's blogs is an entertainment, but writing your own

> blog is more of venting procedure, more of venting out your frustration, or whatever problems you have, and it's more like — talking to your best friend, because actually they are listening, not just pretending to listen… I've said that I've developed changing as a person, someone I wasn't last year. So when I read my last year's writings, I do feel like — delete some. I find myself, such childish; my point of view is so stupid. But no, I don't [delete entries], I usually don't do that. I just leave them there."

Similarly, Kelly highlighted the need of a private place to express personal insights and emotions as well as a place to achieve consolation. Thereby, again, it showed blogging helps HE students to go through worries, anxiety, and uncertainty of growing and becoming mature.

> "Through blogging myself, a sort of — I learned to express myself, you know — to portray my ideas better, probably; but reading people's [blogs], gives me new ideas and also it can give you reassurance, yeah, reassure your ideas, I suppose, because if other people do the same thing as you… if other people, they've got the same sort of symptom or things happened, you know, really a bad day like I had, it's sort like — reassure, should I guess." (Kelly, age 19)

Thirdly, a few participants stressed that personal traits (e.g., shy, uncommunicative) may be a factor that makes people less likely to express personal feelings or opinions in conversation. However, they would like to show their ideas and prove that they have the same abilities to others. By blogging, they sought a sense of belonging and assurance of their own capabilities. Furthermore, they may build confidence and develop communication skills by encouragement from commentary. As two examples below, Lynn talked about how blogging can be a treatment of herself and her sister, and Tina, from a short experienced reader's viewpoint, pointed out the usefulness of blogs as a therapy.

> "I think there are many advantages, especially for people like me, who don't like speaking about their feelings face-to-face with people. You know, they can just write down, like — an essay, put on the Internet and people can comment on it, and people can know how you feel. I think it's a really good thing. But you obviously need to write down it and people can see it. I think it can build people's creative side, especially people like my sister, she is very, very shy, and through weblogging, she's been able to speak to many more people. Just because she is very creative and her weblog is very, very beautiful. She does all the graphs herself and it's amazing." (Lynn)

> "It's good for people who are not very talkative, or who are not very sociable people, who don't like talking and asking question face-to-face. They can get information on the blog; they can ask questions on the blog, and then receive information back in the same way. So it can help somebody's learning in that way, by building their confidence to be able to start discussing things." (Tina)

Fourthly, in relation to the categories Self-liberating, Maintaining/Expansion of relationships discussed in sections 5.2 and 5.3, there is a sense of different strategies used by females and males. Looking into this point further, the data suggested that female bloggers are more likely to use blogs to purge emotions and further achieve self-therapy than male bloggers. All male participants (17 students) expressed that they did not open the blog to a particular selected group of readers but open to the public; whereas 8 out of 24 female bloggers highlighted that they did not open their blogs to everyone online. Three out of the eight female bloggers said that they only open to friends whom they know and online friends whom they trust. The study also displayed that half of the male bloggers (6/13) clearly did not put personal emotions, moods or self-expressions on the blog; whereas there was only one female blogger (Tina) expressed that she did not regard blog as a place to purge of personal emotions and moods. However, Tina was a beginner and used a class blog. In addition, almost all male bloggers put interest-relevant information or meaningful information (defined by themselves) on their blogs, but only one male blogger (Frank) used his blog specifically to record travelling experience, which he felt was not personal interest-relevant information. Similarly, most female bloggers put interest-relevant information on their blogs too.

Meanwhile, by comparing the participant's reading blog perception, it suggested that female blog users were likely to read friends' blogs whether it is about personal matters, personal diary or interest relevant information, whereas male readers had less orientation of being interested in personal matters on blogs or a personal diary, and were inclined to not read again even if it is a friend's blog (see Appendix 16, one of comparison tables used by the researcher in her analysis).

Therefore, from a psychological standpoint, it indicates again that male bloggers are more likely to blog interests and social issue relevant matters, whereas female bloggers are more likely to blog interests and emotional relevant matters. It further implies that female blog users are more inclined to achieve self-therapy and sort out personal problems by releasing emotions on the blog or reading emotional relevant blogs; whereas male blog users are less inclined to achieve self-therapy by blogging or reading blogs, rather achieve a confirmed feeling by discussing opinions openly, or reading interest-related information widely. There are five typical statements as follows.

> "…if they described a bad experience they were going through, [I leave comments to] give them more support and inspiration… if somebody is going through a bad time, then they describe it through their weblogs, I feel I am able to sort of understand, what's folly and what's going on because — I feel like — I can help them a lot more… Mostly the time it is because they are my friends. But there are other times when I left comments on their blogs, that people I don't know personally, because of something that I agree with, or something that I can relate to and I can learn personal experiences about." (Nancy, female)

> "…girls' writing maybe more emotional, more about their feelings, but boys' writing more keep on some news and some critical views of the army, the society, and something about their subjects or their majors. You can see that boys' blogs always look like — blue or dark, not colourful. But girls' blogs are red and pink, more colourful." (Flora, female)

> "I think it [blogging] just keeps your mind active and gets your thinking [clear]. So I think it's healthy for the mind to be writing and thinking about things on a daily basis and sharing your thoughts with others." (Bess, female)

> "It's a place where people can actually talk about big issues, because very often, kind of everyday life, it was just get a chance that people are sort of talking big things, important things; people are concerning, — that is interesting. So I guess it helps a lot of people talk about that sort of things when they don't feel they would able to do it in everyday life." (Hugh, male)

> "…because the blog is a way to show your real personality, I think. But I don't like to put some real private feelings on it… Maybe I can write — I mean like — write a novel, but that is the content involved my private life, but that's not true [privacy]… I don't want to say this is my real life, my personal life. I don't want to say that." (Cliff, male)

Fifthly, unquestionably relaxation is a way of reducing pressure and helping psychological therapy. As discussed before, most participants clearly stated that they use blogs for getting away from study rather than for study.

Lastly, the data suggested that regularly writing down or expressing personal insights and feelings, and further being viewed openly by other people can be beneficial to young people's mental health. From previous analysis about self-liberating, writing habit and attitudes to commentary, it displayed that the participant believed that persisting in writing down personal experience is a healthy way of life. They felt the reassurance of themselves and positively affirmed the benefit of using blogs (see Rock's statement below). Furthermore, it denoted that blogging may foster the user to have more self-censorship awareness and form a regular thinking habit, as Judy put forward below.

> "I think it's helpful for your psychology, to express yourself through blogging In the past, maybe more people keep a diary or a journal, but particularly, life is very fast, there is a lot of technologies and many things to do and remember these days. So just write — the active writing — down your thoughts, I think it can be very helpful; makes your mind clearer." (Rock)

> "It's a quite strange sort of situation. I haven't quite thought it out yet in my head — that sort of feeling — I suppose it likes the kind of anonymous thing of talking with a shrink almost. It's having that sort of advice related about you by the people who are completely independent to the situation. It's very peculiar." (Judy)

Besides this it remains to be seen that the therapy can not be achieved without the interaction between a blogger and his/her readers. As shown in Figure 6.2, this interaction is put into practice based on interpersonal (virtual or reality). On the contrary, it did not directly display that self-therapy brings about interpersonal skill/relationship development. That is, interpersonal skills can be used as either a strategy or a condition of self-therapy, but self-therapy may or may not be a consequence of interpersonal skills because the above six aspects reveal that individual factors: age; gender; personal traits; and preferences, play crucial roles in the sense of self-therapy.

6.3 Interpersonal skills

“Interpersonal skills” refers to the participants feeling the benefits from the use of blogs by realising the role of interaction in self-development and felt the improvement of their interpersonal skills. The result of developing interpersonal skills is that the students learned how to use online interpersonal relationships to deal with personal issues and develop themselves. In Figure 6.2, it denotes that improving interpersonal skills will affect intellectual abilities and vice versa.

By using blogs, interpersonal skills are improved through identifying “who I am”, developing relationships (i.e., maintaining existent relationships and expanding new connections) and the awareness of communication skills. With the development of interpersonal skills by the blogger, it implies a possibility of forming a blogger-centred community, especially those who used blogs in a community of interest sense. As Maintaining/Expansion relationships and Online identity have been analysed in section 5.2 and 5.3, the following discussions will centre on two categories: Interpersonal skills development and Blogger-centred community in relation to Interpersonal skills.

6.3.1 Interpersonal skills development

6.3.1.1 Bloggers’ perceptions

“Interpersonal skills development” had emerged as a category through the bloggers stressing the important role of interactions between themselves and their readers in using blogs, and their positive descriptions of the development of interpersonal skills. Firstly, it helps the blogger build confidence of being online, communicating with people and presenting personal opinions explicitly. Many bloggers similarly mentioned the benefits of blogging at this point. For example, Todd explained what he learned by blogging, and stressed that he began to know how to express his ideas and standpoints without offending others. This quotation reflects both interpersonal skills development and intellectual development (will be discussed in next section).

> “For me, everything is learning. So it’s very helpful. You can learn anything from important interpersonal skills… One thing I realised was that I was writing about myself, I had absolutely no objections about being totally frank, even to strangers. I can write what I feel like writing and I can just say this is what I did, but if I mention other people I know, and they are not going to like it, so I don’t want to get into that kind of situation, where I will be embarrassed and asked to apologise about that. I maybe mention a very, something which is very trivial to me, might be very important to someone else. So that person is likely to take offence and I don’t want all that, so I removed all the personal entries. If I have personal experiences to relate, I would rather write them into one story… that is one thing I learned through that. The second thing is through writing, you learn, how to engage with my data, and how to argue, which is very important. My style of argumentation has improved so much over the last 15, 16 months.” (Todd)

Secondly, the bloggers also mentioned that blogging helped them become more aware of the issue of online etiquette and respecting others, which is a crucial point in developing interpersonal skills. Sally noted what she learned in dealing with interpersonal relationships and gave her opinion of inappropriate online manners.

> "I think you can learn a lot of things about yourself if you post a blog, because as I said, it almost likes a diary for everybody to read… People can see it and can learn a lot about you. You can learn a lot about the way they react from it, if they ignore you, if they mention it out, if they mention it face-to-face… I've seen a lot of profiles, might relate to people who have passed away. I just think that's not right really. You shouldn't write about somebody in such a way, but obviously it's completely open, people can blog about anything they want, and that's the point of them. But I just think on the moral level, dishonest so far, you can do." (Sally)

From the description of commenting by Betty, who likes to interact with people online, it showed that she was using an active manner to communicate with people and further build wide connections.

> "…quite often if it's something that interests me, quite often people will ask questions or put a post, and I will fill those in. It's good fun as well whether it's a sort of serious poll or just watch if they have dinner tonight. It's nice that you can get involved with that. So I do try to leave comments because it's a way of telling people that you're reading and you appreciate what they're putting down… I suppose that I've learned there are different ways of communicating with people, keeping in touch..." (Betty)

Next, according to earlier discussion, the participant felt his/her identity was not only defined by him/herself, but also associated with the identification by the readers. This is a continuing self-adjustment and self-identification process. Many participants agreed that they achieved a satisfied feeling of "who I am" in the online interpersonal relationships and their interpersonal skills had developed. From the psychological perspective, this group of bloggers is likely to communicate with people on the web and prefers meeting new people, and is not afraid of interacting with strangers. They have an "open" trait in general. Comparing two typical bloggers' statements from Elsa who disliked accepting strangers' comments and Antony who preferred to interact with people online (exampled in section 4.5.1), it demonstrated that online interpersonal skills are developed by bloggers who are more open, but not by those who use blogs with a small specific group of people.

> "You sometimes get people who comment on your page but you don't know who they are, and they don't know you, but they write you comments as though they know you very well, but in fact they never meet you, and then you find they have read all your entries, which I don't like, and they got the profile of you as a person and they may judge you on that, but they don't know you as a person. So I don't like to make my weblog public." (Elsa)

> "I think I am a sociable person. I like to talk to people, and blogging was a good picture for me, — to provide a picture of myself and to say what I'm thinking, and more

> importantly, to receive people's comments... I enjoy that, because, I don't know why, possibly because part of my personality. I don't want to hide myself." (Antony)

On the contrary, the researcher had analysed Kent in Chapter 4, who had a short blogging experience and was concerned with publishing personal opinions to the public online. In his opinion, interpersonal relationships in real life are visible which he could truly build and improve, whereas online relationships are virtual and difficult to trace and trusted, which made him feel "odd", "psychological", "weird" and even doubt his identity. The analysis here reflects the blogger's online perceptions. There is hardly any evidence to show that bloggers who are less interactive with people through their blogs have become more aware of using online interpersonal relationships and developed interpersonal skills through their blogs.

6.3.1.2 Pure blog readers' perceptions

It is clear in Figure 5.7 that "Maintaining a relationship" by reading a blog, may affect the pure blog reader's interpersonal skills. It does not have as rich data as the blogger participants to explain how they developed interpersonal skills, such as build confidence in communication and using open and active manners to interact with people by blogging. There was a sense that pure blog readers improved interpersonal skills when they compared those blogs that they read and realised that they can use them for their own interpersonal relationships. Thus, it is worth quoting Lisa's expressions about interpersonal skills that she learned.

> "You learn how people react because some comments are really nasty, and you will see how the blogger reacts to it. Some of them, the bloggers were retaliated by lashing out their feelings, showing their anger. I don't really respect that. Some bloggers can actually be tactful and say 'you are entitled to your own opinion and I respect that, but please try not abusing my page so much'. I really like that. So tolerance, for one thing, whether you like or not, the nasty people will still be there."

All in all, interpersonal skills are not developed in one day, but over a long period of time and by the user's self-censorship. In Chapter 5, it was discussed that people use blogs as a strategy of maintaining and expanding potential relationships, that is, it is an approach that needs interpersonal skills and, in reverse, develop these skills. It can be easily seen from the previous examples that interpersonal skills are able to be improved in this process. In Figure 5.8, this category is not on the social use side but the reflective use side because it is reflected by the blog users' perception of what they had learned and how they changed in terms of personal advantageousness.

6.3.2 Blogger-centred community

6.3.2.1 Bloggers' perceptions

As mentioned in section 4.6.2, one blog use orientation is to form a community of interest. "Blogger-centred community" refers to a consequence of long time blogging on a topic. This links to a blogger opening his/her blog to the public, interacting with people by comments, expand relationships and keep publishing focused topics based on his/her own interests. Undoubtedly, without writing in interesting styles and generating common interests, it is difficult for the blogger him/herself to build a community of interest. A few bloggers, Vicky, Bob, Dora and Jack were typical examples of using blogs and gradually forming a community centred on their own blogs. Vicky, analysed earlier, had long blogging experience. She used to write down her emotions and worries over a particular time on the blog. Later, she studied abroad; she started using her blogs to publish her interests, such as graph design, fashion design, and meet friends who are from the same country or have similar interests. She linked friends' blogs to her blog, communicated with friends and even arranged events and started an online business through her blogs. Also, Bob, a doctoral student, gave an example of academic blog community and pointed out his intention of using it.

> "…because it's a strong interaction between the readers and the writer. It's easier to build up a community both for the social life and for the academic information. Because I found many bloggers — because I read one blog that links to many persons' blogs in this community of academic area. So I get lots of information from this blog. That's very helpful, I think… I have mentioned that I found a community of the special list in my area, that's one example. Another is that there are many excellent bloggers who write blogs only reasonably to show their knowledge. You can learn a lot from them." (Bob)

Jack, exampled in section 5.2.5, developed his blogging from putting funny quotations to contributing to a group of Christian churches. He described the sense of community generation through blogging.

> "It's [his blog] still one author. It's just now I would engage in a lot more, so, have read other people's blogs. I would kind of collect to what they all said, and then make my own comments about the same issue… I read them, link to them in the post I might write, and kind of formal part of the discussion….Certainly like — community blogs, which kind of look at each others' [blogs], so, that would be very similar to me, like Christians, like in this country, some in America, and other places as well. I suppose there is bit community, but there is not like — some ways we all meet each other. It just happens through Googling really, sort of interest, and finding other people's blogs, so I sort of add that sort of things to my blog." (Jack)

Similarly, Dora, a 5-year blogger, was a representative instance that used blogs for entertainment, developing interests such as gaming and cooking recipes, maintaining and broadening relationships; she indicated how she was impacted by the blog communities and gradually built her own community by either developing her interests or achieving self-therapy.

> "It was a kind of nice feeling. It's like — a nice community. Because a lot of my friends know other people who I know, and you meet people through them, and it's nice to get to know people, and it does feel like — a community online… I check it every day… A lot of them are my friends'. I will be really upset to lose them because I made really good friends, and I hope it's just being able to say a lot of things that I wouldn't necessarily be able to say to my parents or some other people I know in my real life. It's

> like — know what problems I've got… someone is going to be able to sort of reassure me. We've gone through something similar because there is a lot variety between them. So it's just nice to be able to say what's annoying me and something that's upsetting me, or what makes me happy, to people who can sort of understand it." (Dora)

Typically, those cases reflected that by long-term blogging, bloggers felt a wider concept of blogging, rather than being limited to the concept of self-expression or an online diary; they realised the public will censor the information on the blog and used the censorship to benefit themselves. They changed the use of blogs from blogging for him/herself only, to include a group of people as well as him/herself. In this sense, the trend of forming a blogger-centred community became apparent. It also implies that the blogger used interpersonal skills to maintain and expand their relationships by sharing interests and information, supporting and concerning others, involving in online/offline activities, that is, being positively interactive with people. This in reverse helps them to develop better communication and expression styles and learn how to build better interpersonal relationships. It also denotes that a generated blogger-centred community will help the blogger's professional experience based on his/her interest, such as writing skills, organising ability and information judgement skills.

6.3.2.2 Pure blog readers' perceptions

It can be seen that, in Figure 5.7, "maintaining a relationship" by reading a blog in the long term, may contribute to forming a "blogger-centred community". This is, in a sense, to provide readership, support, and help the blogger to develop a community. However, there was no clear data to suggest that pure blog readers contributed to them much. Four pure blog readers explicitly said that they do not join online communities and they did not even realise blogger's community existed. The researcher induced that a reader continuing to read a blog is a kind of contribution to the readership of a blog, even though most time the reader is anonymous. To an extent, the blogger knew that there are readers (e.g., visitor counter on the blog) and this encourages them to continue blogging. A fairly explicit example is Hugh who read his friends' blogs and maintained friendship by reading them. He contributed to the discussion on the blog. His description below implies that pure blog readers in a way help the blogger build a "blogger-centred community".

> "…they are politics students, they can be very opinion oriented, and have things exactly how they want, but I have different opinions… I looked them up, but I am less inclined to comment on someone whom I didn't know… I would tend not to put my own conclusions in there. I would just point out where their arguments are going wrong." (Hugh)

Again, Blogger-centred community as a consequence and a promoter element of Interpersonal skills, is inseparable with the categories: Maintaining/Expansion relationship; Professional development; and Interpersonal skills development.

6.4 Intellectual abilities

“Intellectual abilities” is defined as understanding and use-for-self abilities that the participants developed based on improving interpersonal skills (e.g., developing interests, knowing how to communicate with people) or self-therapy (e.g., knowing about themselves more, writing habit, learning how to express themselves clearly). It is reflected by performing professionalism, forming self-organised learning style and the user’s knowledge construction. The data did not explicitly show that Intellectual abilities directly acted on Self-therapy as the former was emerged from an intelligent standpoint, while the later was reflected from a psychological angle. Interpersonal skills can be a means of Intellectual abilities and vice versa, and Self-therapy maybe an intervening condition of Intellectual abilities. This section focuses on discussing what “learning” means for the participants, and how using blogs reflects self-organised learning styles.

6.4.1 Conceptualising “learning”

The researcher has addressed that learning in this study covers gaining everyday, lifelong and ultimate survival skills, which take place in numerous diverse ways such as communication, reading and writing. The data showed that every participant felt he/she has learned something by either reading blogs or writing one. There were clearly five types of learning: (1) acquiring information and awareness (2) gaining skills (3) changing styles and insights (4) understanding and exploring with deeper interests and thoughts, and (5) creation and imagination, have been found in participants’ identifications. There is not enough data to demonstrate differences between bloggers and pure blog readers on this point.

Firstly, some participants mentioned that the blog is an awareness tool, which made them aware of matters (e.g., interpersonal relationship, people’s lives in different countries, different cultures) and news through reading blogs. For instance, Don took a generic view of learning and Jenny described her opinion below. In another sense, some participants pointed out that gaining pieces of information or reading individuals’ ideas was not really learning. For example, Susan emphasised that learning has to been digested to become the learner’s own knowledge and May felt that learning is to learn new and useful ideas (see below).

> “Because if we — in terms of learning something is very general, that is not only what is read on the common book, on the textbook, but it’s also can be caught in the society. I mean, all of us are learners, are teachers at the same time. I’m learning now, I’m talking with you, you’re learning from me, but we’re also teaching each other. So if you can consider this, we can see that blogs are also a good way to learn. I mean I’ve been learning many things from blogs. Otherwise I would not be there. I think that the main goal usually is also to learn. I mean that people are particular always hunger for information, for new stories, particular for kind of marginal stories, So I like marginal ideas. I think that blogs are the best field in which to look for this kind of news or knowledge. Yeah, it’s better to talk about knowledge when talk about learning.” (Don)

> "[The blog] is like — a current awareness tool almost; a current awareness tool that gives you pretension in someone's blogging… You are busy, you perhaps don't want to have time to sort of, read large academic journals every day. It's quite easy to get — like — by a source — a chunk of information which you can follow or prefer, you are interested in." (Jenny)

> "Mainly for friends' blogs, I read for pleasure, reading for fun. I'm not seeking for any information on it. What the only information I want to find out is whether my friends are doing alright… if you think I get certain information and that's called learning, then of course, reading a blog, as I said earlier, a blog would be somebody's opinions, or he has experienced, or he has learned, and he produced it, he published it with his personal views and with his personal words, and if you go and read it, and then you digest it, become your own knowledge, then that's learning. Doesn't really matter what the subject is." (Susan)

> "[learning is] to get some new ideas or some useful knowledge or special aspects. But I think in people's daily life, there are not so many new things. If they just describe things simply, you cannot really get ideas. So I don't think it's useful for learning." (May)

Secondly, gaining new skills or developing skills is another type of learning. Up to this point, many statements have been presented in previous discussions, such as using blogs to help second language use, IT skills, typing skills, writing skills, and so on. In a broad respect, developing skills by using blogs is like learning by doing and experiencing. Again, to provide one example, William's perspective was as follow:

> "…that's true. My written English, of course [improved]. I believe it's stronger than before. Anyway, because I believe when you practise more, then you will obtain more."

Thirdly, according to the participants, learning was also presented as a reflection on changing styles and insights. They reflected on how they changed and what they learned. Rose realised her writing had improved when she read back her blog after a break from blogging.

> "…I have been reading back, because you don't usually do that when you were writing, at least you don't read back your own thoughts often. I found that's really helpful, because at the time, I didn't think that I was writing very well and some of the things I wrote were quite personal, and I wasn't always comfortable about putting them as — in public. But by reading back, I found, — that sounds really stupid — I found that you read, and you can get a sense of the writer, because you were writing, because it was written what's the feeling, and I found sometimes I was anger with myself, or sometimes, I felt guilty or couldn't forgive myself for things I did for myself. I read back, I found the writer — the posts in the weblog — was someone I could forgive. So that helped me because I thought I've written that."

More significantly, 14 out of 48 participants clearly noted that they learned about themselves, which provided a sense that learning is an ongoing process that needs the learner's self-censorship and reflection. See a typical example as follows.

> "I've learned a bit about myself, I suppose. As I go back and check things, how my views and feelings changed on certain subjects, because sometimes I go back and I'm surprised that I've written that, otherwise I cannot remember that I've written it." (Scott)

Fourthly, another type of learning was shown as understanding and exploring with deeper interests and thoughts. For instance, as analysed before, Harry, who studied in English Literature and was interested in computer games, developed a better understanding of the whole game industry and various perspectives of viewing different phenomena happening in the gaming market area. Todd, a Masters student in psychology, was interested in Asian philosophy and wanted to be a good writer. He self-learned and researched the language by translating the old philosophical ideas and stories as well as interpreting the meaning behind them on his blog.

> "I've written some posts about the Asian and Indian philosophy at very beginning… So if I want to compare with other new ideas, or discuss something fresh, I like to go back to my original articles and see what I said about that before, to see whether my story was understandable, the flow, whether that becomes constant with my own beliefs. So it helps to improve my understanding of certain topics, if you wrote about them… Because as I said, something that I write, especially the words that I translated from sound scripts, and different philosophy ideas I discussed, I make sure that they are some credible things." (Todd)

Finally, creation and imagination reflect that blog use experience helps the user to create new meanings and ideas of the subject by connecting their previous knowledge. In light of the discussion in section 5.2.7 and 5.3.4, this point is related to "knowledge construction" and the analysis has displayed that students viewed learning as the outcome of knowledge construction rather than the process of it. It is useful to quote Wendy's understanding of learning. She held a negative attitude of blogging because of the contradiction between public and privacy. She said,

> "I suppose, for studying, you can use the Internet, because studying wouldn't mean a singular activity, whereas learning would apply either a singular activity or group learning, and it might involve a person who — with teaching — in order to learn… You can use the Internet first to study things, but you cannot learn anything through it. I think learning is the outcome of studying".

By discussion of the meaning of "learning" and their learning experience from using blogs, it found that the participants reflected on learning from different perspectives and standpoints, some are technique oriented and some are conscious oriented. From the benefits of using blogs, it found that blogs facilitate the user to form self-directed and self-organised learning styles.

6.4.2 Self-organised learning styles

"Self-organised learning styles" was emerged as a category based on analysing the perception of "learning" defined by the participants and their orientation of using blogs (section 4.6). By inducting the expression of the experience of using blogs, it implies the blog users learned skills which they had few chances to gain in the classroom in terms of their disciplines; they started thinking about themselves, how they changed and what they developed in growing; they started concerning different opinions, arguments, and phenomena happening in the world, according to their own preferred styles. The researcher then explains it further by two aspects: (1) different communication styles and (2) different learning approaches, and analyses the differences between bloggers and pure blog readers.

6.4.2.1 Bloggers' perceptions

Different learning styles are built on different communication styles or information conversion styles. Some bloggers preferred verbal expression (e.g., Daisy) because it reduces misunderstanding; some preferred an indirect way of informing people (e.g., Sally, Rose) because it clarifies personal ideas and avoids embarrassment or disputes with people who have different opinions; whereas some users preferred textual expression (e.g., Cliff) because it supplies communication, is personalised expression and has been archived for later checking back. Blogs thus provide a medium for them to exchange information according to their individual favourite styles. They become aware, realise, change, ponder or explore during the communication process. Some bloggers' statements are as follows.

> "I think I did learn things about my friend, because I think she wrote things that she wouldn't have said and that was very interesting. But in a way, I think she was using it in the same way that I was using it. She was using it as a distance technique in order to express herself better, and she was saying things that she found difficult to say to people. She wrote about her relationships, things like that, it was interesting, it was good, I think it does help you to know people better." (Rose)

> "…If you want to indirectly tell somebody that you are not happy, that [blogging] was a sort of way to do it. Generally if I have a problem with a friend, I wouldn't post a blog about it. If there is somebody who I know is going to look at my blogs, and they've hurt me in some way, I may just indirectly write a story and say that this is how you hurt me, please stop it. It's like — an indirect message of telling them to stop doing whatever they're doing, that makes me angry." (Sally)

> "I practise writing English on my blog. I got some foreign friends… I try to organise my words well and try to make my words easy to follow, try to express my ideas fluently and logically." (Cliff)

Moreover, different learning approaches reflected different self-organised learning styles. As revealed in the last section, there emerged five types of learning. Some bloggers acquired techniques or knowledge by doing, searching and writing (writing, information retrieval skills); some bloggers broadened views and increased their own understanding of the topic by comparing and observation; and some participants learnt through fun and relaxation because blogging is an alternative and flexible way of gaining information. For example, Bess felt blogging helped her regularly organise thoughts and reflect on what she learned.

> "If I have an essay or I'm working on something, I will write about it in my blog, even if it's not very interesting for people who are reading it. It's just to get out of my head and

> organise my thoughts. It's pretty much — my blog is to organise my thoughts online… I mean, some of my entries, people probably don't read, because it's seldom relevant to them." (Bess)

At the same time, bloggers affirmed their learning experience because of positive acceptance by readers. They gradually changed and developed their style. For instance, Frank, who initially recorded travelling experience, with more and more people reading and commenting, he realised that he had good writing style and cultivated deeper thoughts of his travelling experience.

> "When I realised that so many people read it, more people than just the people I sent the link to, kind of changed the way I wrote it, I think, because obviously I was aware that it wasn't just people I was writing to who were reading it… people like — email me back or put comments, and said that was quite good writing about travelling... and then I knew that was recording down, recording what I was doing I thought, rather than just travelling and just having a good time, and if something would happen, and then I would go and I can write about that or mention that. It added certain depth to the actual travelling experience. It's kind of reward to write about things, whereas I would never consider doing that before… there is, sort of, I think more confident about that… you are good at writing something that was interesting, otherwise people wouldn't want to read." (Frank)

Moreover, it must be stressed that information retrieval skills were emerged through analysing the participants' expressions about information searching. As Betty and Lucy mentioned below, blog users largely search online in terms of their needs, their own methods and their inquiries, and generally form a self-comfortable approach to reproduce online sources.

> "Within a group of people that you read their blogs often, they read your weblog, you kind of develop a style really… Also, I think each resource has different ways that can be searched and I think lot of weblogs they are — they can be really useful, but you have to search a lot more just within the one weblog to find what you might need, because even weblogs that have particular subject tend to go across the entire range of the subject, where you initially want to find one particular point." (Betty)

> "I just try to find the blogs suitable or sometimes try to find something related to the learning I learn here. I just type the key words and read their blogs… Search for the information by myself." (Lucy)

As shown in previous analysis, the statements positively supported that using blogs helped bloggers to develop professionalism, such as writing skills, language use, IT skills, interest-relevant skills. It helps them judge information credibility and issues online during the process of using blogs as information resources. It may help the blogger form his/her own learning style while experiencing blogging.

6.4.2.2 Pure blog readers' perceptions

Pure blog readers are different from bloggers by communication styles, as bloggers are likely to comment on each others blogs and reflect on interactions with people, whereas pure blog readers do not so often. They are more inclined to be a lurker on the web or use verbal expression, such as face to face conversations. They often learn things by reading widely and reflecting on different opinions. Sometimes, they thought that their comments should add value into the interaction and discussion on the blog, otherwise, it is not useful to comment. It is worthy of quoting Harry,

> "…you read all the discussion that has been quite fairly developed, and you see the arguments that you agree with, and then you read through these arguments and progress, you see how that argument is undermined. You sometimes get the feeling — well, if I present my argument there, it wouldn't be the correct one. So there is a small element of being disapproval with it… most of things are developed thoroughly without your interaction. I don't really feel if I can add anything really unique to the argument."

In the data, the experience of reading blogs reflected that pure blog readers largely used relaxation, observing and linking what they read to themselves as learning approaches. This may be affected by the blogger. For example, Lisa read blogs and at the same time improved her ability of using English.

> "If you are lucky, and you find people who write well and take care of the grammar, you learn new words; you actually launch your vocabulary. Your writing skills improve as well because they really do know how to write, and there are other people who comment on your grammar." (Lisa)

Compared with bloggers, blogs have fewer effects on pure blog readers' self-organised learning style formation. For example, using different information retrieval approaches, judging information credibility, or reacting to comments, contributed to a blogger to form his/her learning style, but not for pure blog readers exclusively. Rather, for pure blog readers, it happened in other online experience too. As noted in section 5.3.4, Ben felt that whatever the format of online resources, users were looking for updated and novel resources, which maybe gained from other channels. He further argued,

> "I would go on Times online or BBC or SKY sports news, because I know there are articles, they are already there. So they are almost bypass. I don't need for any — bypass — using a weblog, because I already have my habits for my classic information needs or my classic interests".

Back to the point of "Intellectual abilities", the data suggested that on one hand, a self-organised learning style is related to the user's awareness, reflection and desire of gaining new knowledge. On the other hand, through knowledge construction, they changed and developed their learning styles. It showed that interpersonal skills affect a formation of learning style because of individual preferred communication styles and approaches in using blogs. Furthermore, learning styles are formed during a relaxation process. The bloggers did not aim to learn by using blogs, but gradually found their own changes and their abilities improved in this process. Reading blogs contributes to pure blog readers' learning styles only when they reflected on what they read and linked back to their own needs. As a whole, it implies that using blogs was possible to help blog users develop their abilities to better understand the issues they were interested in, phenomenon they see, or perspectives they meet, as well as think more intelligently.

6.5 Knowledge sharing

6.5.1 Different perspectives on knowledge

When participants noted knowledge, they always linked it to learning. Knowledge sharing therefore embeds the participant's perception of learning. They also interchangeably used "information" and "knowledge". To them, in a broad respect, "knowledge sharing" is to exchange information between people, such as Tina said "… exchange ideas and … and be able to pass any idea". The concept of "knowledge" is not as clear as the meaning of "learning" identified by the informants. However, it still revealed the nature of "knowledge" from four aspects.

Firstly, knowledge and learning experience are personal and knowledge is an inseparable part of learning. In section 6.4.1, Susan's idea about learning has shown that learning has the meaning of absorbing knowledge and making that knowledge the person's own. Neil's reflection on reading blogs also provides evidence of it.

> "I mean the experts' blogs, they show what the experts' thinking in the financial world, because that's my subject. So I get what they think, and I think that's useful at least to build my knowledge base." (Neil)

Secondly, personal experience, awareness and views are forms of an individual's knowledge. For example, provided by Ruth: a lady wrote down her experience and feelings after an instrument exam, and other people followed that and talked about their respective experiences and opinions. Through reading the entry and commentary, she felt that people are sharing knowledge and she learned from other people's experience. Don illustrated that blogs "make it possible to increase knowledge that people are aware about something". Similarly, Alice felt that she gained knowledge from a blog:

> "I think it's very useful because she [the author of the blog] is a middle-age woman. So all the tips that she has, she keeps on posting in her blog. It is like — 20, 30 years tips from the mother, from the grandmother. So like — old tips. We are young people; we don't know any of the old tips. For me, I think it's good, because we need to look back in the past, to see the tradition, something like that… I think it is kind of knowledge after all."

Thirdly, knowledge is valuable and useful to the individual. A person's knowledge is not measurable but known by him/herself and only he/she is able to evaluate that knowledge. As Jack's statement:

> "… I think of humanity, a lot more kind of specialists' knowledge on different issues, which I wouldn't never had, if I haven't been interested in blogging… I think it helps me critically think about a fact, an opinion… and I think it can help in terms of knowledge, in terms of humanity facts, so the facts that you found out, which you wouldn't know otherwise…"

Fourthly, knowledge is gradually constructive. It was discussed in Chapter 5 that knowledge is constructed from using blogs for a long period of time. The data suggested that knowledge is not instantaneous and is not acquired without effort. It includes a process of developing understanding. As Don said, he reproduced the information he read and posted on his blog, and expressed,

> "I go back to that post, even though I've posted other stuff, and I changed the title, or I added some news that I knew later. So I try to increase the knowledge about that small subject. So that's why for example — it's not ready yet, sometimes it becomes ready after a while, I mean, it becomes the complete news after a while, because it's like — developing, discontinuous development...".

6.5.2 Tacit knowledge

Linking back to the concept of "tacit knowledge" discussed in Chapter 2, it can be seen that tacit knowledge is a type of knowledge which is hard to be codified, but it is possible to convert as long as the person appreciates it. By asking the questions, such as "How do you think express your feelings, experience, or opinions by blogging? Is it easy for you to express clearly?", it showed that 22 bloggers felt it was easy to express themselves, 4 bloggers said it depends on what they want to express, 5 bloggers indicated that it was hard because they often think about readers and what is appropriate to present in public, and 5 bloggers clearly noted that it was difficult because the thought is too complex to express (see some examples below, the participant used his/her native language to blog).

> "But I think it actually makes — I can sense the entry with the points, with like — clear opinions, with clear expressions, like — people can reflect the tone, or you can reflect a tone yourself. I think it's really difficult." (Kelly)

> "…sometimes you cannot find a word to describe your feelings… Sometimes the feeling is just too complex. I don't know how to describe." (Ellen)

> "I think it's sometimes hard for me to write down my thoughts, to use the right words for what I'm trying to say, sometimes I find that is hard, but I think actually using blogs, the technical aspect of it, I think that's easy." (Scott)

On the assumption that personal ideas, experiences, or thoughts are typical recognisable forms of tacit knowledge, the data in this study had shown that by blogging, tacit knowledge is largely conversed between bloggers and readers, for instance, Bob commented, "…there are many excellent bloggers who write blog only reasonably to show their knowledge. You can learn a lot from them". On the assumption that tacit knowledge is that people have unconsciously and do not realise, the above examples revealed that people have felt it. On the assumption that tacit knowledge is not codifiable nor transferred, the data also contended that tacit knowledge can be expressed in some context and has different degrees of difficulties in conversion. For example, Todd and Daisy said that expressing personal daily life is easy but writing down personal opinions clearly is hard; Elsa and Dora felt that writing down personal emotions or ideas is easy; whereas Kelly, Ellen and Scott noted difficulties to express themselves. All these denote that tacit knowledge exists as personal. That knowledge may be explicit for one person, but tacit for another person, that is, it is not explicitly and equally understandable by everyone and is not common to everyone.

6.5.3 What they have shared

Following investigating the "knowledge" in blogs, it emerged that knowledge sharing happens in relation to three clear factors: firstly, common ground (e.g., interest, experience, background, and language); secondly, great breadth of mind; and thirdly, changes.

Interest-relevant or experience-relevant knowledge is mostly shared, for instance, William described, "It's [blogging] helpful for improving my knowledge… it's not related to my research subject very much, but my interest". Don pointed out that he blogged in two languages to spread information, increase readability, and share with people widely. Knowledge sharing closely relates to people's attitudes to knowledge, and it needs voluntary, openness and open mind. According to Annie, "…when I know something, if I don't talk about it, I don't communicate it with other people, I cannot get more. By giving more, I can get more". In addition, knowledge sharing links to changes, that is, people felt that they learned new things and changed perspectives. As Jo indicated, "…it's always like sharing, and just exploring our own views. You can gain some knowledge from others, that's always good, for this kind of change."

In the data, 10 out of 37 bloggers felt that their blogs were useful for themselves but not providing information for others because those are personal matters and ideas; whereas 14 out of 37 bloggers agreed that their experience, ideas and interests on blogs are useful for readers because those are their lessons, what they know, or their opinions on what happened to them, and other people are able to borrow their ideas. Next, the researcher discusses what people shared through blogs based on the three major consequences of using blogs.

First and foremost, sharing was not the blogger's purpose of using blogs. They achieved satisfaction or consolation by both self-expression (e.g., personal daily matters, experience) and receiving comments. However, the personal experience and feelings were open to the public, it therefore had a chance to be read by those who had similar problems, opinions or interests. Further, the shared information was able to help the reader; then the reader might share their experience and help the blogger and vice versa. It can be seen the knowledge, not only the information was distributed, conveyed and lead to new uses. In a sense of self-therapy, this kind of sharing is important. In the next example, Nancy expressed how she shared experience and achieved benefits from peers' blogs.

> "I'm giving you an example. When I first at the university, I wrote a little bit about how I was feeling about, how nervous I was about... It's basically me with the advantages and disadvantages of coming university, and sharing that with other people. Because not only I wanted to share, I needed some voice of my concerns, I thought that maybe — have reflected on how other people's feelings about going to the university. Maybe they're a bit scared of all their mistakes, that sort of thing… if I'm sharing another life experience, I suppose, let people know that they are not the only person who is feeling in a certain way, undergoing a certain thing. I hope it's sort of, a thing that people can relate to… A few of my friends who are sort of higher up in the university, in the third year, — roughly the same subject I'm doing, I found their blogs are quite useful, because it gives me a few more clues as to the university life would be like… So I think they're very useful in that sense."

In addition, the blogger developed interpersonal skills during sharing individual-relevant information to friends, interests-relevant information (e.g., hobbies, academic information, business and products) to online friends or communities, or personal insights and interesting news (e.g., journey experience, social issues) to broad readers. A great deal of diverse information on blogs is contributed by a single blogger voluntarily. As Bess demonstrated that she could read various sources online.

> "…it's a daily outlet of information on the Internet. It can be so many different things, so many different blogs out there. Political blogs, news blogs, fashion blogs."

There is another sense that the blogger who is using blogs for community of interest is likely to share knowledge. This can be viewed from the analysis in earlier chapters. Here, the researcher added one point that the blogger who has a "teaching" trait is inclined to share knowledge. These types of bloggers are likely to teach people, raise social issues, propagate, and advocate telling truth. They put some sensitive topics or news on their blogs. They use blogs for calling people's attention, and want to provide more angles of view which are different from mainstream media. Don and Bob are typical examples. These two informants are male and international doctoral students. From their views, it implies they are more confident of expressing views online than undergraduate participants and they called on people to view the world from broader perspectives. The representative quotations are as follows.

> "You have your own voice. Maybe sometimes I want to teach people something from my major… It depends on the person's personality, if you want to always teach people, or you just want to write some information to share." (Bob, a doctoral student in Working Psychology subject)

> "This is a little contribution. So I think that just likes 20 visitors on my blog, 20 visitors on others. They make it possible to increase knowledge, that people are aware about something. We are not only just reading, but we are also writing. We are not journalists. We are thinkers. That's different… Actually [my blog] it's a collection about what I like,

> or sometimes what I dislike, or I want to make other people are aware about that." (Don, a doctoral student in Planning Research and Theory subject)

Furthermore, as a way of developing intellectual abilities, blogs provide opportunities for the blogger for self-development in light of their own needs. The obvious example is to practise writing, language use and expression. Similar to self-therapy, the blog users were not intent to use blogs for sharing their experience, but to improve their own abilities. Nevertheless, because the blogs were open and the reader could leave comments, it hence shared the blogger's knowledge. For example, Lynn, an undergraduate in Law and German subject, provided an example of how she shared useful information through her blog.

> "Give you an easy example. In law [subject], sometimes we use a lot of Latin, and I studied Latin, so I understand it. But a lot of people didn't, so sometimes I have a little bulletin coming up and blogging, say, 'oh, this Latin means this', or a little blog coming up about something that was particularly hard or a new case maybe… So quite often that happens on a blog. So I think, it can obviously — if it's used by the right people, if it comes from my credible source, such as the university, then I think, it can be very helpful."

Again, according to Harry's explanation, it indicated that blogs contributed to free online sources, but it greatly needs the user to collect and judge the shared information.

> "…you have to be able to have the time to go away and explore the aspects of that blog that you are interested in. But thanks to the amount of resources available online, sometimes it's nice to have someone who points to new sources. You would have gone up and found for yourself, and in that way, you have a wider use of information presented online, you are able to go to all sources, you even become better able to see the process of finding new sources and integrating them, so you are more independent, because you are more able to do it for yourself. So it enables me to find various different resources online."

Clearly, in this study, the researcher does not use the term "information sharing", rather "knowledge sharing". This is not to say that information is not shared. On the contrary, it shows that knowledge has largely presented on blogs as codified knowledge, that is, information. Tacit knowledge, which is reflected as experience, thoughts, perspectives, is also attempted to be expressed by the bloggers. Blogging to an extent provides a means of converting tacit knowledge, but it has different degrees of being explicit in terms of the blogger's knowledge and the reader's knowledge.

6.6 Narcissism and knowledge sharing

Following the last section, knowledge sharing does not simply mean given and taken or exchanged information, rather in this study, it interestingly occurred that egoism of the blogger facilitates knowledge conversion as the blogger voluntarily publishes it to the public. According to Shaver (2002), "Egoism" may refer to any of these connotations: (1) psychological egoism (the individual is motivated by self-interest), (2) ethical egoism (the individual ought to do what is in his/her self-interest), (3) rational egoism (the belief that it is rational to act in one's self-interest), (4) solipsism (the belief that only the experiences of one's self can be verified), or (5) egotism (an exaggerated sense of self-importance, which include narcissism and antisocial behaviour). The analysis in this study suggested that "egoism" has the first and the fifth meanings, that is, the participants were motivated by their self-interest of using blogs and had a big sense of self-importance reflected from their experiences. Hence, the researcher uses "egoism" and "narcissism" interchangeably to refer to it.

The data showed that three participants (Jenny, Kent, and Bess) used "narcissism" to describe the feeling of blogging, two participants (Kelly and Jack) used "egoism" to describe themselves, one participant (Hugh) used "egotism" and one participant (Lauren) used "self-indulgent" to express what they thought about a blogger who writes personal matters, and six participants (Antony, Judy, Cliff, Nancy, Don and Todd) clearly employed "addict" to depict how enjoyable blogging was. There is a sense that pure blog readers have different views of blogging behaviour from bloggers' views. In a sense of self-therapy and blogging for self, especially about writing personal matters, bloggers felt that blogging is for expressing, getting help, sharing personal stories or assuring self ideas and they felt that it is understandable and interesting to read; whereas pure blog readers felt that it is putting more useless information about someone online (e.g., Ruth), showing off, a waste of time (e.g., Jenny), or is awkward to read sometimes (e.g., Wendy). In a sense of blogging for providing information (e.g., social topics, products information) for readers, both bloggers and pure blog readers felt that it is sharing, learning resources and expanding views. Therefore, it implies that the reader may not understand the blogger's intention of blogging, especially when it is for themselves, and gaining a therapeutic and satisfactory feeling in blogging. However, according to Kent's statement below, it disclosed that in a social setting, this "egoism" or "narcissism" in blogging behaviour helps to share knowledge.

> "I think there is an element of narcissism or something. It's about getting your opinions out there — it's the same of writing mine. It was 22:00pm, I was been online and I looked that, 'oh, looked at this great quote. Oh, it's great, and I found something to share with the world!' and I think a part of sharing is sort of narcissism. You check your things, how many people look at my website today. It's a nice feeling."

Looking into the data further, narcissism is neither reflected as psychological disorder or disease sense, nor showed that the bloggers felt that they are extremely important or much better than other people. Rather, it is a developing satisfied feeling that they can do and become able to do something. It helps to enhance their egos. Blogging is an action that bloggers contribute voluntarily; it thus manifests a means of communicating with people, a desire of developing interest-related abilities, and an approach to dealing with personal problems.

It follows that the study showed that blogging encourages the user, as a person, to present ego, face up to the problem, regularly express his/her insights, censor him/herself, and be open to their experience. Psychologically, it will benefit his/her mental health and build his/her confidence based on their personal learning. On the other hand, this action, which has been regarded as “egoism” or “narcissism”, creates opportunities for communication, exchanging thoughts, and better understanding each other, and further prompts knowledge explicitness and conversion.

6.7 Constraints of using blogs in formal learning

In light of the indication earlier, the participants are likely to blog for a non-academic or non-study purpose. The data showed that half of the participants had a positive attitude to the idea of using blogs in HE; 13 participants had an uncertain and dubious attitude; and 8 participants explicitly disapproved of using blogs in education. This is relevant to their self-defined meaning of “learning” and blog use experience. According to their expression, learning experience has been reflected through gaining new ideas, technologies and skills, learning about themselves, and understanding people, issues and the world. Apart from Tina who was a beginner of a module blog introduced by a lecturer, other participants used social blog services outside of education. Consequently, by analysing the data, four grand elements were emerged as constraints on blog usage in formal learning.

Firstly, owing to the blog being born as a social medium, most participants mentioned that they become aware of blogs by friends’ recommendation or advertisement rather than education. This thereby became “first impressions leave the most lasting”. The users regarded blogs as a social communication or medium tool rather than an educational tool or system. Typically, as William and Don inquired below, what is the meaning of using blogs in HE? A part of the participants who held a suspicious view felt that HE has its own system which is for educational purposes, whereas blogs are used for social purposes. For them, education is associated to formal, academic-standard, and preciseness; whereas social software links to informal, social-standard and mobility. They suggested the educational tool can borrow certain functions from blogs, but it is neither appropriate of directly using educational tools for informal and social activities, nor using social software for formal learning.

> “…in higher education, you have your own systems, of course online systems. I think WebCT is one of them. Why do you want to use blogs as an education communication system? There is one kind of blog, which is an extension of Forum actually. I know there is this kind of blog, because many people can register as a publisher, and I think it’s like Forum or BBS, because for example, students in the class, they can all register as a user for this blog system, and they can all put everything they know on it. The difference is that it lacks entries, because in BBS, you only have one or two sentences, then finish; but if you put something really meaningful, it would be a bit lengthy…” (William)

> “No, I don’t think so. In a sense, they can be a waste of your time. I mean, there are systems for education, similar to blogs. But there are also general, for example, let’s say the system like — Moodle, it’s a kind of e-learning system — inside it’s a kind of

> Forum, this can be similar to a blog, but it's inside the system. If you are talking about Blogger, it's free, open, doesn't work for education, unless we are studying blogs. It's learning the object, but using that object for learning about other things, I think it's a big misleading, because it can be useful to spread what people are really learn. It's an instrument to replace media. I mean, can we learn through television? It depends on what we watch. We can learn through the Internet, but the blog is a kind of instrument that does not have this goal of our education. It's a goal maybe — spread in education, but it's not a goal of education." (Don)

Secondly, back to the point that blogs are in non-academic use and the issues of using blogs as information sources, this brings about the question of the quality of blogs. From the viewpoints of the participants who had a suspicious attitude, education is formal and relates to authority, high quality and reliable information, while information on blogs are not as guaranteed as formal educational sources. They showed a conflicted view: on one hand, blogs have its place in lifelong and informal learning because it helps them indirectly reflect on their intellectual abilities in social life; on the other hand, they were concerned that formal education does not accept blogs, or will lose its high quality standard in a study or educational achievement. They inquired who will contribute to the blog, who guarantees the accuracy and reliability of the information, how to avoid its issues in sharing information without losing the blog's advantages, open the educational blog to the public, the university, or the class only. It hence emerged the role of moderation in using blogs in HE. It needs different degrees of moderation on different use orientations and different levels of balancing between informal and formal.

To a broad extent, it has been discussed that blogs can be a facilitator of self-therapy. If HE students use blogs in this sense, then it should allow the blogger to be anonymous, write informally and encourage peers to support each other. The students can publish personal experiences, stories, insights and comments. It may be open to the university so that peers can read and contribute to it. It also needs lecturers and educators to provide care, advice, encouragement as well as control unexpected debates and impolite expressions. For example, as Susan mentioned,

> "I think for self-study, or if you want to go and look for information, that would be ok. But if you want to really use it as a textbook or as a published journal, or to learn in higher education, it's not up to that level yet. It's like — if you read a textbook in the classroom, or you get a copy from a certain published journal, then that's some academic work, and something you look up to, something you can learn from. But for a weblog, in my opinion, it's still not that academic. Sometimes, it requires fact checking, because it's based on somebody's personal point of view, you don't know whether he said is right or wrong. You probably need to look for other websites, other information, to confirm whether this blog is right. So I just don't think, — for reference or for another aim to your study, that might be ok, — but not in class, I just don't think it's ok in class."

If using a blog for encouraging students to improve interpersonal skills, it should allow the blog to be open to the public. It does not need much moderation to a broad extent. It can be used to enhance relationships between teachers and students according to Carol's expression. On the contrary, a few participants clearly emphasised that it is inappropriate that a teacher develop his/her relationship with students through publishing a personal blog (see Lynn's statement below). There were no further data in this study show that how teachers could use their blogs to develop relationships with students as it goes beyond this research topic. In addition, blogs can be used to meet new people in the university, as Ben suggested, or in distance learning, mentioned by Jenny.

> "I think if it's an informal way, then students maybe, — they will feel better that they are using it, because it's informal and they could have a better relationship with the lecturer. It's not like — a lecturer and a student, but like — two people who are on the same level. It's not like — the lecturer is up higher, and the student is down below. It's like — normal people." (Carol)

> "…if a teacher writes about a blog about something very personal, you know they teach you, and it will change your relationship with the teacher. It's almost like — when teachers try to become friends with their students. But it's teachers and students, not friends. I think it's a very important distinction. So I think if they had a blog and wrote about their personal feelings and had all their personal details, I think it will be quite inappropriate. It's wrong. It's just — for me, could be wrong." (Lynn)

> "It would help to build a much better community. When you are out, you see people, 'oh, that's the person in the weblog' and you are more inclined to talk to each other… I think like — a weblog, everyone puts their photos and a little about themselves. It's especially in a small environment, like — your class or your hall, you can easily see, oh, that person seems, seems quite — has similar interests to me, I might talk to them. It almost does a bit ground work for you." (Ben)

> "If I was studying at distance, it might be used for me to blog about my progress, and then if I email them and say that I have a problem, so they can look at that; and there is another way that you can read students' blogs and see if they're all like — in the same stage, if everyone has in trouble with something, and then if they haven't in trouble, you won't too worry." (Jenny)

If using a blog for encouraging students to develop intellectual abilities, it needs experts, professionals and lecturers to share suggestions, experience, accurate and reliable resources. It can be used as a question and answer style, or a space for practising writing. It also needs the lecturers to give feedback when students have problems or contribute to a discussion on the blog, yet, it may adopt a fairly informal form. It can be used to help students; to increase awareness of social issues or perspectives in their subject areas, to form a self-organised learning and thinking style, to organise personal experience and knowledge rather than compulsive memory or conduct. A couple of considerable statements are as follows.

> "…if it would be used in education, it should stay informal, because I probably wouldn't do it if it's formal. If it was like — a class, you have to do this, and you have to do in this way, or you English has to be perfect and you are not allowed having bad grammar in it, it wouldn't be interesting. I was thinking if it was something available, like — freely as it is, and informally, but people are aware that it was for education, and you can

> share ideas. Like at the university level, if they can say there is blog, you know, it's helpful for you to communicate your ideas and you can get ideas, and just make people aware that it's there rather than say you have to do it now." (Kelly)

> "…they have limited education use really. I mean, it's an interesting way to transmit information, very quick, updating way, like — current awareness, sort of situation. But beyond that, not really sure. Using it as a current awareness tool probably would be the best way in education." (Judy)

> "Well, it depends on what they are learning. I think for a subject, like mine, I don't know that a weblog will be a particularly the best way of providing information. I think ordinary websites are better, because it's not constantly changed information really. But for other subjects, I suppose politics could use weblogs." (Daisy, Mathematics)

> "…You could have links to relevant articles, you could have comments from the expert; a professor could have a blog about what articles he is reading currently, and what he thinks about them. You know, all kinds of things are possible with the blog, actually. Or if a professor was publishing a new book, and you can let people know that book being published, and he can say, I recommend you to read this article — that article, the website was very useful, or it can be a good source of reference. But also he can write his own thoughts. It's really a good way to use in higher education." (Rock)

Thirdly, it showed that the benefits of using blogs to an individual will not be seen in the short term, but a longer period of time (see an example below). Thereby, it displayed that using blogs in class has less obvious outcomes than a tutorial or a group discussion in classroom. It is a long term reflection and affects the student as a whole person rather than he/she become knowing a technology at that moment. It may help students to learn how to learn through censoring their own experience.

> "I think also it seems, like — be more suited for kind of longer term, kind of education or something like that. I suppose say — for those modules you're taking over the whole year, which was discussing a certain issue, then weblog could be probably useful in terms of communicating what you currently think about it. If it is like — a short term, like — a 3 weeks project, you use blog, I suppose it wouldn't be useful from the point of view of kind of expressing, and all sorts of different opinions what was happening or writing something… I know from my blogging, if someone reads a month, or like 6 months, they will get more balance for you… if it's a long term project, or long-term thing, that's probably more useful than it was written today, or blog about this, because my experience is what you write, pouring out how you feel, and what mood are you in, things like that. I suppose it could be useful, useful kind of if you are in a lab every day, and you want to keep a diary of it, and your supervisor wants to see where to check what you up to it, see what you're thinking, and that would be very useful action, I suppose. I suppose if that was research, then that might be sensitive, so it can be public, but I suppose the version of that blog can be used." (Jack)

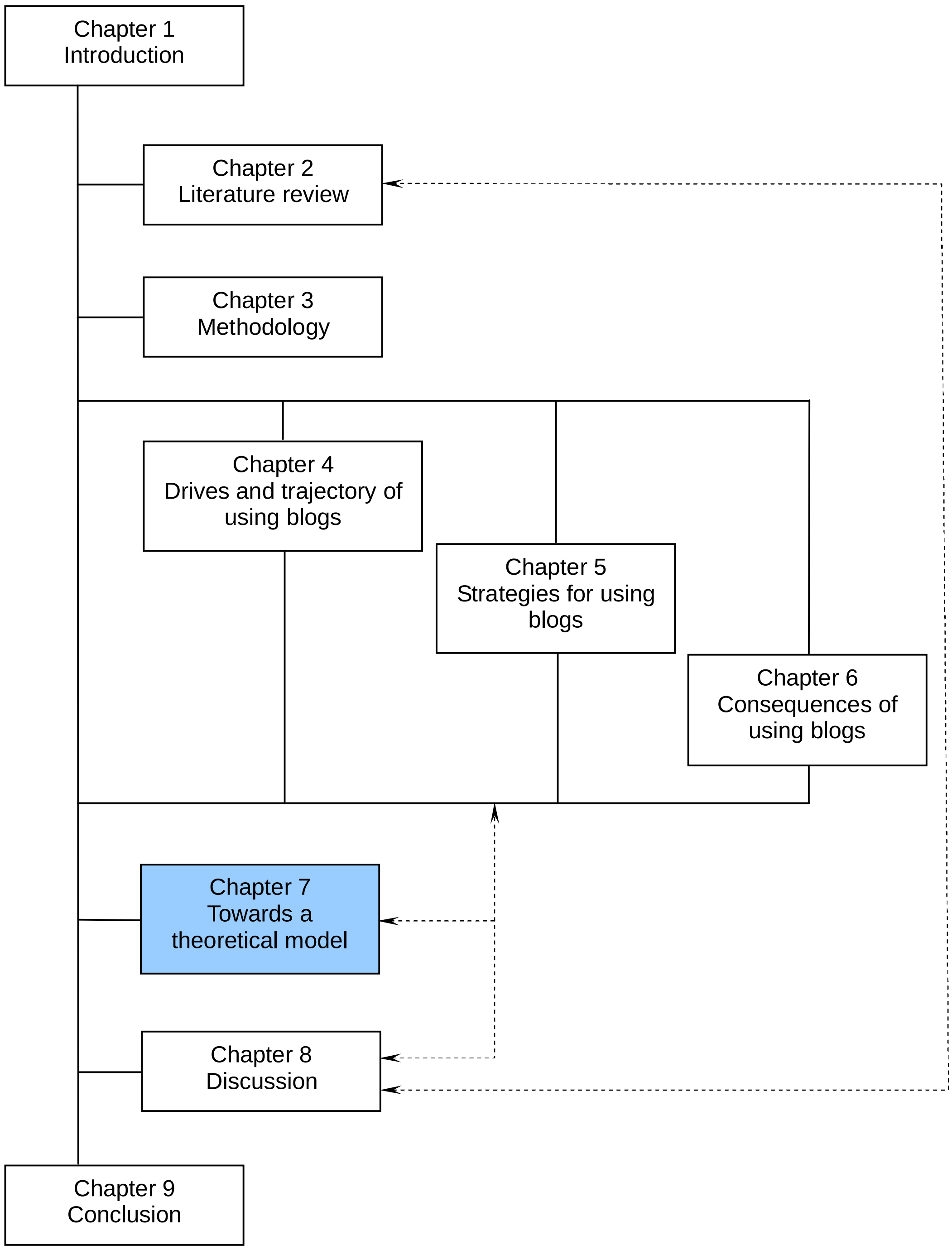
Lastly, but not least, from observing the sampling, it was analysed that the HE student is a specific group of people in digital generations, who have ambivalent feelings of either being unsure of their professional knowledge or rapidly constructing their knowledge. They are gaining new technologies, ideas, and knowledge in the university, but they have not finished their education yet, which makes them feel that they are not professional enough in an area. Because their knowledge and perspectives are in a forming and consolidating phase, many of them do not feel confident to present or speak out their insights. They doubt their own knowledge and even what they have known. Hence, this kind of non-confidence becomes a barrier to open their views and thoughts to others whether using blogs or other online technologies. Furthermore, to a broad extent, it may hinder knowledge sharing. Up to this point, Harry is a typical example.

> "I don't think I am in the position at the moment to write the kind of weblog that I would read myself, because my experiences are not unique enough really. They shouldn't really been presented to a large audience, because there is nothing at all that's inspiring there. But if I get into a position where I can present information or give them an opinion about things which people are interested in, that's something I would consider. Because as anything you are really interested in, I suppose you make the time for something like this." (Harry)

Overall, it is difficult to use a blog to cover all three facilitators (Self-therapy, Interpersonal skills and Intellectual abilities) and four use orientations (for self, for-community of interest, reflective use, and social use). It suggests the educator decide in which aspect they would like to facilitate students. It calls the educator to consider the foremost purpose of using blogs for benefiting students as a whole person and keep a fairly flexible and informal moderation when use it.

6.8 Summary

This chapter discussed the findings that relates to the nature of using blogs. From the perception of the participants, it identified that Self-therapy has a prime role in using blogs. From six perspectives (1) going through personal problems over a particular time, (2) from immature to mature, (3) personal traits, (4) gender-relevant emotional balance solution, (5) relaxing brain, and (6) regularly thinking style, it showed that blogs help the students' mental health positively. Meanwhile, it explained the vital role of interaction in supporting the development of interpersonal skills and intellectual abilities. It stressed the relationship between interpersonal skills development and blogger-centred communities forming. In addition, by discussing five types of learning perception, it explained the positive role of blogs in generating self-organised learning styles and further developing intellectual skills. By discussing four factors of knowledge, it analysed that tacit knowledge is appreciable by the blogger; it is conversed but depended on the individual's knowledge. It emerged that there is a narcissism sense of bloggers, and the blogger's narcissism is moderate and provides opportunities of facilitating knowledge sharing. Then, this chapter ends with an analysis of the limits of using blogs in HE and some suggested ways by the participants.


Chapter 1
Introduction
Chapter 2
Literature review
Chapter 3
Methodology
Chapter 4
Drives and trajectory of using blogs
Chapter 5
Strategies for using blogs
Chapter 6
Consequences of using blogs
Chapter 7
Towards a theoretical model
Chapter 8
Discussion
Chapter 9
Conclusion

CHAPTER 7

TOWARDS A THEORETICAL MODEL

> *"All rules for study are summed up in this one: learn only in order to create." – Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854)*

7.1 Introduction

This short chapter will reflect on a holistic theoretical model as a finding of this study. As Strauss and Corbin (1998: 15) recommended that a theory is,

> "A set of well-developed concepts related through statements of relationship, which together constitute an integrated framework that can be used to explain or predict phenomena".

The major concepts and their relationships have been analysed in previous chapters. The theory emerged in this study then is integrated as a whole. The researcher will explain its generation process and summarise a theory storyline.

7.2 Integrating theoretical model

A theoretical model is shown in Figure 7.1. According to Chapter 4, the conditions that underlie the development of strategies of using blogs include: intrinsic incentives and extrinsic incentives. Intrinsic incentives include (1) desire of being visible (2) anxiety of being visible (3) writing habit. Extrinsic incentives include (1) following social trend, (2) preventing unwanted readers, (3) breaking away from social taboos, (4) reducing geographic distance and (5) effects on people. Evolving from Strauss and Corbin's (1998) framework and their techniques of labelling conditions (see their suggestions below), the researcher identified casual conditions, intervening conditions, and contextual conditions.

> "Labels placed on conditions such as *causal, intervening,* and *contextual* are ways of trying to sort out some of the complex relationships among conditions and their subsequent relation to actions/interactions. *Causal conditions* usually represent sets of events or happenings that influence phenomena… *Intervening conditions* are those that mitigate or otherwise alter the impact of causal conditions on phenomena… *Contextual conditions* are the specific sets of conditions (patterns of conditions) that intersect dimensionally at this time and place to create the set of circumstances or problems to

which persons respond through actions/interactions." (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 131-132)

The causal conditions include (1) desire of being visible (2) anxiety of being visible (3) writing habit (4) social trend (5) social taboos, which influence the blog use orientations and strategies. Intervening conditions consists of (1) preventing unwanted readers (2) geographic distance, and (3) effects on people, which affect the causal conditions and further to influence the blog use orientations and strategies. Contextual conditions refer to the pattern of conditions which have dimensions: personal use vs. community of interest use orientation; and social use and reflective use orientation. Those conditions interpret the context and drives of using blogs. As Strauss and Corbin (1998) mentioned, identifying and listing the conditions is not the main task. What is important is that it provides the researcher a way of focusing on the interweaving of conditions leading to the phenomena that the blog user is responding to through some form of action/interaction, with some sort of consequences.

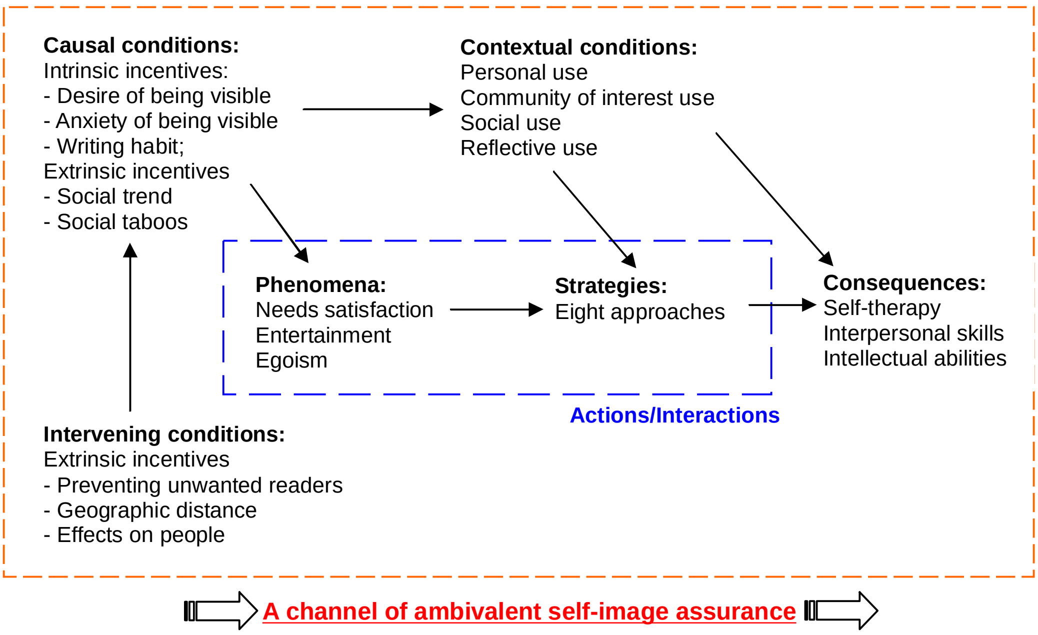


Figure 7.1 A theoretical model of using blogs in facilitating learning and knowledge sharing

The blog users take different strategic actions/interactions to resolve a situation and in so doing shape the phenomenon in some way. There are eight elementary strategic actions/interactions (1) Relaxation (2) Self-liberating (3) Online identity (4) Memories (5) Blogs as information resources (6) Maintaining/Expansion of relationships (7) Professional development and (8) Knowledge construction being analysed in Chapter 5. These strategies contain what goes on among individuals and groups (bloggers/pure blog readers) in their blog use experience.

The tactics used by the participants were not without consequences. Again, in terms of Strauss and Corbin (1998: 134), the consequences "may be visible to self but not to others … may be immediate or cumulative, reversible or not, foreseen or unforeseen". In Chapter 6, it analysed three occurred consequences: (1) Interpersonal skills development (2) Blogger-centred community (3) Self-organised learning styles, and their relationships. Afterwards, the three concepts with those tactics were abstracted into higher level core concepts (1) Self-therapy (2) Interpersonal skills, and (3) Intellectual abilities, which implies why HE students use blogs.

Aiming for discovering the central category and integrating the concepts, the researcher adopted the technique of writing a storyline and six criteria for choosing a central category in terms of Strauss and Corbin's (1998: 147) suggestions:

1. It must be central; that is, all other major categories can be related to it.
2. It must appear frequently in the data. This means that within all or almost all cases, there are indicators pointing to that concept.
3. The explanation that evolves by relating the categories is logical and consistent. There is no forcing of data.
4. The name or phrase used to describe the central category should be sufficiently abstract that it can be used to do research in other substantive areas, leading to the development of a more general theory.
5. As the concept is refined analytically through integration with other concepts, the theory grows in depth and explanatory power.
6. The concept is able to explain variation as well as the main point made by the data; that is, when conditions vary, the explanation still holds, although the way in which a phenomenon is expressed might look somewhat different. One also should be able to explain contradictory or alternative cases in terms of that central idea.

The researcher identified a central category that has been condensed into HE students' blog use experience as "a channel of ambivalent self-image assurance" to conceptualise the essence of research findings. It will be explained in the next section.

7.3 A theory storyline

As presented in Chapter 3, in a GT study, the researcher needs to look into the data by constant comparison, set up hypotheses, and analyse the variations of the concepts by asking and investigating what, who, when, where, how, and with what results based on the hypotheses. For example, the typical questions cover: what are the major categories for understanding the consequences of the core category? What is the central phenomenon describing the nature of a major category in HE students? How does the phenomenon proceed, with what variability and what effects in both micro and macro environments from the participant's perspectives? The researcher finally generated a theory storyline of the studied phenomenon, that is, the phenomenon of using blogs by students reflects an ambivalent process of assuring self-image. It is an intertwined process of learning and knowledge sharing.

As mentioned before, many participants had tried blogs and a few of them gave up blogging but still kept reading blogs. The primary reasons for stopping blogging include: (1) short time blogging for memory, repository, dealing with personal problems, and maintaining relationships; (2) being uncomfortable of being searchable of their blogs as well as anxiety of affecting people (themselves, family or who they noted on the blog). These elements do not only simply reflect a blogger's decision of blogging or not, but imply the blogger's ambivalent experience of knowing if he/she is truly comfort with opening individual thoughts and information to the public standing on his/her needs.

In general, they often start blogging through friends' introduction or searching online. Some of them mentioned that everyone has a blog which manifests that there is a trend of using blogs as a channel of connecting an individual with a group of people. For most of them, it is an easy way of keeping in touch with friends or family. It is to maintain interpersonal connections. Also, some participants wanted to present their opinions and develop their abilities, such as writing, expressing self, using their own experience to influence others. Through blogging, they take a self-pace-controlled action. They can share interests, experience, and stories to people. They feel that people may be interested in reading; they feel they are contributing to something for the society, for the world, for those people who have similar interests or in a similar situation. Blogging makes it possible to build online connections and distribute information. Therefore, bloggers assure their roles that they preferred to play.

For pure blog readers, they do not have experience of maintaining a blog. Basically, they use blogs for acquiring information. Some of them read friends' blogs for maintaining relationships. It is clear that blogs are information sources for them. Taking bloggers and pure blog readers as a whole, the information that they read includes: hobby-related information (e.g., game, cooking, gossip); people's life (e.g., largely friends, people who inspire them; people who are mind-liked or have similar experiences); relevant to knowledge and skills (e.g., IT, professional experience); and social issues (e.g., countries, politics, and society). The information to a broad extent supports the benefits to them: self-therapy, interpersonal and intellectual development.

It can be seen that in a micro environment, HE students realise that the blog provides a space that they can use for individual purposes. Most of them find that it is a personal place for venting out moods, opinions, and feelings. They are able to publish what they want with little limitation. One benefit of the blog pertains to the students' mental health. HE students, who are largely between traditional-age 18 to 22, are adults in a legal sense but not as mature as mature students yet. Many of them, especially female students, do not want to talk personal problems with parents, friends in real life, a psychiatrist face-to-face due to: they do not want to trouble people; feel embarrassment; or feel their certain understandings or thoughts may affect their real life and other people's impression about them. They find a place where they are able to have a private talk with "close friends" or "trusted people". A more important point is that they feel self-liberation. Sometimes, they receive comments from people, which make them realise that there are people who are similar to them, having difficulties, in similar situations, understanding them, or having common opinions. They feel that people listen and care of them. Furthermore, they feel that they are not the only person who is in a certain situation. Blogging consequently becomes a way of sorting out personal problems.

In addition, because most of the HE students blog for a non-academic purpose, they do not link blogs into their study, rather they use it for being away from study. It is a way of relaxation and reducing pressure. Through sorting out their problems on blogs, bloggers start to meet people, make friends, expand online relationships, and regularly reflect on themselves. Blogging becomes a habit. In this process, they assure themselves and gain help from either self-expressions or other people's suggestions. Self-therapy hence emerges as a psychological approach and benefits to HE students.

Also, in a micro environment, HE students realise that the blog is a tool that they can use to keep in touch with people. They can inform people what is going on in their life as well as reduce feelings of isolation because of geographic distance. Some of them open the blog to a group of people to maintain the existent relationships; some of them open the blog to a community and the public to share information or interests; and some of them open the blog to the public to raise social issues or contribute to social discussions. It thus provides the possibility to meet new people who are like-minded, with similar interests and views, and further brings about an expansion of social connections. A more significant result is the students gradually feel that they belong to a big social community and they are adding value to the community. This helps the students to build confidence in interpersonal relationships and develop interpersonal skills because they feel that their contributions are being affirmed in the interaction through blogs.

Meanwhile, for most bloggers, apart from the interpersonal connection and self-therapy, they realise that the blog is a place where they can practise writing, improve a second language, and learn new technologies. In a way, to maintain a blog, the students need to type down their thoughts regularly, search and publish new information, and try new technologies on the blog. At the same time, there are chances that people read their blogs and give them feedback, that is, freely public reviewed. They may receive encouragement, suggestions, or arguments; even sometimes they may meet professional, experts or someone whom they admire. These make them become more aware of the purpose of using blogs and reflect on how they will use blogs to benefit themselves. As a result, after one year blogging or longer, they feel it becomes easy to express themselves logically and clearly. They practise technical skills that they probably would not have chance to practise or develop, in particular, to those students in certain subjects: Dentistry, English literature, Mathematics, and so on. In addition, as the blog has archived entries, the users can read back and see their own changes. This helps them to learn about themselves and also people; gradually it helps them build confidence of their own abilities. They feel the accumulation of interest-relevant, subject-relevant, and technique-relevant knowledge. For the pure blog readers, they have specific purposes of reading blogs. They read blogs for entertainment as well as developing their interests or professional knowledge. Usually, they do not use blogs for self-therapy. Undoubtedly, the reading experience becomes a part of knowledge construction and a way of learning. Intellectual skills therefore emerged as a major benefit of using blogs.

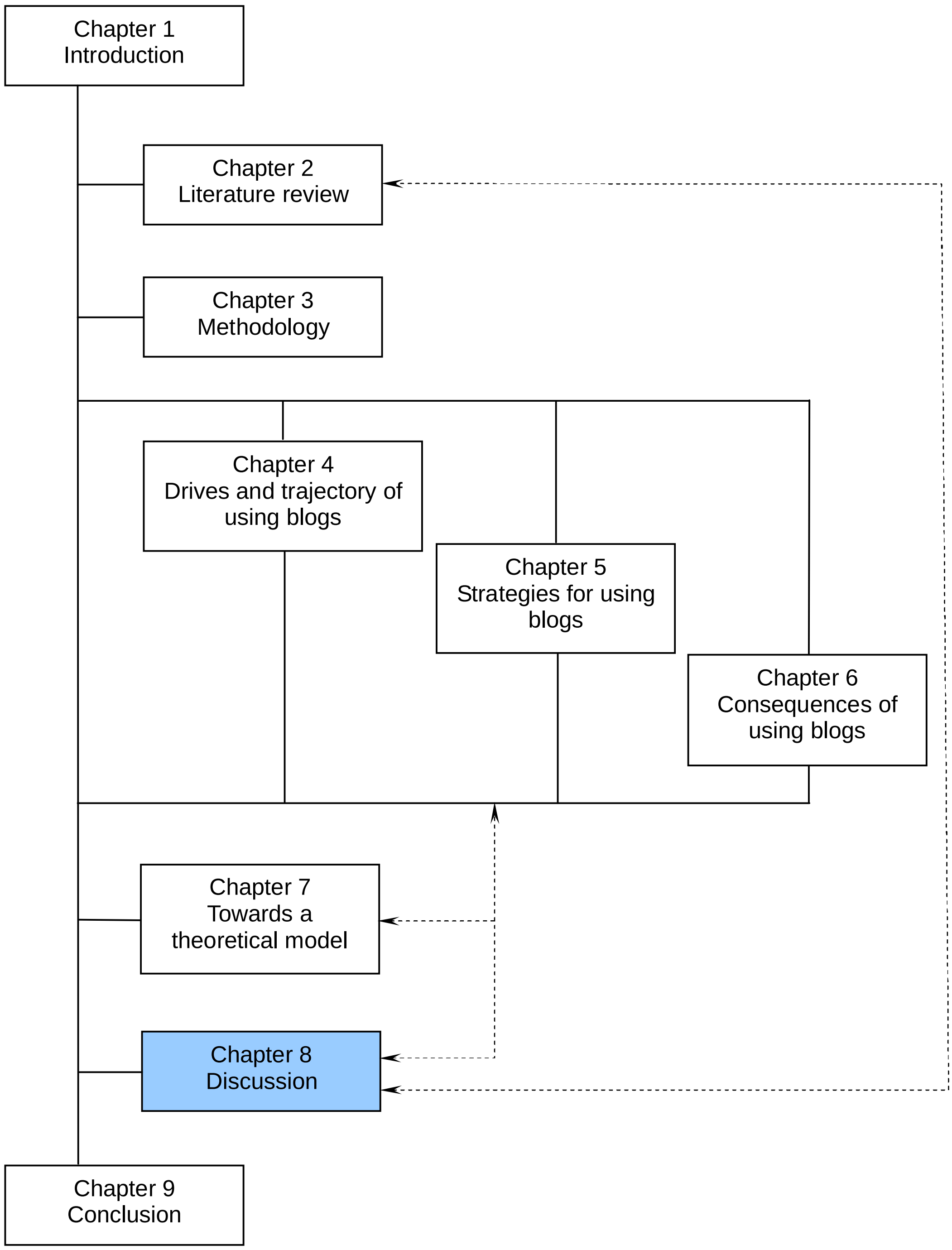
In a macro environment, it needs to stress that the attributes of the blog such as interaction possibility, individualisation, and convenient accessibility and operability are inevitable effects to support its usage in both micro and macro environments from the participant's perspectives. Most bloggers who have more than one year experience are likely to continue to blog. For them, it is a way of assuring themselves. They can get the assuring feelings from other means, such as community, forum, teamwork, etc. However, it shows that blogs provide an easy possibility of seeing "who they are", "what they are good at" and a combination of personalisation and being affirmed "true-self" in social connections. This is a useful inspiration in their personal development.

All in all, blogging can be a short term approach of sorting out personal problems or being a repository. Also, it can be a long term habit that interferes with the blogger's life. It provides a way of keeping information, maintaining and expanding connections as well as facilitates a style of thinking and reflecting on the person him/herself on a daily basis.

Blogging is not only an action on the Internet and in a virtual world, but also makes people find a way of gradually seeing the "multiple" and "flexible" self. Revisiting the data, for example, some students expressed "get into a habit" (e.g., Cliff), "have a lot of freedom and independence with it" (e.g., Nancy), "quite obsessed" (e.g., Lynn), "to make time for it [blogging]" (e.g., Daisy), "In fact, I quitted blogging, but I came back… I just like pressing the 'publish' button, I just want to keep doing it again and again" (e.g., Todd), and "is very easy to get sucked in a lot of it" (e.g., Dora), which reflected their self-complacency to blogging. Some students used auto-criticised words like "egotistical", "stupid" (e.g., Jack), "narcissism" (e.g., Kent), "addictive" (e.g., Antony) to describe the enjoyment of blogging; and other students said, "I would like to check my blog every day", "especially, during the night, I would like to think about what I should write down for today…" (e.g., William), "I think it's worthy", "you can reflect on your own thoughts" (e.g., Kelly), "It's more helpful for me personally; it's a connection to home for me, which is more helpful for my mental health to have a connection to home." (e.g., Barbara), and "I think it just keeps your mind active and gets your thinking [clear]." (e.g., Bess), which reflected self-censorship of being valuable for themselves. All these examples do not refer to blogging, as an action, is seductive, but imply that the process of using blogs to satisfy the discovery of "true-self" is seductive. Therefore, in general, it denotes that the student is on his/her way of learning, changing, and being him/herself, which has been proposed by Carl Rogers since 1969 (Rogers, 1969).

7.4 Summary

Drawing on the discussion in this chapter, an integrated theoretical model of using blogs was illustrated. It presented the key ideas about the elements: what (drives), how (contextual conditions, strategies), and why (consequences) in using blogs. Also, by using the technique of generating a theory storyline, it discussed the findings as a whole. Afterwards, the researcher will revisit the literature and link the findings in this study to the most relevant existent theories in the next chapter.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CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION

"We must learn to see the world anew." – Albert Einstein (1879-1955)

8.1 Introduction

This chapter revisits the literature concerning the use and usefulness of blogs in facilitating learning and knowledge sharing. Combining with the emerged theory, it presents the original contribution to existing literature in the study area; it shows the significance of the emergent findings by investigating the blogging phenomenon; also, it discusses shortcomings while conducting the research and recommends future studies on the current topic.

8.2 Contribution to knowledge

This research is intended to be a contribution to the ongoing effort to understand students' behaviours of using online information and improving HE by investigating the blog phenomenon. There are many shades of grey between learning and knowledge sharing at an individual level. This study sheds light on the relationships by generating a theory to interpret the use and usefulness of blogs in facilitating learning and knowledge sharing. The researcher will discuss the contributions from five aspects: (1) studies into motivations for using blogs (2) students' conceptions of learning (3) the most relevant learning theories emerged from this exploratory study (4) knowledge sharing in using blogs, and (5) narcissism theory as an emerged area in explaining the research topic.

8.2.1 Motivations for using blogs

A growing body of literature has investigated why people blog. From the results of these studies, people attempt to better understand human's learning from behaviourists', cognitivists', or constructivists' perspectives. The published studies on motives for blogging can be concluded into 20 points as follows:

- A good career move (Sauers, 2006);
- A hope for blogging to make us better people (Turgeon, 2004);
- Convenience (Kaye, 2005);

- Self-representation and leaving traces (Efimova, 2004);
- To achieve personal fulfilment (Kaye, 2005);
- To capture, articulate and organise ideas through writing (Efimova, 2004; Nardi *et al.*, 2004b);
- To form and connect community (Ali-Hasan and Adamic, 2007; Graham, 2002; Kaye, 2005; Nardi *et al.*, 2004b);
- To document one's life (Koh *et al.*, 2005; Nardi *et al.*, 2004b);
- To enrich and maintain existing offline relationships (Ali-Hasan and Adamic, 2007);
- To entertain others (Koh *et al.*, 2005);
- To express feelings and thoughts (Koh *et al.*, 2005; Nardi *et al.*, 2004b);
- To feel heard (Turgeon, 2004);
- To find experts and cross-disciplinary connections (Efimova, 2004);
- To get to know yourself and others (Turgeon, 2004);
- To influence others to take action (Koh *et al.*, 2005);
- To learn web publishing (Graham, 2002);
- To minimise spam (Graham, 2002);
- To provide commentary and opinions (Koh *et al.*, 2005; Nardi *et al.*, 2004b);
- To provide, share and collect information (Koh *et al.*, 2005; Turgeon, 2004);
- To release emotions (Koh *et al.*, 2005).

In addition, the motivations for reading blogs can be found in a few studies from four points as follows:

- Information seeking and media checking (Kaye, 2005);
- Political or social surveillance (Kaye, 2005);
- To explore how ideas unfold and connect over time (Kajder and Bull, 2003);
- To access to information unavailable through traditional media sources (Turgeon, 2004).

Although the literature is becoming rich with descriptions of the motivations for using blogs, this study is distinctive in its exploratory approach based on the HE student blog users' experiences and perspectives for understanding what they use blogs for, how they use blogs, why they use them, to what extent they use blogs for learning and what they learned. It found that the nature of blogging lies in that it is a process of ambivalent self-image assurance. It is reflected by the benefits to the blogger from three aspects: (1) a means of self-therapy (2) a way of developing interpersonal skills, and (3) an approach to fostering intellectual abilities. In Chapter 7, an integrated model (Figure 7.1) has been shown in order to explain the use and usefulness of blogs in facilitating learning and knowledge sharing.

In the theoretical model, it shows that HE students use blogs driven by intrinsic incentives and extrinsic incentives. They started, continued, or stopped using blogs caused by these incentives.

With the incentives of using blogs, it is clear that they have four distinct orientations of usage. According to each orientation, it showed that the students apply different strategies for achieving the purpose of using blogs.

On one hand, it found that student bloggers use blogs due to six effects. Firstly, the blogger has a desire of being visible. This is mostly because the blogger has a will of speaking out personal feelings, thoughts, ideas and views about certain issues. They feel that it is an appropriate way to have their own voice across online. They feel that the blog is a platform to satisfy their needs. In a sense, the way of visualising personal ideas and thoughts denotes a first-step of sharing knowledge, especially converting tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge. Secondly, it cannot be ignore that most bloggers enjoy writing. They either find that blogging helps them clarify and organise thoughts or use typing instead of writing. To them, the enjoyment of expression leads them to maintain a blog.

At the same time, not only the blogger' personal preferences play a crucial role, but also four key external elements affect them to blog. As analysed in Chapter 2, the blog has been developed rapidly. It is easy to learn because of low technological requirements for the user; it is free online, and accessible easily. It is regarded as a social communication medium, a publishing tool or an open personal diary. Most HE students use blogs because of social trend. Their typical ideas are: "Almost everyone has a blog, why do not I?" and "All my friends have blogs, so I'd better have one". It reflects that they need a feeling of belonging. As Child (2004: 188) pointed out, "they need the feeling of belonging, which has nothing to do with sexual desire. To some extent the feeling of belonging adds to our safety needs". Thus, this finding in a way manifests that blogging is a method of connecting and keeping a social connection. Another group of HE students use blogs because of the free feeling of talking what they want without social taboos. Under a mask of anonymity, they feel that they can raise issues, have different voices and hope to contribute to the social evolution. Also, there are bloggers who are not anonymous. They feel that the blog is theirs and there are their views; they are not doing something bad, but not following mainstream media's voices. In a sense, the blog is a reflection of the blogger's insights, a reflection of the blogger's online identity, and further increases the blogger's fulfilment. At the same time, it also helps information diffusion. Besides the above elements, a group of bloggers use blogs because of unwanted events, for example, parents found their diary and they need a private space to keep a diary, or they are away and need to inform many people about their experience. At this time, blogs become useful for HE students. Because they are already accustomed to using computers and IT, it is easy for them to try blog services and adapt to blogging.

Linking back to the literature, the findings again confirm that HE students used blogs as (1) a communication tool to keep in touch with people, to inform people what happened about them, to reduce the feeling of isolation caused by the geographic distance, and to maintain their social relationship; (2) a personal controlled space to record personal life, (3) a place for self-expression and releasing emotions (4) a tool for practising writing.

On the other hand, it found that HE students may lessen blogs use by two major reasons. Firstly, they are anxious of being visible. Psychologically, they dislike to be noticed by others. They do not want to present their insights in public. They, to some degree, concern about themselves, they are careful of presenting personal views and hope to add value. This might reflect that they are not confident about their knowledge. In a sense, this “anxiety of being visible” may be a barrier for exchanging ideas and sharing knowledge. Secondly, students heard bad cases about influencing other people or the blogger him/herself by writing things which are not accepted by other people (e.g., the employer, friends, or common consensus). Because they do not want to lose the advantages of openness of the blog, they begin to write less sensitive topics, and start protecting themselves as well as people who are related to them.

Moreover, in this study, it suggested that bloggers read blogs for (1) maintaining and expansion of relationships (2) relaxation (3) acquiring interest-relevant information (4) searching for like-minded people; whereas pure blog readers read blogs for (1) acquiring interest-relevant information and ideas (2) acquiring information about friends (3) relaxation. It reflects that the blogger reads blog with a wider purpose. They not only get benefits in the way of using blogs as information sources to broaden views and accumulate knowledge, but also meet people, build online identity, and even develop critical thinking. Up to this point, it reveals that blogging helps HE students’ professional development, such as IT skills, communication skills, information retrieval skills, and information collection and judgement skills and so on.

In addition, an interesting finding is about gender element in blog use. It displays that male bloggers are likely to hold an attitude that “this is my opinion; let us discuss”; whereas female bloggers are likely to use blogs in a sense of “this is my feeling; let it go”. Female bloggers are likely to use blogs for “self-liberating” and “self-therapy”, they are inclined to select readers and share different information with different people; whereas male bloggers are likely to use blogs for “opinions discussion”, they often open blogs to everyone even though the blog is for themselves and do not care too much who reads their blogs. Female readers are inclined to accept those personal-diary-style blogs; male readers are inclined to accept those blogs that present social topics and big issues. Again, it implies that female and male blog users are sharing different knowledge and only when the information gives rise to their interests, then they will engage in the sharing.

However, apart from the findings discussed above, there is not enough evidence to confirm the findings (see the 20 motives) suggested in the literature, such as: (1) blogging for a good career move (2) bloggers have a hope for blogging to make us better people (3) blog to find experts and cross-disciplinary connections, and (4) to minimise spam. Meanwhile, Hsu and Lin (2008) tested egotistic motives and altruism motives for blogging and concluded that “People participating in blogs were motivated intrinsically to contribute knowledge to others because they enjoy helping each others”. If putting their statement into the personal use oriented contextual condition in this study (see Figure 6.1), it is not applicable because bloggers who blog for themselves showed a low interest in sharing information openly and widely. However, the statement is applicable to those who blog with a community of interest orientation or social use orientation.

8.2.2 Conceptions of learning

As discussed in Chapter 2, Säljö (1979) and Marton et al. (1993) identified six concepts of learning. More recently, Felix (2007) in his research into blogs and instruction effectiveness suggested four types of students' learning from an educator's viewpoint, which confirms that learning is (1) developing understanding (2) cultivating deeper thought and creating (3) exploring, and (4) connecting with previous experiences. In this study, five types of learning have been identified by the participants (see Chapter 6).

At first, it showed that students identify learning as acquiring information and awareness. Secondly, students felt that gaining skills is learning. Comparing with the literature, it can be seen that the two points are congruent with Säljö's (1979) findings that learning is acquiring of facts, skills, and methods that can be retained and used as necessary. Thirdly, some students felt that changing their own styles and insights is learning. This point supports the statement from Marton et al. (1993) that learning is increasing one's knowledge for changing as a person. Next, learning has been seen as understanding and exploring with deeper interests and thoughts, which again confirms the findings in the existent literature (e.g., Felix, 2007; Marton *et al.*, 1993; Säljö, 1979). As Miura and Yamashita (2007: 1457) mentioned Pennebaker and Beall 1986's experiment result and indicated that, as many previous psychological studies pointed out, "writing about our personal experience can help us to understand ourselves more deeply and mitigate major problems or conflicts".

Lastly, creation and imagination have been identified as learning by the participant. The sense of creation is similar to Felix's (2007: 217) statement of "creating meaning and new ideas from the subject" and Säljö (1979) declared that learning brings about increase in knowledge. Without doubt, it reflects that learning in a way leads to changing. Whilst, back to Senge's (1998) opinion of knowledge sharing in section 2.6.2, he suggested that knowledge sharing is distinct from information sharing because it creates new ideas and it causes learning. Here, the data supported that if people regard learning as creating new ideas and abilities, then knowledge sharing is the same as learning in this sense. More importantly, for blog users, they put forward that not only creation, but also imagination is learning. Imagination is not stressed in learning theories by educators but had been noted by Albert Einstein in 1929 (Taylor, 2002).

> "Imagination is more important than knowledge… Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world… For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand." - Albert Einstein (1879 - 1955)

In another respect, this reflects that learning is beyond knowledge sharing. It is not only about creating new knowledge and abilities, but also means the learner needs to use his/her imagination in learning, and the imaginative ability is a part of intellectual ability.

8.2.3 Emerged learning theories

The representations of the data that emerged from the GT analysis provides a set of propositions for understanding learning and sharing behaviours of the HE students: (1) experiential learning happens in using blogs; (2) Carl Rogers' (1969) humanistic psychology approach to learning is occurred; (3) social dimension of communication is important but not essential in facilitating self-organised learning.

It is clear that learning in using blogs has been defined as informal from the participants' point of view. According to Moon's (2004) description of the connotations of experiential learning in section 2.3.5, the data suggested that by blogging, it has a great deal of reflection on what the blogger experienced, what they thought, what they feel and what they realised about themselves (e.g., changes, growing, mature ideas). This is what they learned directly from their experience. Because of the archiving and commentary mechanisms, the user is able to read back what they documented and reflect on it. Also, because the blog is personal, the blogger is the owner of the blog. They therefore regard the blog as a personal product, and voluntarily maintain it and use it according to their own needs. It is not presented that the blog users have an intention to learn, but an intention to entertain, to show off, to enjoy, and for self-expression. Nonetheless, as analysed previously, it turns out that bloggers eventually develop interpersonal skills and intellectual abilities in the sense of reflective use orientation of using blogs. In a way, learning does not happen as an intention but one's experience in a voluntary action.

In addition, the findings reflect that HE students are learning through writing, reading and reflecting, which largely support Carl Rogers' (1969) humanistic approach to learning (see section 2.4). In his (Rogers, 1969) ten principles of facilitating learning, the data showed that when the matter is relevant to the student's own purposes (e.g., improving writing skills, seeking interests-relevant information), experiential learning takes place (that is, it has significance and meaning for the learner). Because of personal moderation of publishing, selecting and collecting information on blogs by the student as well as it is publicly open online, it has shown that self-censorship happens, which supports what Rogers (1969) advocated that independence, creativity and self-reliance are facilitated when the student's self-criticism and self-evaluation are evaluated by others, but this is not the most important factor. Meanwhile, commentary is given by others online, in this sense it supports that learning is facilitated when they participate responsibly in the blog use process. There is hardly any doubt that the bloggers had noted that blogging has few limits and they feel the freedom of owning a personal virtual space, they see their own changes and they learn about themselves and the world more. To an extent, this also implies Rogers' (1969, 1994) ideas that learning involves change and when external threats to the self are low, the learner's experience can be perceived and learning can proceed. Afterwards, by investigating the blog users' perceptions, it found that less experiential learning happens with pure blog readers than bloggers since bloggers have been involved in more actions such as selecting, designing, judging, collecting, expressing and communicating. This further indicates what Rogers' (1969: 162) stated: "much significant learning is acquired through doing". In the long run, it reveals that when the blogger feels the benefit to him/her and self-directed use it, learning will involve the whole person and promote active informal learning and lifelong learning for the student. This point again supports Rogers' (1969) idea.

Furthermore, the findings in this study suggest that social dimension of communication is important but not essential in facilitating self-organised learning. It shows that when the blogger is writing for themselves rather than sharing information and writing for a community of interest, they are likely to seek a way to deal with their own problems, such as self-liberating emotions and further to adjust their moods. They may receive comments and interact with people who could help them, exchange views on personal matters, or share their own experience with others. Interaction is helpful for them, but not requisite. In this sense, it reflects an approach to self-therapy but not an intention of learning. In particular, to pure blog readers, they do not often leave comments on others' blogs. It did not show that they learn through interacting with others, but through reading blogs with a will to acquire relaxation and a piece of interest-relevant information, and this could happen while reading other online media as well. As Jonassen and Grabowski (1993) said, learning requires (1) a student's will or motive to learn, (2) a student is able to learn, (3) a social and academic environment that fosters them to learn. As far as ELT is concerned, this study has no clear emergent evidence to match the four steps of Kolb's learning cycle. However, it is worth emphasising again the limitations of the scope of this study: it concentrated on the users' own definitions rather than observing their postings on blogs.

8.2.4 Knowledge sharing of practice

Linking to the discussion in Chapter 2 and Chapter 6, "knowledge sharing" is a term being used in the literature, but in practice, students do not often use it, rather they usually use "share information", "exchange ideas", "learn perspectives", or "share experience". In this study, "experience", "insights", "feelings", "ideas", "thoughts" as different forms of knowledge are largely interchangeable in using blogs. The findings support that knowledge is personal, valuable and useful for the individual, and is gradually constructive.

In the sense of using blogs as a tool for helping self-therapy, it showed that blogs are personal-diary-styles, including personal matters, feelings, issues, emotions, and experiences. It implies that certain information that has been codified by the blogger is more sharable than others, such as hobbies and views of social issues, because the blogger is writing for self and making him/herself comfortable. In this respect, professional skills, writing techniques, subject knowledge are harder to be shared during the blogging process. Some of the concepts and relationships that emerged from data during this study support findings of other researchers. For example, King et al. (1998) proposed that Internet-assisted therapy is one of the tools available for family therapy. Castelnuovo et al. (2003) stressed a concept of e-therapy as a new modality of helping people resolve life and relationship issues.

In the sense of using blogs as a tool for interpersonal skills development, the data shows that bloggers largely present personal experience, interest, events, views of interest-relevant topics, stories and news on the blogs. They do not write for self, but also for readers. Thus, they write to inform people and raise people's attention. It helps people know each other more. In a respect, knowledge sharing happens over the interaction, communications and discussions about views, opinions and experience. As Felix (2007: 216) portrayed,

> "Blogging by its very nature gives students a vehicle for sharing their ideas with one another, a contemporary way to gain additional knowledge or understanding that resonates with students being raised in the digital age".

In the sense of using blogs as a tool for intellectual ability development, the findings suggested that blog users have self-organised learning styles. Bloggers are more likely to construct knowledge in the process of writing to express and being open to interaction. They often have a purpose of self-development, such as improving writing skills, language use, regularly thinking or clarify thoughts by writing. To an extent, subject knowledge, interest-relevant knowledge, deeper thoughts are shared by the individual's voluntary efforts. Their purposes are for self benefit, for accumulating personal knowledge but not for sharing. In another respect, it is inclined to a sense of learning. Moreover, the bloggers regard the blogs as an information source in terms of their own needs. They therefore encounter the issues of privacy exposure and judging information on the blogs. Some studies have investigated this aspect. For example, Razavi and Lverson (2006) reported that the current stage in the information life cycle, the nature of trust between the owner and the receiver of information, and group dynamics are three key factors affecting privacy preferences. Contrary to that study, findings in this study suggest that the relationship between bloggers and the readers affect the degree of privacy disclosure and the extent of judgement of credibility of information on the blogs. The concerns for privacy disclosure and judgement of credibility of information affect each other. In different contexts, the student has different levels of judgements and concerns for privacy disclosure, therefore put different information. It reflects that what students learn is influenced by different levels of knowledge shared.

8.2.5 Narcissism theory

As discussed in section 2.5, narcissism theory is increasingly published in psychology literature. In cognitive psychology and social psychology, narcissism has been studied into its motivations and the relationship with self-esteem and ego (Bosson *et al.*, 2008). However, in educational psychology, it has not been emphasised as much.

More relevant to the present investigation, this research shows that "narcissism" is defined by both the blogger and pure blog reader. The blogger realised that they may "be addicted to blogging", "use the blog too often", or "enjoy of having their own private space", but they do not think it is a problem because they feel the satisfaction of "being self". The readers described that the blogger put too many personal matters on the public web, which reflects the narcissistic trait of the blogger. In another sense, they accept that this is a personal choice and the blog is a personal space for the blogger. Therefore, the researcher called this as "moderate narcissism", which does not have a diagnostic meaning. She found that the narcissistic students have a positive view about themselves but not see themselves extremely important. As they said, they are being themselves. They are using the blog for mental therapy.

In the literature, Guadagno (2008) reported that people who are high in openness to new experiences and high in neuroticism are likely to be bloggers. In this study, the data suggests that people who have "moderate narcissistic", "like being online", "openness" are likely to be bloggers. Also, female and male bloggers have different orientations for using blogs. Dvorak (2002) listed four reasons of blogging from a non-blogger's view: (1) ego gratification (2) anti-depersonalisation (3) elimination of frustration and (4) a need to share and a need to publish. While the pure blog readers from this study outlined four reasons of blogging (1) egoism (2) inform people and maintain relationships (3) a need to speak out and self-expression (4) a need to share and diffuse information. They do not elaborate "anti-depersonalisation", but positively regard blogging as a normal way of building connections. This implies that bloggers are not largely viewed as narcissists. The "moderate narcissistic" is an acceptable and realisable trait by the blog user him/herself. Meanwhile, Barak (1999) mentioned that the online-group discussion provides a great opportunity to satisfy people's voyeuristic needs by "lurking". By investigating those pure blog readers, this suggestion was not found in this study. The reader is lurking, but as analysed before, they do not spend too much time on reading blogs, and what implied is they are "seeking" up to date interest-relevant information.

These findings enhance our understanding of who blogs and what makes them use blogs. Using a participant, Bess' comments again, "I think it just keeps your mind active and gets your thinking [clear]. So I think it's healthy for the mind to be writing and thinking about things on a daily basis and sharing your thoughts with others". Blogging is an approach to well-being and mentally therapeutic; in a sense, it implies the "love of self", like the idea of narcissism (e.g., Bosson ***et al.***, 2008), but at the same time, it is realised and in moderation of the blogger or certain drives (e.g., extrinsic incentives). All the descriptions do not mean blogging as an action is seductive, but imply that the process of using blogs to satisfy the discovery of "true-self", the solution of personal problems, and the way of seeing of "self" is seductive.

8.3 Implications of the theory for practice

This study generated eight insights for educators and HE students. The eight implications for the understanding of "what" motivations for using blogs are, "how" they use blogs, and "why" they use it may thus contribute to decades' studies of web-based learning and sharing knowledge on the web.

Firstly, HE students who study in less-IT-relevant subjects (e.g., Chemistry, Structural Engineering, and Mathematics) can use blogs as a tool to improve IT skills. Blog service providers are continuing to develop tools that require minimum effort to learn and use, and blogs are compatible with many other technologies. It can help students learn by themselves with fun, curiosity and exploration.

Secondly, a corollary of the first is that the writing-based subjects (e.g., English Literature, Philosophy, Journalism, Law, Politics) can use blogs as a tool to help students improve writing. As current HE students often use computers and the Internet, it is possible for them to have an online space and practise writing regularly. Because blogs can be opened widely to readers, blogging may encourage students to critically think about their writing. Blogging is not formal writing. In this sense, its use is for students to form a thinking habit by regular writing (e.g. express themselves clearly and logically, using rich vocabulary).

Thirdly, blogs can be used as a tool to reduce distance and build connections. It is very feasible to international students or students who travel. It encourages the student to record his/her experiences, feelings and views as well as encourages readers to comment on, further, to share their experiences, bring in discussions, or keep a personal documentary.

Fourthly, students who are involved in a team can use blogs as a tool to publish information, arrange events, collect ideas, manage resources and track the progress of the teamwork. As HE students have other alternative ways of working in a group, such as phone, MSN Messenger, Facebook or face-to-face talking, there are difficulties to put blogs into practice. The data in this study especially suggests that students who belong to a community (e.g., religion, subject) or have similar interests (e.g., music band, sport, cooking) can easily link each other's blogs together and form a blogosphere.

Another unexpected aspect of these findings is that blogs are useful for mental therapy. It shows that students need a private and self-moderated space for self-liberating, talking about concerns, worries, and problems. Especially, female students, they are likely to use blogs with different strategies. They talk to "trusted" people through blogs, they feel that people are listening, they read other people's blogs and feel the similarity, and they provide understanding of those who write personal matters. The blog in this sense is not directly for facilitating learning but helps students resolve problems and achieve mental health.

Also, similar to Hsu and Lin (2008) stressed the importance of enjoyment, this study also suggests that students' self-organised learning needs low external threats, and high internal enjoyment. However, this point is not suggested to help students learn or gain knowledge, but to help students have wider views, positive attitude to learning. According to Field (2006: 55) stated, "if the new adult learning is about struggle, then, it is often focused on a struggle with oneself". It also manifests that when the learner feels relaxation, enjoyment and satisfaction, they learn with minimum confusion.

The seventh implication is that blogging reflects human's very natural behaviour – self-expression. This expression is an intention of being self, seeking a meaning of self, constructing understanding of life and an effective communication of one's true self. The communication enables true-self-disclosure in public because of its relatively anonymous nature. It fosters the person to open to their experience, to new people outside of one's established social network, and further leads to forming new relationships. As Rogers (1969) believed that being able to express one's true self is positive and so to form new meaningful relationships and expand one's sphere of friends. Educators should encourage this openness to challenge, changing perspectives and seeking understanding of life.

Last but not least, as discussed in section 6.7, using blogs to facilitate formal learning has barriers. Although as Patterson (1973: 17) suggested, "a real revolution in education would consist of a change in goals and in content", the traditional theories are continuing to face new contexts and new technologies. When using blogs in education, on one hand, they need to provide good quality, accurate learning sources for students. On the other hand, they need to build flexible, open, learner-controlled and interest-driven environments. The findings particularly suggest that the educator needs to clarify the blog's purpose to students when they decide to use blogs in teaching (e.g., for long term writing practice, team work, or support students a learning environment in a wider sense).

8.4 Limitations in the study

The present study is limited in several ways. First of all, the most important limitation lies in the fact that the research objective, "knowledge", is personal, neither measured nor directly observed. In Chapter 2, the researcher discussed the research gap and challenges she faced when setting up this study. By asking questions such as, "Do you feel it is easy to write down your feelings or thoughts by blogging?", "In which case do you think it is difficult to express your feelings or thoughts?", "Are there any case you feel it is difficult to express your stories, feelings or thoughts?", she attempted to investigate whether tacit knowledge is perceived by the person, which forms of tacit knowledge (e.g., experience, opinions) are codified, which are not, and what knowledge has been conversed. The findings have been presented in section 6.5, but it is difficult to discover enough evidence to explain why "tacit knowledge" (e.g., insights, feelings) is easy to express for some people, but is hard for other people in the same situation. Hence this increases the difficulty of the study.

Secondly, it was discussed in Chapter 3 that qualitative study is related to "insider perspective" and "the researcher is instrument", which has argued that an exploratory is inevitably affected by the researcher's subjectivity. Meanwhile, despite GT as an appropriate approach to the research goal and the research tradition has been of benefit to the study, it has to recognise its weaknesses as well. It was hypotheses generating rather than hypothesis testing. The researcher agrees that the generated theory needs her analysis, understanding and interpretation. Although she followed the suggestions by Glaser and Strauss (1967), Strauss and Corbin (1998), was open and honest to the data, made effort to avoid her prior knowledge and any influence of the literature, it is impossible to say that the researcher's own knowledge and experience in the study area did not affect the final theory.

Thirdly, following from the above point, using interview method to collect data also has its disadvantage. According to Wakefield (1995: 11),

> "Validity is a problem in qualitative studies because of the potential effect of the researcher's biases and the subjects' suggestibility on qualitative interview data and their interpretation, and because of the difficulty of making causal judgments based on studies where no variables are controlled".

The findings were affected by language and understanding due to verbal exchange between the researcher and the participant. The researcher focused on verbal language and inquired certain interesting points, and some important information might not be expressed by the participant in an interview situation. This could be seen as a threat to the validity of the study.

Fourthly, the theoretical sample in this study was developed between 2006 and 2007, and within the University of Sheffield. It is limited to a small self-defined group of blog users, at present the emerged substantive theory cannot be generalised to the Internet public phenomenon at large in terms of culture or lifestyles, although it does give insights into the online behaviours of HE student blog users.

Last but not least, the blog as a new socio-technical phenomenon is changing as time goes on. Compared to blogs in 2000, currently, it has evolved new functionalities and is compatible with a variety of tools. At the same time, the blog user's perceptions of using blogs may be different in terms of the time when they realised blogs. The informants in this study largely started touching blogs from 2002 to 2005. The data thus reflects on their experience in that period of time, and the theoretical model is built on those particular cases. In brief, the current study was unable to analyse these variables and the findings might not be transferable to generalised concepts at this stage.

8.5 Future research

The researcher intends that the study is not crudely ad hoc, but an in-depth study for exploring and discovering whether blogs can be used to facilitate learning and in what sense it can be used. Future research in this field regarding the role of "experiential learning" and "narcissism" in everyday life would be of great help in understanding HE students' personal learning and knowledge construction. It is recommended that further studies could be undertaken in the following six areas.

Firstly, as mentioned in section 3.2.3, different methodologies can be used to generalise the substantive theory into a formal theory. A mixed method can be adopted, and the substantive theory can be either developed using qualitative research, or verified through deductive research in other complementary studies to assess the strength of the empirical support for this theory. Moreover, to generalise the substantive theory, further research could use the theory as a suggestion to investigate different education systems or different cultural regions.

Secondly, in the cases reported in this study, it has suggested that females and males have different orientations of using blogs in the sense of self-liberating, relationships maintaining and building, and self-therapy. It would be interesting to conduct studies to see whether the content on blogs could be a predictor of students' learning and sharing styles by different genders.

Thirdly, learning and knowledge sharing in blogging can be further studied by investigating what bloggers have learned over an extended period of time through showing consistency in terms of categories: Self-therapy; Interpersonal skills; and Intellectual abilities. The data suggested that longer blogging experience may help the blogger form a habit of self-censorship and develop learning style. As the sample size was limited in this study, it will require further study to see whether there is a potential role for this relationship.

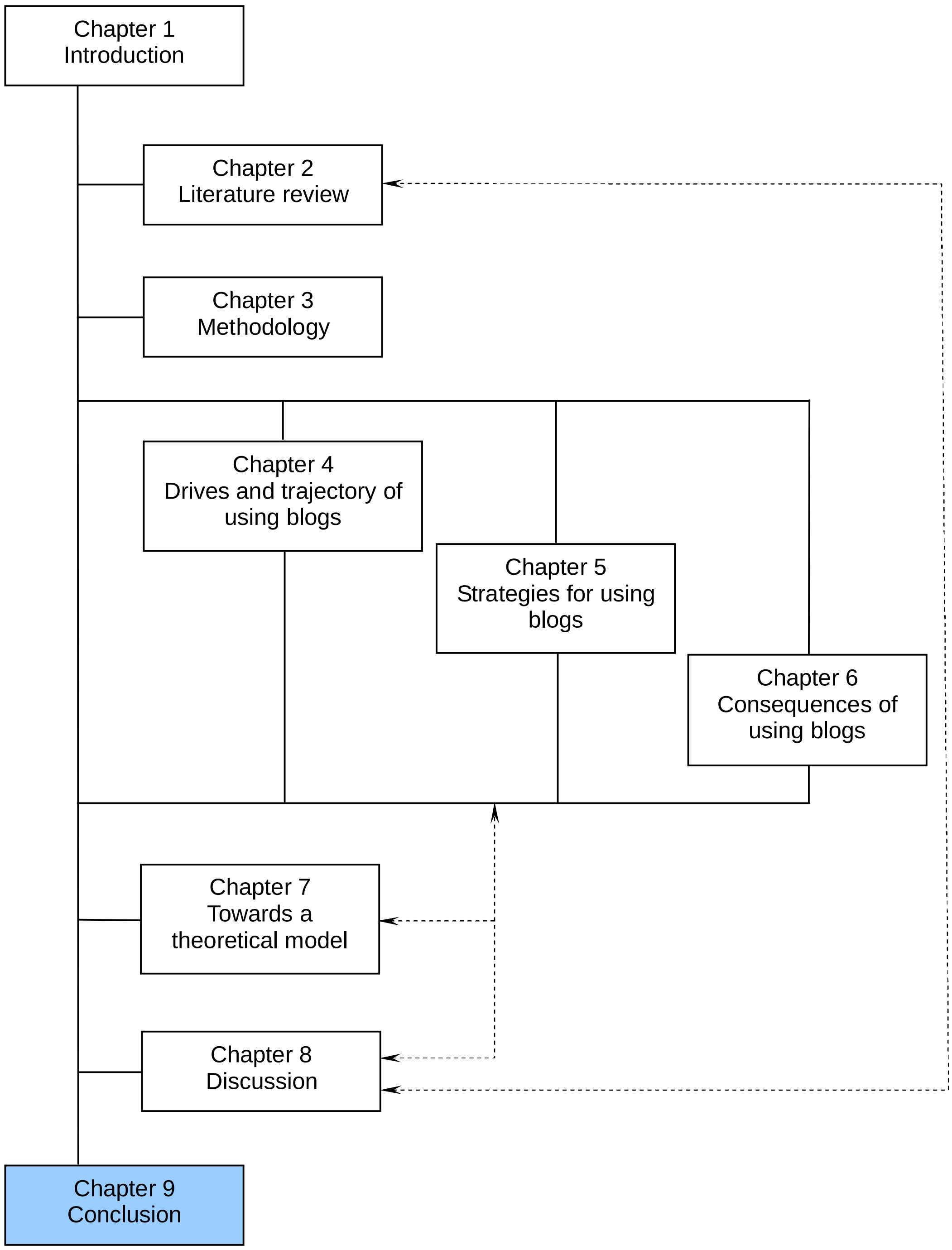
Fourthly, tacit knowledge is not measured and directly observed. As a limitation of this study, there is insufficient data to explain this concept. More information is needed in order to explain why some "tacit knowledge" is explicit to some people, but is intangible to other people in a similar situation.

Fifthly, in Chapter 5, the study has suggested that the usability of information on blogs is relevant to the blogger's purpose, privacy concerns, and relationship between bloggers and their readers. However, academic use oriented blogs were not widely existent when the research was conducted during 2005-2007, so that there was insufficient data about it. Yet, it is increasingly accessible at present. Hence, it suggests further research to look into academic blogs, especially its quality and potential issues, to add supplementary insights to the theory.

Lastly, information studies itself is an interdisciplinary subject. According to the findings, the study may be not only based on educational informatics area, but also connected with social science and psychotherapy to better explain the student's information using experience, knowledge conversion and learning behaviours.

8.6 Summary

This chapter summarises the contributions of the study to the body of literature and practice from five general aspects. It confirmed some existent findings, also suggested new insights, such as a desire of being visible online, concepts of learning, the role of narcissistic trait in knowledge sharing. Eight implications of the findings are presented from its practical application for blog technology promoting students' learning and sharing in HE, including both feasibility and difficulties. Also it concluded five limits of the study which affected the final theory generation, and according to these limitations, the researcher suggested six further studies into investigating this research area.


Chapter 1
Introduction
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CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

> *"Today we live in the age of science. The eternal questions are best answered, it is asserted, by putting queries directly to Nature and letting Nature itself answer." – Lincoln and Guba (1985: 7)*

9.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to revisit the whole study. This thesis presents a grounded theory study into the usage and usefulness of blogs for facilitating HE students learning and knowledge sharing. The researcher reviews the thesis from five aspects: the development of research questions; the adoption of the GT approach; the emerged theory and a core category of the studied phenomenon; the relevant theories in the studied area; and the implications of the research.

9.2 Reflection on the emergent research questions

This research was conducted from July 2005 to July 2008 and aimed to explore the nature of the blogging phenomenon and its potential usage and usefulness in facilitating personal learning and knowledge sharing. It was hoped to discover a theory to interpret the studied phenomenon. Through using the GT approach, the researcher investigated 37 HE students' perceptions and subjective experiences of blogging, and 11 HE students' reading blogs experience. Looking back at the whole study, the researcher defined the research process as eight steps (Directing, Launching, Sensing, Exploring, Reflecting, Evaluating, Polishing, and Condensing) and classified the research questions that were developed over the process as starting questions, essential questions and emergent questions.

In this thesis, the researcher first presented the background of the research, a boundary of the literature she reviewed, including studies into the development of blogs and their use in HE, learning theories as well as knowledge and knowledge sharing theories. She defined gaps in the literature: (1) it lacks in-depth studies into the blogging phenomenon from a sharing knowledge perspective and at an individual level, and (2) there is a need of further investigation of students' learning and knowledge sharing experience in blogging, especially tacit knowledge sharing. Based on these gaps, she assigned the starting research questions which focused on exploring the blog user's motivations and learning experiences. Over the data collection and analysis process, the researcher found that students separated blogging from learning in the classroom and their subjects of study entirely, and they mostly used blogs for social life. She therefore developed more exploratory questions to cover students' conceptions of learning and sharing, and their attitudes to blog use. By using the theoretical comparison method, she developed new ideas for theoretical sampling to discover variations, that is, new ideas for directing inquiry. For example, she asked question "what are the effects of using blogs as information sources" when she felt that most participants regarded blogs as a channel for gaining information, and inquired "what are the participant's strategies for achieving benefits by using blogs" according to their blog use orientations.

To explore the motivations for using blogs, she found that bloggers use blogs because of intrinsic incentives (e.g., desire of being visible, writing habit) and extrinsic incentives (e.g., following social trend, preventing unwanted diary readers, breaking away from social taboos, reducing geographic distance); whereas they may lessen blogging because of extrinsic incentives (e.g., worrying about affecting others). To pure blog readers, they do not blog mainly because of both intrinsic incentives (e.g., anxiety of being visible) and extrinsic incentives (e.g., effects on people); whereas they keep reading certain blogs because of either retaining a relationship or acquiring information that is not provided by mainstream media or normal websites.

Four orientations of using blogs emerged: for self; for a community of interest; for social use; or for reflective purposes. For self use, the blogger does not expect comments as much as those bloggers who use blog for a community of interest. The blog is a personal space for self-expression, emotion-release, and venting out feelings and opinions. For a community of interest use, the blogger has a willingness to share and to exchange ideas and interests. For social purposes, bloggers are using blogs for entertainment, social connection and communication. For reflective purposes, they are likely to reflect on self-development and they address the importance of receiving comments from readers. Pure blog readers have similar blog use orientations. They read blogs for themselves in a broad sense, but they also seek for blogs that deal with personal issues from which they are able to borrow ideas or reveal their own concerns; seek for wide interest-relevant information for developing their own interests; want to build social networks, keep connections with friends, or enhance awareness and develop their own abilities. Pure blog readers usually leave comments on friends' blogs or blogs that impressed them particularly. To them, leaving comments should add value to discussions on blogs.

It was found that for those blogs with a self use orientattion, the blogger felt it is worth seeing their own changes and thoughts development. It is more valuable for themselves than anyone else. To the bloggers, presenting personal ideas and feelings regularly is healthy. Whilst, it seems that most pure blog readers (especially male readers) do not read personal-diary-style blogs and view blogging behaviour as egotism. Based on other orientations, it is clear that bloggers have more perceptions and experience than pure blog readers. They feel that they improved IT skills, writing skills, communication skills and content management skills and have shared useful information (e.g., personal lessons, experiences, information sources) with others.

More importantly they felt that they had learnt about themselves. To pure blog readers, they mostly stressed that they broadened views and understood more diverse perspectives. Another interesting finding is that female bloggers are likely to use blogs for self-expression, seeking for listeners and reflecing their feelings; whereas male bloggers are likely to openly discuss and exchange views.

The cases reported in this research showed that HE students' learning needs are related to their blog use orientations. In relation to self and social use orientations, the users have a will to relax, have a personalised space, and reveal personal concerns. To the participants, blogging is not for learning, but for mental health and life. In relation to community of interest and reflective use orientations, the users have a desire to develop their capabilities (e.g., writing better, express their thoughts better, and have professional knowledge in some areas) and their learning needs reflect their desire. In consequence, this finding reveals that when the blog users do not use blogs with a desire of self-development, when they blog for sorting out personal problems, blogging becomes a remedy rather than an approach to learning. However, in the long run, if users keep the blog and reflect on it later, they may realise their development. In this respect, it helps the user learn about him/herself and see his/her development and wellbeing.

Most blog users emphasised that blogs are information resources. This called the researcher's attention to the quality of blogs if they are seen as information sources. It was found that three aspects are intertwined on this point. As the major element, the relationship between bloggers and blog readers affects the credibility judgement of the information resources as well as the degree of the user's concerns and management of privacy disclosure. The other two elements: the judgement of credibility and the concerns of privacy disclosure act on each other. Through generating a strategic framework of using blogs as information resources, it displays insights such as the more leisure oriented a blog is and the more alienated the blogger and the reader are, the more private information is likely to be exposed. It further implies that when use blogs as information resources in HE, it needs the educator to clarify that it is for academic discussion and sharing subject knowledge or for peer connection and communication; and it needs the educators to provide different levels of moderation.

The study also suggests that students have an image that the blog is a social tool, whereas education has its own systems, with its own criteria of quality, credibility, and accuracy. Therefore, blogging in HE has barriers to formal learning, for instance, formal academic writing and presenting personal work to the public. Meanwhile, people are very different; hence the usage strategies should be concerned about these differences. The study found three key usages of blogging in HE: an online experiential learning environment to assist self-therapy; to improve interpersonal skills; or to encourage students to develop intellectual abilities. The finding reveals that through experiencing, feeling, presenting and thinking, students use blogs to assure an image of themselves. This is an ambivalent process of starting awaring, knowing, and being "true self". The experience may further promote the student's responsibility for his/her own learning. More detail of the ambivalent process will be presented in section 9.4.

9.3 Reflection on the research methodology

The methodology selection was an important task in this project. Because this study was about exploring, understanding and making sense of the blog phenomenon in facilitating learning and knowledge sharing, it essentially needs the researcher to interpret the social realties. It does not aim to verify an existing theory or test hypotheses by using quantitative data, but to discover, conceptualise and explore the meaning by using words. Thus, the researcher chose an inductive, qualitative approach to increase the chances of discovering the unanticipated elements and analysing the impacts, challenges and implications of new technologies in HE.

Meanwhile, the emergent phenomenological concepts interpret this study because the GT approach meets the purpose of the study and the research problem. As Hutchinson (1988) describes, GT has its philosophical foundation in the work of George Herbert Mead and American pragmatism, and sociological root in the work of Herbert Blumer and symbolic interactionism. It “probably represents the most influential general strategy for conducting qualitative data analysis” (Bryman, 2004: 408). The features of GT are of benefit to the study and the researcher. As a methodology, GT seeks to create a theory about issues of importance in people’s lives; it is appropriate for social research specifically focused on human interaction and is better suited to researchers who aim to explore new territory (Denscombe, 2003). For the researcher, it requires them to be open-minded and honest in their use of data. It hence develops the researcher’s sensitivity to interact continually with the data collection and analysis, to judge theoretical saturation; and also it fosters the researcher’s creativity and theoretical capability (Glaser, 1992). GT has qualitative tradition and builds on compared concepts and suggests that similar data are grouped and conceptually labelled (i.e., relates to theoretical sampling, constant comparison, theoretical sensitivity, coding). Concepts then are categorised, linked and organised by developed relationships, conditions and dimensions (i.e., involves constant comparison, coding, theoretical sensitivity), and finally a theory emerges by using theoretical saturation and theoretical sensitivity (Scott, 2004).

Furthermore, the thesis discussed the research process in detail, covering how sampling was designed, how data were collected such as recruiting and interviewing, and the concurrent data analysis suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998). In more detail, it explained the three steps in analysis: open coding; axial coding; and selective coding. By using ATLAS.ti to manage and index data, it finally created 259 codes and 28 memo codes. The researcher further refined these codes at a conceptual and abstract level, and presented the relationships between them by creating a series of tentative models. A few tentative models have been mentioned in Chapter 3 and the entire developed theory was discussed in Chapter 4 to 7.

GT is not without limits. The thesis clarified the notion of establishing trustworthiness in an empirical study, instead of emphasising “validity” and “reliability”. To maximally guarantee the reliability of the research, following the criteria for conducting GT, it discussed the techniques and methods in detail, such as, using audit trail, member checking, peer debriefing, triangulation, and reflexivity. The researcher agreed that using a researcher as an instrument, her prior knowledge and abilities to be theoretical sensitive in data analysis, to an extent, affected the research results and generated theory.

9.4 Reflection on the emerged theory and core category

In Chapters 4 - 7, the researcher discussed the generated theory of the blog use and its usefulness for facilitating HE students' learning and knowledge sharing. The phrase "a channel of ambivalent self-image assurance" eventually emerged as a core category of the theory in terms of four key aspects.

Firstly, the study found a basic trajectory of using blogs according to the user's motivations for blogging and reading blogs, including the stages: Starting, Groping, Attempting, Norming and Reforming. From online news or friends, the student becomes aware of blog services. He/she usually questions why people post their personal matters online, why there are people who read and respond them, and question whether it is a good idea to publish personal information to the public. However, they are naturally curious about new and different things. Some students feel the blog is a good tool to keep in touch with people; some have the attitude to try it immediately; some keep observing the blog before they decide to use it; and others feel that it is not good to make visible of their identity online. These feelings lead them either to start trying blogs or decide not to have a blog but to read blogs. By using blogs, students find that they meet like-minded people, that people keep visiting their blogs, that other bloggers link to their blogs, or that readers leave comments to agree, encourage, share experience, or provide different perspectives. This kind of enjoyable or surprising feeling from interactions and comments leads them to keep updating the blog. Over time, they do not question why people blog but consider how to use blogs for their own purposes. Some students start thinking about how to write more interesting and useful information for readers, or how to attract more people to read their blogs. Some students become concerned about what to post and how to express their emotions, feelings and opinions appropriately without offending others. They experience self-censorship, making decisions to balance personal information and information acceptable in the public arena, judging online information and dealing with online relationships. They start forming their own styles of using blogs (e.g., practising writing, developing communication skills, organising thoughts, building social relationships). At the same time, some students worry about the effects on people (e.g., themselves, family, or people they write about) because the blog leaves a trace of the blogger. They either decide to change their way of blogging, publishing less sensitive themes, adopting a pseudonym and writing what they like on the blog, restricting their blog readers to a particular group, or giving up blogging. The student may have an unpleasant experience of using blogs. For example, people may criticise them for misrepresenting information, disagree with their opinions or post spam. Nonetheless, many users stated that blogs provide a personal space for them to control, manage and publish information; a platform to connect people and develop new relationships; a means of communication, and a way of freely saying what they want to say, and further promote mental wellbeing. They keep blogging as long as the blog does not affect their life negatively.

Secondly, from such trajectory of using blogs, it is apparent that using blogs is not a purely pleasant or carefree experience, but rather an ambivalent process. Younger generations view IT and the Internet as an access tool for their own purposes, such as to network and socialise, to gain and spread information, or to engage in self-expression and break away from social taboos. As analysed previously, bloggers questioned the blogging phenomenon at the beginning, but when they started to use blogs, they gradually felt the benefits in terms of their own purposes (e.g., for self-therapy, for interpersonal relationships, or for developing certain skills). On the one hand, they kept using blogs because of a satisfying feeling that, for example, readers cared about them because of a few words of comfort posted on their blogs; readers may like their writing style and appreciate helpful information on the blog; an admired person or a professional in an interest-related area might link to his/her blog or leave messages on the blog. They did not question why they blog, but explored better ways of using online tools for their own benefit, for example, to discuss socially sensitive topics, to prevent unwanted people from intruding on their privacy as well as to have a space for self-liberation. On the other hand, students also experienced feelings of curiosity, and uncertain and dubious feelings when using blogs. They were curious about new ideas and differences, such as different beliefs, understandings, expressions and opinions on blogs. Through the blog they had to compare their own ideas with others, build trust, and evaluate the comments readers leave, and the discussion developed on the blog. Meanwhile, they sought a balance between their own desire to speak out on matters (e.g., their experience, concerns, emotions, opinions) on the web and how to express without worries, such as about being misunderstood by others, or something they wrote may affect their employement in the future. They wondered whether it is suitable to post personal information on the blog because people normally think that blogs are for amusement. They might feel uncomfortable allowing strangers to read their personal reflections but still had an intention of writing down them on a blog. In some situations (e.g., involving blog wars, published sensitive topics), they even regretted publishing personal information to the public and questioned how other people would look upon them. To some extent, these feelings made them doubt themselves, including their feelings, beliefs and views; question what they should write and why they wrote it; and doubt whether the satisfying feelings they had at other times from blogging is true and good. They may have to change their ways of using blogs or give up blogging. Further, the experience of dealing with curiosity, uncertainty and doubt itself became a learning experience of self-evaluation, self-censorship, self-discovery and self-regulation. This experience may not be easily recognised by blog users because to a large extent bloggers view blogs as a space for self-expression, emotion-release or liberation, and pure blog readers may see blogs as amusement and nonsense. However, it is an import part of the experience of blog use and an aspect of its usefulness. As discussed previously, this process of dealing with these ambiguities helps students to clarify their thoughts, understand themselves and others, and be open to their feelings and experiences. It not only helps the student to experience “adjustment”, but helps them experience their full human potential (Kirschenbaum, 2004). As Rogers (1994) claimed in his notion of experiential learning, learning through experience helps students develop psychological health, wellness, creativity, and self-actualisation.

Last but not least, typically as participants Judy and Emily mentioned, the blog is a part of a blogger's identity and blogging helps the blogger to see an image of whom they feel they are. Participants regard using blogs as a discovery process of one's true self. During the trajectory of using blogs, some students stop blogging because they feel that "I do not need it any more. I do not need a space for venting out so-called secret or personal emotions. I grow up, can control myself and handle my emotions well now", or "I strongly feel that it is not wise to leave a trace online because it may affect my future". They follow their true feelings and want to be themselves whether there is a trend for people using blogs or not. Some students keep blogging because the statisfying or enjoyable feeling confirms their ideas about themselves and their potential, such as "I am good at writing", "I will develop IT skills as people like my blog design and style", "I will collect more interesting information and put it on my blog because readers feel the information is fun and leave positive comments". To an extent, such confirmation helps students to become more assured of their own abilities, skills, potentials, and further helps them to be open to change, to build confidence, to develop skills and to confirm their identity (e.g., whom they feel they are). Hence, the researcher named this sense as "self-image assurance". "Self-image" is similar to the term "true self" in the studies of virtual learning (e.g., Bargh *et al.*, 2002; Döring, 2002; Turkle, 1999). It reflects the experience of blogging as a process of realising growth and change as well as a process of becoming one's "true self".

Also, "narcissism" in the psychological sense of the term emerged from the data. From pure blog readers' perspectives, blogging included an element of showing off personal skills and abilities (e.g., great web design, collection of interest-related information, presentation of travel expereinces). From bloggers' perspectives, blogging was regarded as a means to engage in self-therapy, help benefit mental health, including satisfaction with self through interactions with others (e.g., through being reassured of their opinions from reading others' comments, wanting to know others' opinions, etc.), as well as through their own expression (e.g., reading their own writings, venting their emotions, etc.). Bloggers did not feel that they were showing off in a one-way communication, but rather that this entailed sharing and exchanging their feelings and knowledge. The sense of "showing off" or "narcissistic" feeling actually becomes important in knowledge sharing and learning because at a micro level, it helps students to be open to their true experience and feelings of change and growth; at a macro level, it is of benefit to people to be open to different subjective perspectives and to share personal experience, views and tacit knowledge (e.g., encouraging people to express feelings and experiences).

Overall, the experience of using blogs is a channel of ambivalent self-image assurance. It is an ambivalent experience and it is a process of seeking assurance over feelings of one's "true self". During the process, students become more open to their individual feelings, emotions and ideas. They deal with their personal issues, maintain social connections, develop interest-relevant skills and acquire broad knowledge. They become knowledgeable about themselves. Blogging therefore becomes a way for blog users to form their identity, discover themselves, and build confidence and self-development. This study reflects blogging as a social software that to a large extent benefits the user as a whole person, especially in terms of self-therapy, and the development of interpersonal skills and intellectual capability.

9.5 Reflection on the relevant findings in the literature

The researcher presented the literature related to this study from three primary aspects: studies into blogs and their usage in HE; learning theories, particularly on informal learning; knowledge theories and knowledge sharing studies. It shows that the soaring popularity of blogs is recently attracted attention in academia. An increasing body of literature investigates blog usage, such as being a tool for interactivity, communication, facilitating learning, fostering reflection, or creating a learning environment. By presenting a theoretical model of blog usage in facilitating learning and knowledge sharing (Figure 7.1), this study sought to shed light on what makes HE students blog, how they use blogs and what is the nature of blogging. It particularly suggested three consequences of using blogs: self-therapy; interpersonal skills development; and intellectual abilities development.

The study found four attributes of blogs at a functional level: convenient accessibility; flexible operability; standardised structure; and personalised communication styles. It supports claims in the literature, that blogs have distinguishing characteristics such as personal editorship, flexible hyperlinks, the capability to add comments which enables people to capture, organise and share viewpoints easily (i.e., Lamshed *et al.*, 2002; Man, 2004; Nardi *et al.*, 2004a). The data largely showed that students blog without any profit motive; they moderate blogs freely and are voluntarily writing and selecting information for their blogs. The increasing use of blogs is not only because of the blog's functionalities, but because the blogger feels the advantages of using blogs.

As summarised in sections 9.2 and 9.4, blogs provide potential opportunities for students for their specific needs. An amount of people regard blogging as amusement, self-expression and egoism. However, these phenomena are related to the purposes of blogs (e.g., for self use, for a community of interest, for social use, and for reflective use) and their strategies for fulfilling these purposes.

When students blog for themselves, it was found that blogs have been used as a memory store, a self-liberating place, and a space for presenting an online identity. The findings revealed the potential of blog use for helping self-therapy, that is, it leads to students' improved psychological well-being. The researcher also found that it is difficult for pure blog readers to use blogs in this respect as they do not expose their personal identity and thoughts through blogs. This finding has not been clearly published in the literature.

When students blog for building a community of interest, the findings suggested that it was often related to the blog user's desire to develop personal interests or maintaining relationships. There is a possibility of forming a blogger-centred community as the blogger keeps updating and providing information, for example, writing personal matters to inform friends, publishing interested topics to exchange ideas, share experience and discuss with others. This needs the blogger's efforts to update a blog, and readers' comments to encourage the blogger to write more. In a sense, the findings confirmed those in the existing literature (e.g., Huffaker, 2005; Schroeder, 2003; Suzuki, 2004) that blogs can be used to encourage interaction and support between peers.

When students blog for social purposes, the findings showed that they regard blogs as a way of relaxation, gaining up-to-date information, or keeping up social connections. Again, this reflects the blog's advantages in terms of spreading information quickly, getting personal voice across, and discussing social issues from a non-specialist point of view. To an extent, as presented in the literature (e.g., Ferdig and Trammell, 2004; Mortensen and Walker, 2002; Oravec, 2002), blogs provide students with a wide opportunity to broaden views and learn about the world. They therefore help students to improve their abilities of expression, and to develop information judgement skills, communication skills, etc.

When students blog for reflective purposes, the study provides evidence that students use blogs for improving their own professional abilities (e.g., online business, advanced IT skills, writing skills, expertise in a subject). It also provides evidence that students become censors of themselves. In a sense, it shows that students have developed self-organised learning styles and are using blogs as a tool to manage and accumulate personal knowledge. This point supports the findings in the literature that blogging helps students in critical thinking, problem discovery, reducing misunderstanding and learning how to learn (e.g., Fiedler, 2003; Fiedler, 2004; Oravec, 2003b; Tosh and Werdmuller, 2004).

The study also discusses concepts of learning which confirm and add new insights to the existing learning theories. Relating to conceptions of learning proposed by Säljö (1979), Marton et al. (1993) and Felix (2007), here participants defined five types of learning, which repeatedly showed that acquiring information, enhancing awareness, developing skills, understanding things deeply, changing views and gaining insights are all learning. Specifically, the findings suggest that creativity and imagination in using blogs are vital to help students improve intellectual abilities.

Little literature in the information science area reveals the relationships amongst learning, tacit knowledge sharing and blogs. This study arguably provides an answer to bridge this gap. First, Carl Rogers' (1969, 1994) humanistic learning ideas, such as openness to change, self-criticism, self-actualisation and self-evaluation emerged in the findings. Rogers' contribution was in humanistic education, which emphasises points such as high-level health and well-being, the learner's interests, education as a life-long process, respect for an individual's subjective experience, the human motivation towards self-realisation, and self-empowerment (Underhill, 1989). He stressed that experiential learning has to be self-initiated, and the will to engage in this comes from the inside. In relation to blogging use, the participants reported that they decided what they wanted to publish on the blog; they had a desire to express personal feelings, interests and experience; they developed their views of the interested topic or the world. They gradually realised their learning in this experience. This experience is self-initiated and self-realised. Rogers emphasised that educators need to respect students' subjective experience and their role should be "not to decide what the student should learn but to identify and create the crucial ingredients of the psychological climate that helps to free learners to learn and grow" (Underhill, 1989: 251). This study showed that students do not want to mix blogging with their study because they can freely decide what they want to learn, write and develop through blogging. It can be seen that, in the nature of informal learning, students used social software for their own purposes (e.g., self-therapy, forming identity, maintaining social connections) and moderated their development rather than through interactions with educators. Rogers (1994) also held that learning involves the whole person and experiential learning entails helping people towards realising their own individual and unique potential, towards becoming what he called a "fully functioning person". "His view is that there is, in the person, an ability to actualize the self, which, if freed, will result in the person solving his or her own problems" (Zimring, 1994: 1). In this study, participants reported that they gradually realised their development because the blog leaves a trace of their growth and changes (e.g., writing skills, ways of communicating, and the broadening of views, became more mature). They could read their blog entries and reflect on their past and experiences. This finding confirms Rogers' opinion that students have the ability to conduct self-evaluation based on their individual learning objectives.

Second, types of narcissism emerged in this study which map onto those of, for example, Sturman (2000), who identified three narcissistic styles: power-related (e.g., interpersonal influence, being recognised and shaping one's surroundings); affiliation-related (e.g., having listeners who care, having trusted friends whom one does not want to lose); and achievement-related (e.g., showing one's own work, achieving personal fulfilment). In this study, some bloggers felt that they contributed to discussion on social issues by providing real-time, up-to-date and original information, and contributed to the change in ways of information diffusion. There is a sense in which gaining power motivates them to keep blogging. Some blog users read blogs in order to know about friends' lives and blogged to keep in touch with people. Further, they had the feeling that readers understood and listened to their expressions, or they came to know the blogger because they keep reading the blog over a long period. In this sense, gaining affiliation motivates them to use blogs. Also some bloggers kept a blog in order to practise writing, develop IT interests, or contribute an interest-related discussion. They had a desire to improve certain abilities. To some extent, this indicates that they were pursuing a type of achievement.

In addition, it was found that students shared different types of knowledge according to types of blog use. For self-therapy use, personal experiences, stories, feelings and thoughts are largely shared. For interpersonal skills development, interests-related information and opinions are largely shared. For intellectual abilities improvement, professional knowledge, subject-related and personal reflective information are largely shared. Linked to the finding that female blog users are likely to share and read information characterised as high in self-expression and personal emotion on their blogs, and male blog users are likely to share and accept topics relating to social issues with less personal expression, it is clear that females and males share different types of tacit knowledge. That is, different types of tacit knowledge could be transferred according to different blog use orientations by different genders. In the literature, tacit knowledge as an appreciable knowledge type has been found difficult to transfer because it is “sticky” (e.g., Szulanski, 2000) or ambiguous (e.g., Polanyi, 1958), but could be transferred with effort (e.g., by using story telling and concept maps). This study supports this suggestion, and moreover, it sheds light on what types of tacit knowledge could be shared, and how tacit knowledge was shared in relation to blogging. In particular, the study suggests that bloggers are likely to feel the advantages of blogging in the longer term (e.g., more than one year) but not in the very short term (e.g., a couple of months).

9.6 Reflection on the implications of further study

The findings of the research add to the body of knowledge on the role of blogs in creating a sense of self-organised learning and encouraging experiential learning. Still other elements of the theory (like different approaches to blogging by different genders) may be considered new insights into information sharing behaviours in learning. Even for concepts that have been studied before, their roles in the particular context had not previously been explored. Another important distinction between this study and previous investigations is the results are grounded in data gathered from blog users’ experiences and opinions rather than deduced from the literature. As such, they provide valuable insights into the topic and a substantive theory to direct and generalise it into a formal theory.

The main suggestions of this research on using blogs in the HE setting relate to eight aspects: (1) as an inspiration tool to encourage students in less-IT-related deciplines to have more web-based learning experience (2) as a practice tool to help students who are in writing-based subjects to improve writing skills and express thoughts clearly (3) as a communication tool to reduce distance and build connections (4) as a collaborative tool to organise and manage teamwork (5) as a place for mental therapy (6) as a fun, interesting and creatively supportive learning environment (7) as a space for self-expression and self-disclosure, and (8) realising blogs’ barriers in HE settings, the educator needs to explore which aspect of students’ learning they want to facilitate, such as to help students mental health, to develop their writing and thinking habits, or to build collaborative skills.

This exploratory study did not test or prove prior hypotheses; nonetheless, it is appropriate to ask whether the established theory provides any basis for better understanding the observed phenomenon, and to help formulate hypotheses and questions for future testing. It is hoped that the research will be of benefit to learners, educators and educational organisations for better using learning technologies and further, promoting active informal learning and lifelong learning. It has stated some questions for further investigation from following aspects: (1) as suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967: 34), "substantive theory in turn helps generate new grounded formal theories and to reformulate previously established ones", the current theory can be either further developed by adopting qualitative research or verified through quantitative study; (2) to further investigate learning and thinking styles in relation to gender-related elements; (3) to generalise the findings about self-therapy and the development of interpersonal skills and intellectual abilities by investigating different types of social software use; (4) tacit knowledge is personal and is useful for the individual. Based on the contexts investigated in this study, to further explore concepts of tacit knowledge and explore why it is difficult to converse for some people but easy for others; (5) to investigate academic use oriented blogs and compare new findings with the generated theory model in this study; and (6) to adopt interdisciplinary perspectives to test the substantive theory.

9.7 Summary

In conclusion, this study is intended to be useful in adding to our understanding of the ways in which tacit knowledge can be made explicit, communicated and shared within the context of HE students' learning in using blogs. The research adopts a qualitative methodology, applying the GT methods, entailing in-depth interviews with HE students concerning their experience of both creating their own and reading and contributing to the blogs of others, and their perceptions of the uses and usefulness of blogs. Data analysis is inductive, and by analysing interview transcripts and memos, a theoretical model is developed for understanding the role of blogs in the area of human information processing. It is hoped that the theory sheds light on some insights and will serve as a basis for future studies into this area. This thesis presents the GT study in detail. By revisiting previous discussions and analyses, this chapter reflects on the research purpose, research questions, adopted methodology, key findings in the theory, contributions to the knowledge, limitations in the design, implications, and potential further research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: The recruitment email for participants at the pilot stage

Dear student,

My name is Jin Tan. I am undertaking a research project for a doctoral programme in the Department of Information Studies at the University of Sheffield.

The study is about "using weblogs/blogs for people's learning and weblogs' potential effects on knowledge sharing". It aims to investigate how weblogs affect individual learning, how weblogs influence knowledge transfer and how they facilitate knowledge sharing.

The purpose of this email is to ask for your participation in an interview on the topic mentioned above. I sincerely invite you to take part in the interview if you have blogging experience, read blogs or have an interest in this phenomenon. This interview will take place in a location of your choice on the campus. According to your convenience, a date and time will be arranged. The interview will last 30-40 minutes. Please read the attachment – "Interview Guide" for more details of the interview.

I would be very grateful if you could make an appointment to participate in the interview. Please give your contact information and convenient dates. I will contact you by email or telephone in the near future to confirm your availability and arrange the details regarding the day, time and place of the interview.

I would like to stress that this study is only for academic purposes and it will not be possible for any participant to be personally identified.

If you have any doubts or concerns about this research, please do not hesitate to contact me (my contact details are below).

Again, many thanks. Your participation in this research is sincerely appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Jin Tan

Jin Tan

Research Student
Room 229, Department of Information Studies
University of Sheffield
Regent Court, 211 Portobello Street, Sheffield, S1 4DP

Email: liq04jt@shef.ac.uk
Telephone: 0114 222 6343

Appendix 2: The interview guide for participants at the pilot stage

1. Who I am

I'm a research student in the Department of Information at the University of Sheffield.

Name: Jin Tan
Email: liq04jt@sheffield.ac.uk
Address: Room 229, Department of Information Studies, University of Sheffield
Regent Court, 211 Portobello Street, Sheffield, S1 4DP

2. Research aim

I'm conducting research into "The use and value of weblogs/blogs in learning". The interview is intended to ask about your opinions and experiences of using blogs to help individual learning and information sharing.

3. Confidentiality and anonymity

The interview will take about 30-40 minutes. With your permission, the interview will be tape recorded. The tapes and information are only used for the academic purposes, anonymously, and not for any commercial purpose. The interview information will be strictly confidential and data will only be used to transcribe and to compile aggregate statistics. Information on individuals (such as name, gender, ethnicity and so on) will not be revealed under any circumstances.

Meanwhile, I would like to indicate you following points if you are willing to consent. This is completely up to you. I will only use the records in ways that you agree to:

In any use of these records, names will not be identified.
The anonymised records can be studied, transcribed and analysed by the interviewer to fulfil the research aim.
The anonymised records can be used for scientific publications and/or meetings.
The anonymised records can be shown in presentations to scientific or non-scientific groups.

In addition, there are no foreseeable disadvantages or risks in taking part in the interview.

4. Pause the tape recorder

During the interview, if you don't want to continue or need to break for any reason, please do feel free to say or stop the tape recorder by press the "pause" button. And at the end of the interview, if you want to withdraw from the interview, or if you do not want me use the tape or transcribe it, I will give the cassette tape to you, and if you like, you can wipe it.

5. Any questions

If you have any questions or interests in the research, please do feel free to contact me.

Appendix 3: The recruitment email for bloggers at the main stage

Email Title: Are you a blogger? Win a cash prize!

Do you have your own blog (e.g. using Blogger, LiveJournal, Xanga, MSN Space, MySpace etc)? If so, would you be willing to participate in a research project?

I am conducting a study of students' use of blogging and blog reading. I am interested in any aspect of students' experiences of using blogs, for example for keeping in touch with friends or for pursuing a particular interest.

I would like to invite you to participate in the research if you have had blogging experience for more than one year (i.e. having your own blog and updating it regularly).

If you join the study, I would like to talk to you about your experience at a time that is convenient to you, on a campus location (ideally in a room in your department, or the Department of Information Studies where I am based). I am very flexible and would be happy to meet with you any time over the next few weeks or later in the semester. I would expect our conversation to last about 40-50 minutes. When it ends, you will get a small gift and a chance to win £50 cash in a prize draw.

Please respond to this email and we can arrange a time that's convenient for you. I would like to emphasise that this study is for academic purposes only and it will not be possible for any participant to be personally identified.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please don't hesitate to contact me (see contact details below).

Again, many thanks – your participation in this research is greatly appreciated.

Best wishes,

Jin Tan

Jin Tan

Research student
Room 224, Department of Information Studies
University of Sheffield
Regent Court, 211 Portobello Street, Sheffield, S1 4DP

Email: liq04jt@shef.ac.uk

Appendix 4: The recruitment email for pure blog readers at the main stage

Email Title: Do you read blogs? Win a cash prize!

Do you read any blogs on a continuing basis? If so, would you be willing to participate in a research project?

I am conducting a study of students' use of blogging and blog reading. I am interested in any aspect of students' experiences of reading blogs, for example for tracking friends or for pursuing a particular interest.

I would like to invite you to participate in the research if have read any blogs on a regular basis (more than one year).

If you join the study, I would like to talk to you about your experience at a time that is convenient to you, on a campus location (ideally in a room in your department, or the Department of Information Studies where I am based). I am very flexible and would be happy to meet with you any time over the next few weeks or later in the semester. I would expect our conversation to last about 30-50 minutes. When it ends, you will get a small gift and a chance to win £50 cash in a prize draw.

Please respond to this email and we can arrange a time that's convenient for you. I would like to emphasise that this study is for academic purposes only and it will not be possible for any participant to be personally identified.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please don't hesitate to contact me (see contact details below).

Again, many thanks – your participation in this research is greatly appreciated.

Best wishes,

Jin Tan

''

Jin Tan

Research student
Room 224, Department of Information Studies
University of Sheffield
Regent Court, 211 Portobello Street, Sheffield, S1 4DP

Email: lig04jt@shef.ac.uk

''

Appendix 5: Semi-structured interview questions (Pilot phase)

Questions

- Collect basic information:

Name	**gender**	**age**	**ethnics**	**education background**	**Internet experiences**	**e-mail**

- Do you have blogging experiences? How long have you blogged?
[*divide people into two groups according to their blogging experiences because the longer blogging time, the more experiences, and more valuable data could come out*]
1. Beginner / Long experiences 2. No blogging experiences

1. Questions for people who have blogging experiences:

1.1 When did you become aware of blogs?
[*try to find how people start to know blogs*]

1.2 What would you say a "blog" is?
[*try to find how people's view of blogs*]

1.3 Why do you want to have your own blog?
[*try to find the aim of having a blog; blog types; if there are any reasons for sharing knowledge*]

1.3.1 What makes you keep blogging? (for bloggers who have more than one year experience)
[*try to find why people keep blogging*]

1.4 What is your blog used for?
[*try to find the type or uses of people's blog*]

1.5 Do you read any particular blogs? Why?
[*try to find whether people obtain useful information from others' blogs; do they learn something from other's blogs; the reasons that people browse others' blogs*]

1.6 Will you leave comments on other people's blogs? Why / why not?
[*try to find how people's attitudes to exchange their ideas with other people*]

1.7 For your own blog, do you think it's important to get comments from others? Why or why not?
[*try to find if people like to exchange their ideas using comments*]

1.8 What do you feel are the advantages and disadvantages of blogs through your blogging experiences?
[*try to find how people's feeling of blogging*]

1.9 Do you think blogs could help people in their learning?
[*try to find how people's opinions of using blogs help learning/ helpful or not?/ what is learning for them?*]

1.10 Will you keep on writing your blog? Why or why not?
[*try to find how important of blogs for bloggers and why*]

****
Further questions if there are no relevant information comes out:

1.11 Do you think a blog is an easy way to help you express your feelings or show your ideas?
[*try to find how people's ideas about using blogs transfer their tacit knowledge*]

1.12 Do you think your blog offers useful information for people?
[*try to find what people's ideas about their blogging and the significance for sharing information*]

1.13 Are there any impressive stories/things about your blogs? (why?)
[*try to find if people have specific reasons for using blogs; some valuable factors of blogs*]

****

2. Questions for people who haven't blogging experiences, but browsing other people's blogs:

2.1 In your opinion, what is a "blog"?
[*try to find how people know blogs and how do they view blogs*]

2.2 Do you read any particular blogs? Why?
[*try to find if people could get some information via blogs; if it is a potential way of obtaining information*]

2.3 Are you aware of different kinds of blogs?
Which kinds of blog do you like or dislike? Why or why not?
[*try to find what people's preferences of blogs are and further know their interests of blogs*]

2.4 Do you leave some comments when you read other people's blogs? Why or why not?
[*try to find if people like to exchange their ideas using comments*]

2.5 In the future, will you try to have your own blog? Why or why not?
[*try to find how people's feeling of blogging; advantages and disadvantages*]

2.6 If you create your own blog, which kind of blogs would it be? Why?
[*try to find the aim and uses of blogs*]

****
Further questions if no relevant information emerges:

2.7 Do you think you learn something by reading others' blogs?
[*try to find if people use blogs as a way of get information*]

2.8 Do you think blogs could be an e-learning tool in the future?
[*try to find how people's opinions of using blogs help learning*]

After Interview

Thanks for your time and assistance. The information is very helpful. If you have any problem about this interview or are interested in the findings, please feel free to contact me. The contact information is on the consent form. Thanks a lot.

Appendix 6: Semi-structured interview questions (Main phase)

Questions

- Collect basic information:

Name	
gender	
age	
ethnics	
education background	
Internet experiences	
e-mail	
Your blogs **or** **Blog examples**	

- Do you have your own weblog?

- How many weblogs do you have?

- How long have you used weblog?

- Do you read other people's weblogs?
[*divide people into two groups according to their blogging experiences because the longer blogging time, the more experiences, and more valuable data could come out*]

1. Blogger: beginner / long experiences (more than one year)

2. Reader: Don't have a weblog, read some weblogs on a regular basis

1. Questions for people who have blogging experiences:

1.1 Could you tell me which weblog service do you use? (Blogger, Xanga, MSN, LiveJournal, etc.)
[*know the blog service*]

1.2 Could you tell me what your weblog is used for?
[*try to find the purpose of blogging*]

1.3 Could you give some examples of what you have written on your weblog?

1.4 Please tell me about how you became aware of weblogs? (When, Who, How)
[*try to find how people start to know blogs*]

1.5 How did you feel about weblogs when you first time know it?

1.6 Initially, why did you want to have your own weblog?
[*try to find the aim of having a blog; blog types; if there are any reasons for sharing knowledge*]

1.7 If you lost your weblog because of technical problems of weblog services, how would you feel then?

1.8 What makes you keep blogging?
[*try to find why people keep blogging, what motivated them?*]

1.9 Do you go back to read you own weblog? Why/ Why not?

1.10 Besides maintaining your own weblog, do you read any weblogs?
[*try to find whether people learn something from reading blogs*]

1.11 How often do you read weblogs?

1.12 Could you give examples, which kind of weblogs do you read?

1.13 Why do you read these weblogs?
[*try to find the reasons that people browse others' blogs*]

1.14 When you read other people's weblogs, will you leave comments for them? Why / why not?
[*try to find how people's attitudes to exchange their ideas with other people*]

1.15 For your own weblog, do you think it's important to get comments from others? Why or why not?
[*try to find if people like to exchange their ideas using comments*]

1.16 How do you feel if people leave comments on your weblog?

1.17 When you read other people's weblogs, do you compare your own weblog with their weblogs (Content or design)?

1.18 How do you feel about the advantages of weblogs through your blogging experience?
[*try to find how people's feeling of blogging*]

1.19 Are there any disadvantages of weblogs, in your opinion?

1.20 Have you learned anything by blogging? What did you learn?

1.21 Are these learned things helpful for your subject or study here?

1.22 What would you say a "weblog" is?
[*try to find how people's view of blogs*]

****

Further questions if there are no very relevant information comes out:

1.23 Do you think it is easy to write down your feelings or ideas by using weblog?
[*try to find how people's ideas about using blogs transfer their tacit knowledge*]

1.24 Do you think your weblog offers useful information for people?
[*try to find what people's ideas about their blogging and the significance for sharing information*]

1.25 Do you think the information on weblogs is credible?

1.26 Do you think weblogs could help people's learning?
[*try to find how people's opinions of using blogs help learning/ helpful or not?/ what is learning for them?*]

1.27 Do you think weblogs could be used in education?

1.28 What is your favourite way to learn outside of classroom?

1.29 Are there any impressive things about your weblog? (what's it?)
[*try to find if people have specific reasons for using blogs; some valuable factors of blogs*]

1.30 Will you carry on blogging? Why or why not?
[*try to find how important of blogs for bloggers and why*]

1.31 The last question, please could you provide any other information you prefer to add and your impressions of the interview?

After Interview

Thanks for your time and assistance. The information is very helpful. If you have any problem about this interview or are interested in the findings, please feel free to contact me. The contact information is on the consent form. Thanks a lot.

****

2. Questions for people who do not have weblogs but read other people's blogs regularly:

2.1 Could you please tell me about how you became aware of weblogs? (When, Who, How)
[*try to find how people start to know blogs*]

2.2 Do you read any weblogs regularly?
[*try to find whether people learn something from reading blogs*]

2.3 How often do you read weblogs?

2.4 Could you give some examples of which kind of weblogs do you read?
[*try to find the reasons that people browse others' blogs*]

2.5 What makes you keep reading these weblogs? (Attractive content there?)

2.6 How do you feel when you read others' weblogs? (Like or dislike it?)

2.7 When you read weblogs, do you leave any comments for them? Why or why not?
[*try to find if people like to exchange their ideas using comments*]

2.8 What do you feel about the advantages of weblogs?
[*try to find how people's feeling of blogging*]

2.9 Are there any disadvantages of weblogs, in your opinion?

2.10 Have you learned anything by reading those weblogs? What did you learn?

2.11 Are these learned things helpful for your subject or study here?

2.12 In your opinion, what is a "weblog"?
[*try to find how people know blogs and how do they view blogs*]

2.13 In the future, do you want to have your own weblog? Why or why not?
[*try to find how people's feeling of blogging; advantages and disadvantages*]

2.14 If you create your own weblog, what would you use it for?
[*try to find the aim and uses of blogs*]

2.15 What is your favourite way to learn outside of classroom?

****

Further questions if there are no relevant information emerges:

2.16 Do you think the information on weblogs is credible?

2.17 Do you think weblogs could help people's learning?
[*try to find how people's opinions of using blogs help learning/ helpful or not?/ what is learning for them?*]

2.18 Do you think weblogs could be used in education?
[*try to find how people's opinions of using blogs help learning*]

2.19 The last question, please could you provide any other information you prefer to add and your impressions of the interview?

After Interview

Thanks for your time and assistance. The information is very helpful. If you have any problem about this interview or are interested in the findings, please feel free to contact me. The contact information is on the consent form. Thanks a lot.

Appendix 7: Developed additional flexible interview questions (over Main phase)

Additional flexible questions that might ask in an interview:

1 Did you remove any entries after reading back your own blog?

2 Do you often remember that you have a blog or you need to update it?

3 How many hours do you spend on writing your blog?

4 How many hours do you spend on reading other people's blogs?

5 How many words are normally on one of your entries?

6 Are there any lecturers or teachers who mentioned blog resources in class?

7 Do you talk about blog with your classmates or friends offline?

8 Did you find out some useful blog resources for your own study?

9 Did you put pictures or music on your blog?

10 Did you blog anything that is related to your study, e.g., coursework, lectures, textbooks?

11 Did you join in any online community through your blog?

12 Do you use your real name on your blog?

13 Did you mention people's real name when you write about them?

14 Do you put any personal information on the blog?

15 Do you put any private information on the blog?

16 Did you improve your own blog for making it more attractive?

17 Which language do you use on the blog? (for an international student)

18 Do you know who are your readers? Do you want to know?

19 Did you have any negative experience of blogging?

Appendix 8: The participant consent form

Participant Consent Form

Title of Project: The impact of blogs on people's learning and Knowledge sharing

Name of Researcher: JIN TAN

Participant Identification Number for this project:

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated: *[ ]* for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. ☐

3. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. ☐

4. I agree to take part in the above project. ☐

______________________	______________	________________
Name of Participant	Date	Signature
______________________	______________	________________
Name of Person taking consent (if different from researcher)	Date	Signature
JIN TAN______________	______________	________________
Researcher	Date	Signature

Copies:
One copy for the participant and one copy for the Principal Investigator / Supervisor.

Appendix 9: The participant information sheet

1. Research Project Title:

The impact of blogs on personal learning and knowledge sharing

2. Invitation paragraph

You are being invited to take part in the research project "The impact of blogs on personal learning and knowledge sharing". Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

3. What is the project's purpose?

Over recent years, blogs as one of the popular online tools has attracted people's attention; in particular, the use of blogs as an educational tool also raised academic interests. Some research on this phenomenon has been undertaken, however, there is a need for further research in this area. How do blogs help individual learning? How do blogs facilitate knowledge transfer? This research is intended to find the answers. In short, the purpose of this research is to explore the nature of individual learning and knowledge sharing in network environment by investigating the use of blogs.

4. Why have I been chosen?

In this research, data collection is mainly through face-to-face interviews with students separately. You have been selected on the basis of your experience of using blogs within the HE context.

5. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (<u>and be asked to sign a consent form</u>) and you can still withdraw at any time without it affecting you in any way. You do not have to give a reason.

6. What will happen to me if I take part?

It is planned to conduct the research from 2005-2008. The information you contribute could be involved at any point during this period of time. It is estimated that the interviews will take between 30-50 minutes.

With your permission, the interview will be tape recorded. The tapes and information will only be used anonymously and for academic purposes. It will not be possible for any participant to be personally identified. Information on individuals (such as name, gender, ethnicity and so on) will not be revealed under any circumstances.

Meanwhile, I would like to indicate to you the following points for which your consent is needed. This is completely up to you. I will only use the records in ways that you agree to:

1) In any use of these records, you personal information will not be identified.
2) The anonymised records can be studied, transcribed and analysed by the interviewer only according to the research aims.
3) The anonymised records can be used for scientific publications and/or meetings.
4) The anonymised records can be shown in presentations to scientific or non-scientific groups.

I would be very grateful if you could keep the interview questions confidential as well.

7. What do I have to do?

If you consent to the information on this sheet, you need to sign a consent form, but you can withdraw at any time.

8. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

No foreseeable disadvantages or risks in taking part.

9. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the research, it is hoped that this work will indicate the role of blogs in helping people's learning and further facilitate knowledge sharing, as well as benefit higher education.

10. What happens if the research study stops earlier than expected?

If the research had to stop for some unexpected or accidental reason, all the information you contributed in this research would be managed by the interviewer's supervisors or be destroyed, and you would not be affected.

11. What if something goes wrong?

Any enquires or complaints about any aspect of this research may be made by contacting the Ethics Administrator:

Dr. Peter Bath
Senior Lecturer
Department of Information Studies
University of Sheffield
Regent Court
211 Portobello Street
Sheffield S1 4DP UK

Tel: 0114 2222636
Fax: 0114 2780300
http://www.shef.ac.uk/is/staff/bath.html

12. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

This research complies with the Data Protection Act 1998. All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications. Please see No.6 in this information sheet.

13. What will happen to the results of the research project?

The information you contribute will be transcribed and analysed. The analysed data will be organised as a part of the interviewer's thesis. Meanwhile, the results might be presented as a published paper or report. Any personal information such as your name will not be identified in any report or publication. Please see No.6 in this information sheet.

14. Who is organising and funding the research?

This is PhD research that is being self-funded by the student.

15. Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This research project has been ethically approved by the Department of Information Studies' Ethics Review Procedure. The University of Sheffield's Research Ethics Committee (U-REC) has monitored the application.

16. Contact for further information

Name:	Jin Tan
Email:	liq04jt@sheffield.ac.uk
Address:	Room 224, Department of Information Studies, University of Sheffield Regent Court, 211 Portobello Street, Sheffield S1 4DP
Research Project :	http://www.shef.ac.uk/is/research/groups/ei/people.html
Supervisor Name:	Prof. Nigel Ford
Email:	n.ford@sheffield.ac.uk
Address:	Room 210, Department of Information Studies, University of Sheffield Regent Court, 211 Portobello Street, Sheffield S1 4DP
Tel:	0114 2222637 (External) 22637 (Internal)
Fax:	0114 2780300
Webpage:	http://www.shef.ac.uk/is/staff/ford.html
Supervisor Name:	Dr. Philippa Levy
Email:	p.levy@sheffield.ac.uk
Address:	Room 306, Department of Information Studies, University of Sheffield Regent Court, 211 Portobello Street, Sheffield S1 4DP
Tel:	0114 2222638 (External) 22638 (Internal)
Fax:	0114 2780300
Webpage:	http://www.shef.ac.uk/is/staff/levy.html

During the interview, if you don't want to continue or need to break for any reason, please do feel free to say or stop the tape recorder by press the "pause" button. And at the end of the interview, if you want to withdraw from the interview, or if you do not want me use the tape or transcribe it, I will give the cassette tape to you, and if you like, you can wipe it.

You will be given a copy of the information sheet and the signed consent form, if appropriate. Would you please sign the consent form?

Thanks for your time and friendly help. If you have any problem about this interview or are interested in the research, please do feel free to contact me. My contact information is above. Again, many thanks. Your participant in this research is sincerely appreciated.

If it's ok, we will start the interview now. Please relax and express your ideas with ease.

Appendix 10: The university research ethics application form

Cover Sheet

I confirm that in my judgment, due to the project's nature, the use of a method to inform prospective participants about the project (e.g. 'Participant Information Sheet' / 'Covering Letter' / 'Pre-Written Script'):	
Is relevant:	**Is not relevant:**
X (if relevant then this should be enclosed)	

Mark 1 Box

I confirm that in my judgment, due to the project's nature, the use of a 'Participant Consent Form':	
Is relevant:	**Is not relevant:**
X (if relevant then this should be enclosed)	

Mark 1 Box

Does this application cover more than one research project (i.e. is this is a 'generic' research project application)?	
Yes:	**No:**
	X

Mark 1 Box

Insert date here: 06/12/2005
Insert applicant's name here: JIN TAN

University Research Ethics Application Form

Part A

A1. **Research Project Title:**
The impact of blogs on people's learning and knowledge sharing

A.2 **Contact person** (normally the Principal Investigator, in the case of staff-led research projects, or the student in the case of supervised-student research projects):

Title: Miss First Name/Initials: JIN Last Name: TAN
Post: Room 229 Department: Information Studies
Email: liq04jt@sheffield.ac.uk Telephone:

A2.1 **Is this a supervised-student research project?** Yes
If yes, please provide the Supervisor's contact details:

Supervisor Name:	**Supervisor Name:**
Prof. Nigel Ford Room 210 Department of Information Studies University of Sheffield Regent Court 211 Portobello Street Sheffield S1 4DP Tel.: 0114 2222637 (External) 22637 (Internal) Fax.: 0114 2780300 Email: n.ford@sheffield.ac.uk	Dr. Philippa Levy Room 306 Department of Information Studies University of Sheffield Regent Court 211 Portobello Street Sheffield S1 4DP Tel.: 0114 2222638 (External) 22638 (Internal) Fax.: 0114 2780300 Email: p.levy@sheffield.ac.uk

A.3 **Other key investigators/co-applicants** (within or outside the University): No

Please list all (adding more rows if necessary)

Title	Full Name	Post	Responsibility in project	Organisation	Department

A.4 **Proposed Project Duration:**

Start date: 01/2006 End date: 10/2008

A.5 **Mark 'X' in one or more of the following boxes if your research:**

	involves testing a medicinal product *
	involves investigating a medical device *****
	involves additional radiation above that required for clinical care *****
	involves taking new samples of human biological material (e.g. blood, tissue) *****
	involves children or young people aged under 18 years
	involves using samples of human biological material collected before for another

☐	purpose
☐	involves only identifiable personal data with no direct contact with participants
☐	involves only anonymised or aggregated data
☐	involves prisoners or others in custodial care (e.g. young offenders)
☐	involves adults with mental incapacity or mental illness
☐	has the primary aim of being educational (e.g. student research, a project necessary for a postgraduate degree or diploma, other than an MD or PhD)

* If you have marked boxes marked ***** then you also need to obtain confirmation that appropriate University insurance is in place. The procedure for doing so is entirely by email. Please send an email addressed to: insurance@shef.ac.uk and request a copy of the Clinical Trial Insurance Application form.

A.6 Briefly summarise the project's aims, objectives and methodology?
(it must be in language comprehensible to a lay person)

This research is an in-depth study into the use of blogs for people's learning and their impact on knowledge sharing. It aims to investigate how blogs impact on personal learning and how blogs influence tacit knowledge transfer.

A qualitative approach will be used in the research and face-to-face interviews will be used for collecting data. The interviews will be conducted in places (such as office or meeting room) based on campus, depending on participants' convenience.

A.7 What is the potential for physical and/or psychological harm / distress to participants?

None

A.8 Does your research raise any issues of personal safety for you or other researchers involved in the project? (especially if taking place outside working hours or off University premises)

No

A.9 How will potential participants in the project be (i) identified, (ii) approached and (iii) recruited?

In the piloting stage, an initial 5-7 participants will be selected and contacted by email using convenience sampling and snowball methods. My starting point will be students personally known to me, and using a snowball approach, I will broad the sample to people they recommend to me. When I met PhD students, I asked them randomly and informally about their ideas of using weblogs, their blogging experiences or if they know any students who have blogging experiences, then I ask for their willingness and invite them participate in a formal interview. I will send a formal email to each participant to arrange a convenient interview time and suitable place. The 5-7 participants are selected to help the interviewer test the research design, give advice of the study and provide valuable data for the research.

After the piloting stage, the research design will be tested and improved.

Insert date here: 06/12/2005
Insert applicant's name here: JIN TAN

The potential participants will be selected from university students with experience with blogs. It will cover around 25-30 students who will attend the interviews separately. A contact email for recruiting potential participants will be sent out to university students after I seek permission to contact students via an university students' email list.

A.10 Will informed consent be obtained from the participants?

YES [X] NO [ ]

Please explain the proposed process for obtaining informed consent. If informed consent or consent is not to be obtained please explain why. You may want to consult Section 2.4.3 of the University's Ethics Policy or the guidance fact-sheet on consent at:
http://cms.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/03/25/85/ethics_guidance_consent.pdf

Participants will be asked to read the Participant Information Sheet and sign the Consent Form.

A.11 What measures will be put in place to ensure confidentiality of personal data, where appropriate?

The researcher will manage and be responsible for all the research data, including the participants' personal data. All the materials related to research data collection, such as cassette tapes, copies of the participant information sheet, the participants consent form, notes and so on, will be kept and stored safely and confidentially by Jin Tan with electronic files and hard copy.

A.12 Will financial / in kind payments (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants? (Indicate how much and on what basis this has been decided)

YES [ ] NO [X]

Part B – Declaration

Full Research Project Title:

The impact of blogs on people's learning and knowledge sharing

I confirm my responsibility to deliver the research project (project) in accordance with the University of Sheffield's (the University) policies and procedures, which include: the University's '*Financial Regulations*'; '*Good Research Practice Standards'*; and the '*Ethics Policy for Research Involving Human Participants, Data and Tissue'* (Ethics Policy) and, where externally funded, with the terms and conditions of the research funder.

In signing this research ethics application form I am also confirming that:

- The form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief.
- The project will abide by the University's Ethics Policy.
- If applicable: If this is an application for a 'generic' project all the individual projects that fit under the generic project are compatible with this application.
- There is no potential material interest that may, or may appear to, impair the independence and objectivity of researchers conducting this project.
- Subject to the research being approved, I undertake to adhere to the project protocol (protocol) without unagreed deviation and to comply with any conditions set out in the letter from the University ethics reviewers (reviewers) notifying me of this.
- I undertake to inform the reviewers of significant changes to the protocol (by contacting the Ethics Administrator in the first instance).
- I am aware of my responsibility to be up to date and comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data, including the need to register when necessary with the appropriate Data Protection Officer (within the University the Data Protection Officer is based in CiCS).
- I understand that the project (including research records and data) may be subject to inspection for audit purposes, if required in future.
- I understand that personal data about me as a researcher in this application form will be held by those involved in the ethics review process (i.e. the Ethics Administrator and/or reviewers) and that this will be managed according to Data Protection Act principles.

Name of the Principal Investigator (Supervisor if a student project):
insert name here Professor Nigel Ford

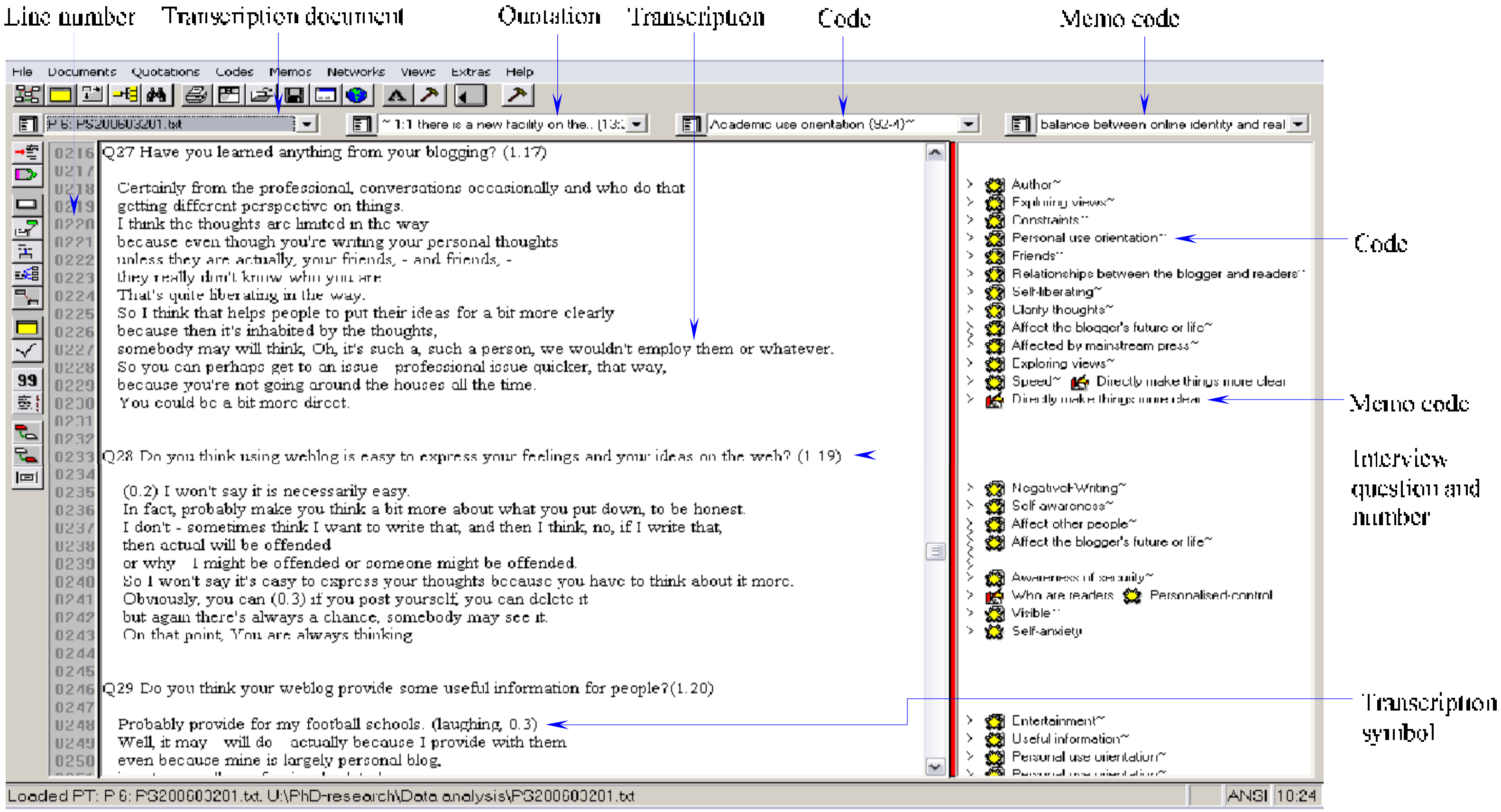
Name of student (if applicable):
insert name here JIN TAN

Signature of the Principal Investigator (Supervisor if a student project):
sign here Professor Nigel Ford

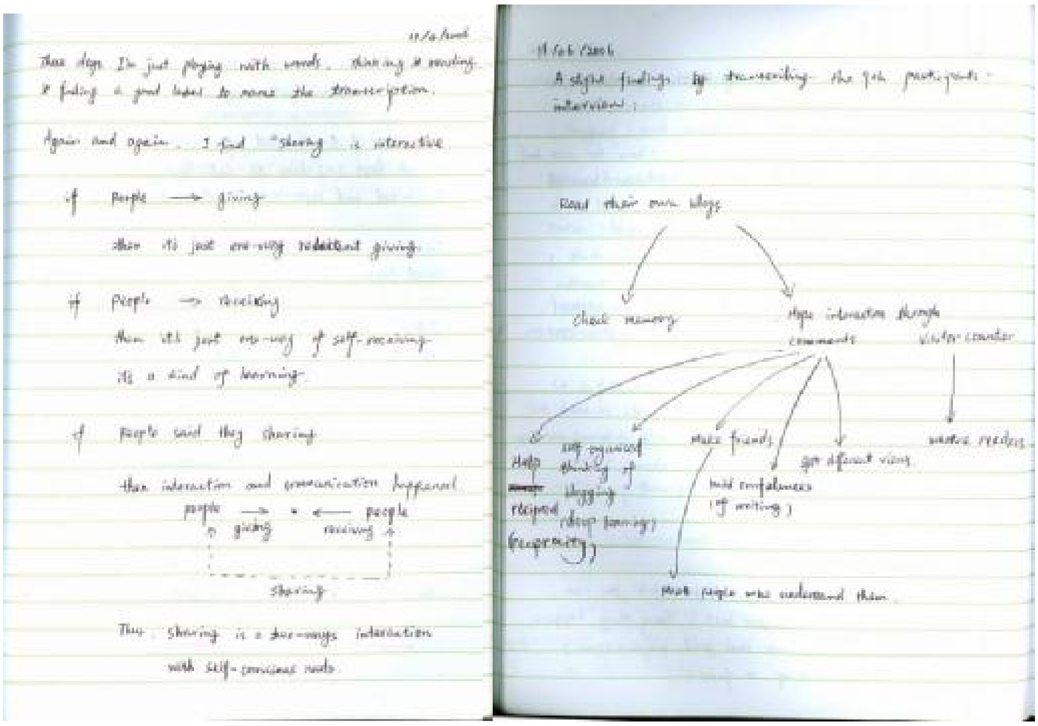
Date: 06/12/2005

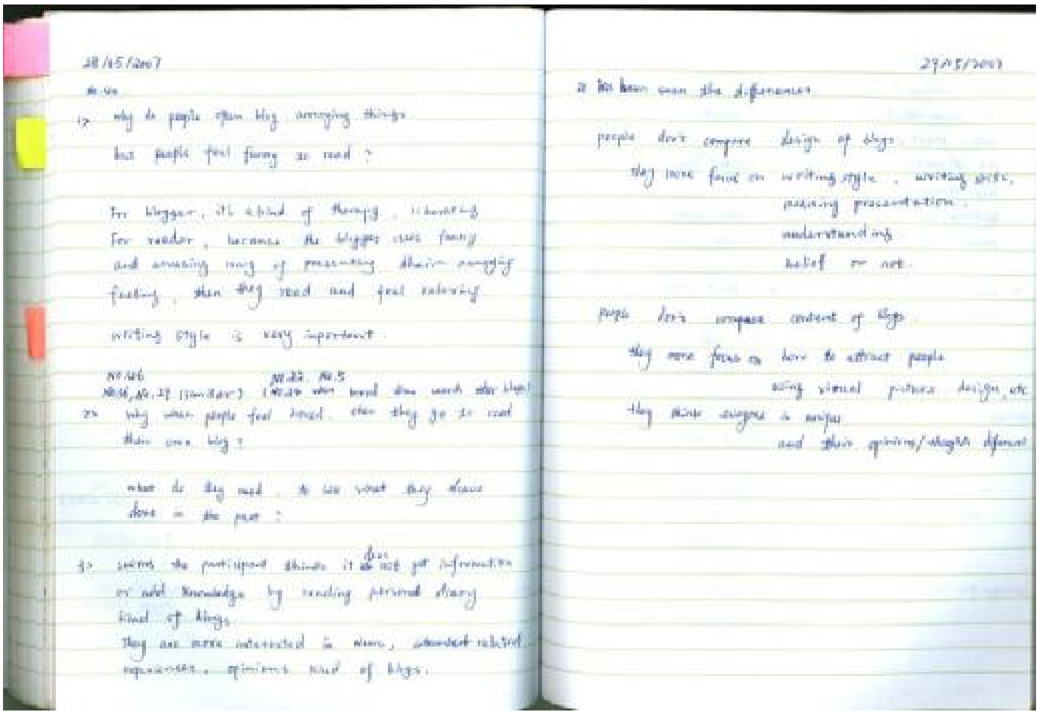
Complete the form in full, insert the applicant's name & date in the footer of each page and sign and date "Part B". Then send an electronic copy of the full application plus a hard, signed copy of "Part B" to the Ethics Administrator (also enclose, if relevant, a 'Participant Information Sheet' / 'Covering Letter' / 'Pre-Written Script' and Participant Consent Form).

Appendix 11: An example of ATLAS.ti data analysis window



Appendix 12: An example of memos (the researcher's personal diary)





Appendix 13: An example of theoretical memos

[18/Oct/2006] about relationships between B/R, learning and blogging

Blogs provide a potential role of helping learning at the first step. I don't talk about blogging is good or bad. Basically, I talk about what happened in blog usage. What did the participants learn? Firstly, IT skills, which they wouldn't learn in the classroom in terms of their disciplines. Secondly, about themselves. They started thinking about themselves, how they changed or what they did before, good or not. Thirdly, their awareness of society, interpersonal relationships and the world. They started seeing different perspectives, different opinions and arguments, what happened in the world, the relationships between the blogger and the reader. See two examples of participant 9 and 6:

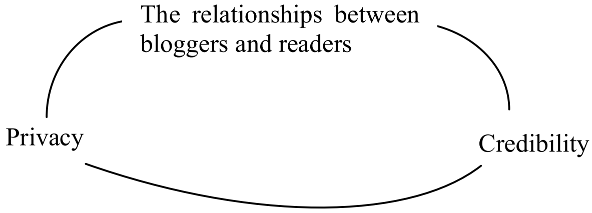
> "…it's that sort of levels of interaction. I actually posted it on my entry about this sort of situation where ***the more private information is, the more anonymous you prefer people to be reading to be***. Because as I said, I have people who know me in real life, who read my blog, but if I have very private entry, I make sure they cannot read it, but completely anonymous strangers I don't mind they read it." (Participant 9)

> "In fact, probably make you think a bit more about what you put down. To be honest, I don't sometimes think I want to write that, and then I think if I write that, then actual will be offended or I might be offended or someone might be offended. So I won't say it's easy to express your thoughts because you have to think about it more. Because you can if you post yourself, you can delete it but again, there's always chance somebody see it. On that point, you are always thinking." (Participant 6)

This kind of learning actually did not happen in class, but in virtual, online. In fact, it is experiential, because it's not "learning" based on prior experience but "learning" through experience, a bit like learning by doing. Students learn these by experiencing of using the technologies/tools.

It seems that there are subtle connections between what people to blog (content) and the relationship between bloggers and readers. ***This relationship is not very clear now, but participant 9's expression drew my attention, I need to investigate instances in new interviews. Maybe analyse more readers and see if there are more positive responses about this point.***

[08/02/2007]



Are there any relationships amongst these three concepts? Which one affects another ones? Where is the starting point in this circle?

[01/04/2007]

"Believe it or not", "is credible or not?"
The quality of online information is mostly judged by students' first sense/conscious. This is based on their prior knowledge, intuition and experience. It seems that the participants did not ask these questions often.

They did not feel very much about they like or dislike the information on a blog. They accepted blog information to some extent according to who is the blogger. Different from other media, such as news or journals, they didn't think about the information according to the publisher too much. It seems "credible or not" is not an appropriate question here, the users only read blogs for relaxation, for life; but not for study or their assignment. Therefore, it seems that it even isn't a question for them. Because the information is not about a fact, but about a person's life, feelings, emotions, or opinions. There is not very serious attitude to blog information. The readers didn't think they should judge right or wrong, good or bad, credible or fake. They just read it, similar to watch movies, read novels, and see what happened on people.

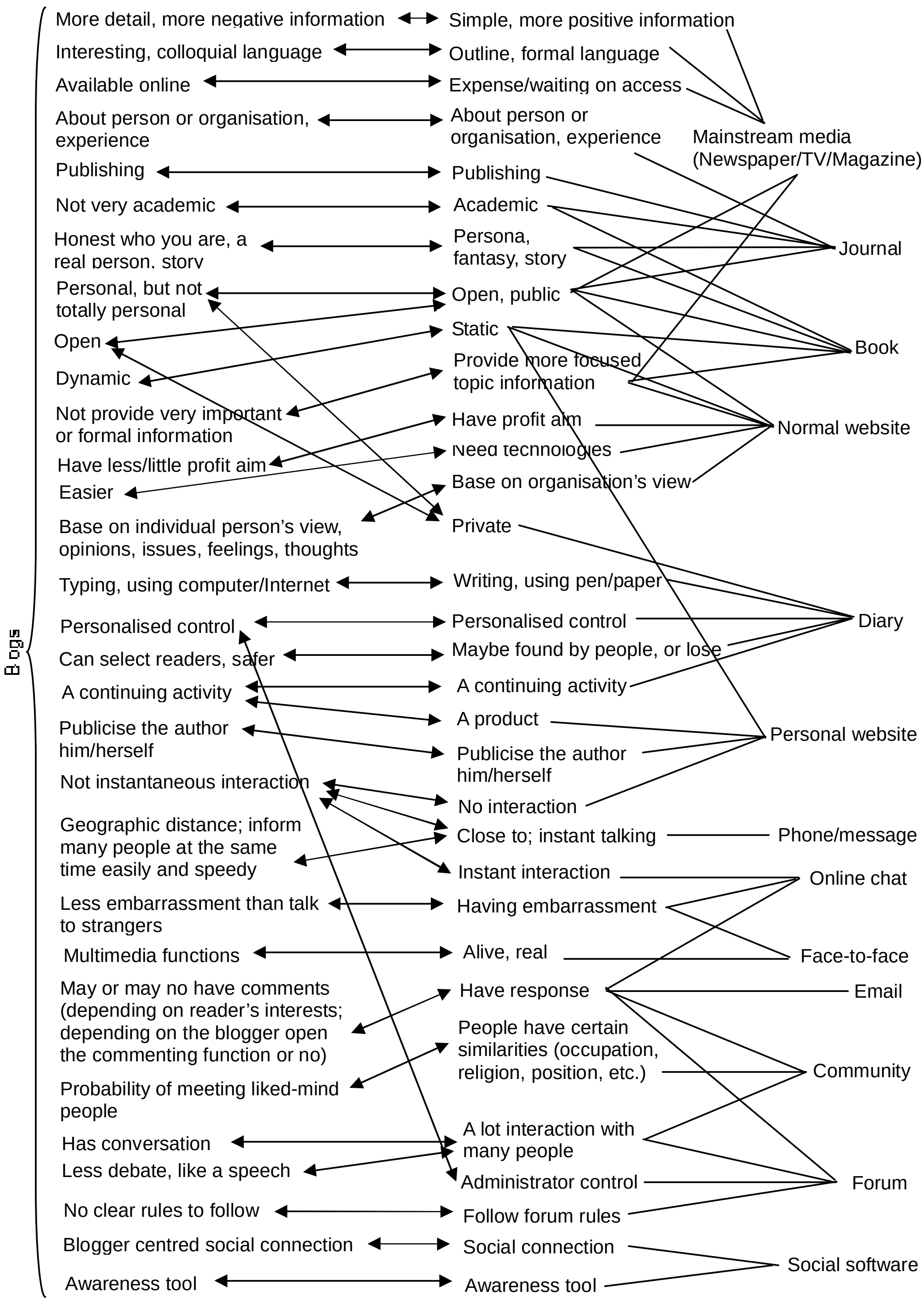
[15/06/2007]

No.36 provided a good example that people blog anonymously and open to strangers. It exactly fits in what participant 9 said that someone blogs for being themselves and being self in another world.

No.36 is a female undergraduate. She thought, by blogging, she can be herself; she can speak out and express something that she couldn't say in reality or to people around her, like friends, parents, etc. It is clear that the differences between online friendships and friendships in reality are that they don't need to worry about offending someone. They don't need to worry any social taboos; they don't need to worry that who they are; and they have to be themselves who people know in reality. This really reflects the identity issue in the virtual world and the reality. Does it help people to see themselves more clear?

This participant intended to separate her real life from online world. She said that she would like to be herself, but sometimes she couldn't in reality. This is because of the social or culture constrains. She doesn't want to keep salient or accept this. It's very conflicted, on one hand, she needs to keep her own identity as her, who has been known by people around. On the other hand, she has some different opinions, different perspectives, she would like to express, but she couldn't say in reality to people who she knows. Being online or blogging provides a space for her to express her true feelings. She thought it's a right way. From this perspective, it is a kind of shrink, psychologically, for self-therapy. She might just want to escape from a real world in a certain period of time or from the uncomfortable feeling sometimes. By blogging, she felt care, listeners and mind-similar friends there, people who have similar feelings, who understand, who give different perspectives too. This again also reflects that it seems that she was looking for a feeling of belonging, a feeling of safety.

Appendix 14: A comparison – blogs and 13 communication styles



Appendix 15: Categories and concepts list

1. Open coding example – generating categories

This table covers 251 codes + 28 memos (ATLAS.ti) + (8 + 14) new concepts. The bold and italic terms refer to the newly emergent concepts in terms of properties and dimensions of the comparative incidents. The italic terms mean there are other relationships at another level and the number means the density of a code.

Dimensions of the property	Properties	Categories	Dimensions of the category
	Convenience (11)		
	Spam (9)		
	Online (103))		
Free/Economical (25)	Expenses (7)	Accessibility (49)	
	Open (162)		
	Government control (1)		
	Select readers (86)		Flexibility (20)
	Commenting (239)		
	Searching function (12)		
	Editable (23)	***Operability***	
	Easy (62)		
	Speedy (23)		
	Personal publishing (2)		
	RSS&Feeds (6)		
	Blogroll (51)		
	Hyperlink (25)	Structure of blogs (6)	
	Visitor counter (22)		
	Reverse chronological order (6)		
	Service reliable (14)	Blog service (133)	
	Time pressure (116)	Priority (24)	
	Priority (24)	Personal principles of blogging (210)	
	Be moved (8)		
	Ask questions (18)	Leave comments (110)	
	Relationships between the blogger and readers (274)		
	Not add value (28)		
	Traceable of identity (39)		
	Anonymity (91)	Online identity (138)	
	balance between online identity and real identity[M] (42)		
	Blogging experience (84)	Individual factors (2)	
	Reading blog experience (47)		

	Internet use experience (10)		
	Work experience (4)		
	Educational background (6)		
	Culture background (40)		
	Gender (5)		
	Age (4)		
	Student status (7)		
	Personality (55)		
	Unique (3)		
	Digital generation (6)		
	Religion relevant (8)		
	Subject relevant (56)		
	Having different opinions (70)		
	Interests (223)		
	Like to be online (10)	Personality (55)	(orientation) ***Altruism*** ---Egoism (24)
	Dislike to be noticed (33)		
	Like to interact with people (21)		
	Like to observe people (36)		
	Not interest in people's life things (6)		
	Curiosity (28)		
	Teaching people (26)		
	Personal views/moods are changeable and relevant (15)		
	Self-anxiety (31)		
	Shy (6)		
	Like variety (3)		
	Like to keep old stuff (1)		
	Not confident (6)		
	talk others about their own blogs[M] (30)		
	Text and language (21)	Communication styles (268)	Preference (62) ***Verbal*** --- ***Non verbal*** ***Formal*** ---***Informal*** ***Virtual*** --- ***Real***
	Text and multimedia (56)		
	Not instantaneous (21)		
	Having distance between people (10)		
	Teachers and students' communication (18)		
	Peer's communication (39)		
	Supplement of communication (67)		
	Colloquial language (7)		
	the contradiction between virtual and reality[M] (59)		
	Build confidence (17)	Valuable for the blogger him/herself (100)	
	Improving writing (269)		

	Language practice (22)		
	Clarify thoughts (61)		
	Interpersonal skills development (23)		
	Feeling if lost the blog (57)		
	Beneficial to mental health (8)		
	Beneficial to studies (24)		
	Directly make things clearer[M] (11)	Public censorship (11)	
	Have readership and interaction[M] (111)	Interaction (165)	
	Leave comments (110)		
	Comprehension (64)		
	Exchange ideas (41)		
	tell the blogger they read their blog[M] (11)		
	Not instantaneous (21)		
(expectation degree) Postive=Comment (15) --Negt veFComment (12)	Feeling of getting comments (108)		
	Feeling of not getting comments (7)		
	Social connection (17)	Origin of information (26)	
	Borrow ideas (2)		
	Memories (80)	Information repository (122) (is associated with Information on blogs[M] (184))	
	Repository of studies (15)		
	Repository of learned things (36)		
	Repository of life things (209)		
	Repository of personal views (29)		
	Repository of quotes (5)		
	Repository of working things (7)		
	Sensitive social issues (30)		
	Private information (28)		
	Reflect reality (15)		
	Reflect the blogger (97)		
	Constant reflection (35)		
Update frequently (43)	Update (75)		
	Filter (17)		
	Author (101)	Credibility (158)	(criteria) ***Subjective* ---*Objective***
	Authority (10)		
	Relationships between the blogger and readers (274)		
	Blog service (133)		
	Public censorship (11)		
	Learn about the blogger (68)	Learned things (153)	***Learning experience***
	Learn about the social world (29)		
	Learn about themselves (20)		

	Learn how to communication with people (15)		
	Learn content management skills (2)		
	Learn subject relevant things (43)		
	Learn interests relevant things (21)		
	Technical skills (80)		
	Broaden perspectives (160)		
	Online etiquette (30)		
	Organising ability (7)		
	balance between personal view and different voices[M] (7)		
	Improving writing (269)		
		Learning by doing (17)	
	Content and personal thoughts comparison[M] (44)	Learning from comparison (29)	
	Design comparison[M] (32)		
	Personalised design (45)	Individualisation (133)	
	Personalised writing (60)		
	Personalised control (22)		
	Freedom space (33)		
	Advertisement (10)	Channels of getting information (132)	(opportunity) accidental found (18) --- ***Inevitable awareness***
	Online searching (9)		
	Friends (62)		
	Working relationships (4)		
	Education (32)		
	Own way of searching information online (97)	Online searching	
	Information resources that have been retrieved[M] (13)		
	Probability of meeting like-minded people online (81)	Expansion of relationship (147)	
	Geographic distance (113)		
	Geographic distance (113)	Keep in touch with people (195)	
	friends will read each other's weblog[M] (63)		
	Readers' interests (60)	Thinking about readers (82)	
	Readership and readers' interests (36)		
	Content on blogs for attracting readers[M] (58)		
	Who are readers[M] (189)		
	Reading other people's blogs (339)	Reading blog experience (47)	
	Reading their own blogs (142)		
	Online business (52)	***Blogs use***	(orientation) ***Altruism*** ---Egoism (24) (usage evaluation) PostiveFGeneral (36) ---
	Less profit aim (1)		
	Sharing (141)		
	Not for expansion (35)		
	Not for providing information (10)		

	Uncertainty of further use (18)		NegativeFGeneral (58) (purpose) academic use (92) --- *Leisure use* / Personal use (149) (orientation) ***for self*** --- for interaction (165) (orientation) ***for self*** --- ***for community*** (orientation) ***profit*** --- ***non-profit***
	Self-expression (69)		
	Self-liberating (135)		
	Self-therapy (104)		
	Self-censorship (174)		
	Weapon (4)		
	Relaxation (48)		
	Entertainment (98)		
	For others (10)		
	Awareness tool (10)		
	Types of blogs (49)		
	Blog for blog[M] (9)		
blogging is not popular in education[M] (30)	Blogging in education[M] (116)		
	Separate blogging and study[M] (60)		
	Time spending on reading blogs[M] (69)	***Lasting voluntary contribution***	
	Time spending on writing blogs[M] (82)		
(maintaining) Not easy to maintain (21) ---Easy to maintain (25)	Effort (39)		
	Sense of contribution (41)	***Use of social power***	
	Sense of belonging (12)		
	Public censorship (11)		
	Backup (47)	Awareness of security (145)	
	Copyright (37)		
	Moderation (35)		
	the contradiction between private and public[M] (72)		
	Impact on mainstream media (7)	Influence of blogs (36)	
	Effects on people		
	Latest insights (17)	Impact on mainstream media (7)	
	Non mainstream voices (45)		
	Supplement of information (13)		
	Personal publishing (2)		
	Affect the blogger his/her own life (43)	***Effects on people***	
	Affect family or friends (6)		
	Affect people whom they blogged (9)		
	Affect readers (views) (14)		
	Traceable of identity (39)		
	Searchable by searching engines (33)		
	Unwanted readers (52)		
	Blog other people (48)	Affect people whom they blogged (9)	

Positive evaluation of information quality (2)	Accurate of information on blogs (46)	Information quality (71)	
	Useful information (104)		
Negative evaluation of information quality (4)	Not concrete (17)		
	Irrelevant information (12)		
	Personal standards of examining information resource (86) = Online information judgement [M] (65)		
	Public censorship (11)		
	Credibility (158)		
	Type of blogs (49)		
	Creativity (20)	***Intellectual***	
	Imagination (8)		
	Ask questions (18)	Information needs (77)	
	Requesting updates (9)		
	information is more important than the appearance[M] (5)		
	Sense of belonging (12)	Self-therapy (104)	
	Care (34)		
	Self-liberating (135)		
	People blog for getting support, agreement or help[M] (66)		
	Honest to self (30)	Self evaluation (39)	
	Self-appraisal (46)		
	Self-criticism (44)		
	Venting out personal moods (100)	Self-liberating (135)	
	Present personal experience (101)	Self-expression (69)	
	Present personal opinions (284)		
	Venting out personal moods (100)		
	Blogroll (51)	Blogger-centred community (118)	
(degree) Addiction (57) --- ***Normal***	Enjoyment (149)	Needs satisfaction (120)	
	Relaxation (48)		
	Gain distinction (10)		
Popular (30)	Trend effects (14)	Extrinsic incentives (10)	
	Affected by community culture (2)		
	Affected by mainstream press (5)		
	most of blogs are inclined to American perspectives[M] (3)		
	Encouragement (46)		
	Personality (55)	Intrinsic incentives (63)	
	Expectation (88)		

	Personal principles of blogging (210)		
	Interests (223)		
	Needs satisfaction (120)		
	Extrinsic incentives (10)	***Motivations for blogging***	
	Intrinsic incentives (63)		
	Instinct (6)		
	Learn about themselves (20)	Self-censorship (174)	
	Clarify thoughts (61)		
	Delete entries (45)		
	Reading their own blogs (142)		
	Change mind[M] (25) =Change views[M] (13)		
	Globalisation (3)	Social developing (37)	
	Social connection lessens (21)		
	Lose interest (10)	End up blogging (17)	
	Writing habit (24)	Becoming habit (48)	
	Categorise topics (42)	*Learn content management skills* (2)	
		Reciprocity (11)	
		Promote relationship (19)	
		Facility constrains (51)	
		Concept of learning (25)	
	Unwanted readers = the contradiction between whom blogger is writing for and actually who read[M] (52)	Encouragement (46)	
		Teacher's blog	
		Comparison reading blogs and books (9)	
		Comparison with chat (8)	
		Comparison with community (4)	
		Comparison with diary (91)	
		Comparison with email (37)	
		Comparison with forum (63)	
		Comparison with journal (7)	
		Comparison with mainstream media (17)	
		Comparison with normal website (16)	
		Comparison with personal website (7)	
		Comparison with phone/message (6)	
		Comparison with social software (31)	

2. Open coding examples – drilling down categories and subcategories

In each table, subcategories demonstrate what is going on of the phenomenon by explaining what, who, when, why, with what results and so on, of the category. There are three examples of analysing between a category and it's subcategories.

Example 1 - Information resources and Information repository

	Category
	Information resources
Subcategories	Information repository
Where	Online;
Who	
When	Keep in touch with people; Flexible operability; Convenient accessibility;
What	Memories; Repository of studies; Repository of personal views; Repository of quotes; Repository of working things; Repository of life things; Sensitive social issues; Supplement of information;
Why	Filter; Update; Reflect the blogger; Reflect reality; Constant reflection; Last insights; Non-mainstream voices;
How	Open censorship; Searchable by searching engines; Channels of getting information;
How much	
With what results	Influence of blogs; Needs satisfaction;
Property	Means;
Dimension	Information quality;
Statement	Blogs are information repository that people use for satisfying their online needs in terms of their subjective information judgement.

In the above table, it is clear that people use blog as a place to vent out emotions, to record life, to put discussions, or as a memory place. Without doubt, it is because of the convenient accessibility and flexible operability of blogs. Because it is a kind of information repository, to some extent, it reflects the real world, the blogger, and the voices from non-mainstream media.

Example 2 – Information resources and Information quality

	Category
	Information resources
Subcategories	Information quality
Where	Information repository
Who	
When	Information needs
What	

Why	Academic use; Personal use;
How	Personalised standards of examining information resource; Public censorship;
How much	
With what results	Information retrieval – Channels of getting information; Information retrieval – Online searching;
Property	Criteria;
Dimension	Credibility
Statement	When people use blogs as information sources, they judge information quality according to personal standards of credibility, which is affected by the relationships between the blogger and readers as well as the type of blogs.

In the above table, "information quality" is a key factor in using blogs as online information sources. It is affected by the purpose of blogging, or the content on blogs. It is open censorship, but it also needs the reader to judge the quality of information on blogs, which largely needs the reader's information retrieval skills and judgement skills.

Example 3 – Interpersonal and Online identity

	Category
	Interpersonal
Subcategories	Online identity
Where	Online;
Who	
When	Use of social power;
What	Honest to self; Reflect the blogger; Constant reflection;
Why	Effects on people; Traceable of identity;
How	Anonymity; Communication styles; Type of blogs;
How much	Personal principles of blogging;
With what results	Balance between online identity and real identity; Learn about themselves;
Property	Perception
Dimension	"true self"
Statement	Blogger's identity is a perception process of who they are. It is a kind of becoming and being. It is reflected by the blogger's own principles and imagination of readers over interaction and reading.

The above table reflected "online identity" is not most bloggers' purposes. However, it is implied by the interaction between bloggers and readers. A blogger may change their orientation of using blogs, because they start to think more about who will read their blogs, and if their blogs will affect their future. At the same time, they become more reflect on who they are, who they want to be.

Appendix 16: A comparison – reading experience between pure blog readers and bloggers

Pure blog readers and bloggers comparison of reading experience

Actor	No	Gender	Reading orientation											
			RP	NRP	RF	NR F	RF P	RI/RT		RS	NR CS	NR S	CT	CD
								RI	RT					
R	17	Male		Y	Y				Y					
R	43	Male		Y		Y			Y					
R	14	Male		Y		Y		Y						
R	04	Male			Y		Y	Y						
R	03	Female	Y		Y		Y	Y	Y					
R	19	Female	Y		Y		Y	Y	Y					
R	27	Female	Y		Y		Y	Y						
R	42	Female	Y		Y		Y		Y					
R	08	Female		Y	Y		Y	Y	Y					
R	24	Female		Y	Y		Y	Y						
R	41	Female		Y		Y		Y						
B	06	Male	Y		Y		Y	Y				Y	Y	
B	21	Male	Y		Y		Y	Y			Y	Y	Y	
B	15	Male			Y		Y	Y			Y	Y	Y	
B	28	Male		Y	Y		Y	Y	Y		Y	Y		
B	46	Male		Y	Y				Y			Y		
B	47	Male		Y		Y		Y				Y	Y	
B	23	Male			Y			Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y
B	35	Male	Y		Y		Y	Y				Y	Y	Y
B	34	Male	Y		Y		Y		Y			Y		Y
B	40	Male				Y		Y				Y	Y	
B	33	Male	Y		Y		Y	Y	Y	Y				
B	48	Male			Y			Y	Y	Y			Y	Y
B	01	Male						Y	Y	Y				
B	07	Female	Y		Y		Y	Y		Y			Y	Y
B	10	Female	Y		Y		Y	Y		Y			Y	Y
B	02	Female	Y		Y		Y	Y		Y				
B	12	Female	Y		Y		Y	Y		Y				Y
B	20	Female	Y		Y		Y	Y		Y				
B	45	Female	Y		Y		Y	Y		Y			Y	
B	13	Female	Y		Y		Y			Y			Y	Y
B	22	Female	Y		Y		Y	Y		Y			Y	
B	05	Female		Y	Y		Y			Y			Y	
B	11	Female		Y	Y		Y					Y	Y	Y
B	16	Female	Y		Y		Y	Y			Y	Y		Y
B	32	Female	Y		Y		Y		Y		Y	Y	Y	
B	09	Female	Y		Y		Y	Y	Y			Y	Y	Y
B	25	Female	Y		Y		Y	Y	Y			Y		
B	29	Female	Y		Y		Y	Y				Y	Y	Y
B	26	Female	Y		Y		Y	Y				Y		
B	30	Female	Y		Y		Y	Y				Y	Y	
B	36	Female	Y		Y		Y	Y				Y	Y	Y
B	38	Female	Y		Y		Y	Y				Y		
B	31	Female	Y		Y		Y	Y				Y		
B	39	Female	Y		Y		Y	Y				Y	Y	Y
B	37	Female	Y		Y		Y					Y		
B	44	Female	Y		Y		Y					Y	Y	Y
B	18	Female	Y					Y				Y		

Note:

B: Blogger
R: Pure blog reader, no their own blog, but keep reading certain blogs regularly
Y: Yes, the informant mentioned it
RP: Read personal diary blogs generally
NRP: Not read personal diary blogs or rarely read in general
RF: Read friends' blogs
NRF: Not read friends' blogs
RFP: Read friends' blogs and their blogs are personal diary blog
RI: Read blogs which are relevant to specific interests often (e.g., movies, games, bands, photos, design, travelling)
RT: Read blogs which are relevant to specific topics often (e.g., philosophy, politics, online marketing, study)
RS: Read and check own blog often
NRCS: Not read own blog often but check it often (e.g., check comments, visitors)
NRS: Not read own blog often, just sometimes, every a couple of months
CT: comparing content, writing style and opinions between their own blogs and others' blogs
CD: comparing design and presentation between their own blogs and others' blogs
Blank means the informant does not reflect it or it is not suitable for the informant

Appendix 17: Conference proceedings and presentations

- Tan, J. (2007). "*Understanding weblog usage for personal learning*". Proceedings of the IADIS International Conference on Web Based Communities 2007. Salamanca, Spain, 18-20 February 2007, International association for development of the information society (with an oral presentation).

- Tan, J. (2008). "*Motivations and students' perceptions of learning: an empirical study of blogs*". Proceedings of the IADIS International Conference on ICT, Society and Human Beings 2008. Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 22-24 July 2008, International association for development of the information society. (with an oral presentation). (Win the Outstanding Paper Award).

- Tan, J., Ford, N. & Levy, P. (2007). CAL'07-Development, Disruption & Debate - D^3 – Presentation of a poster: "Voluntary learning and sharing: a study on blogs usage". Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland. 26-28 March 2007.