

## Are Bloggers a Global Community?

### Blogs: An International Virtual Community

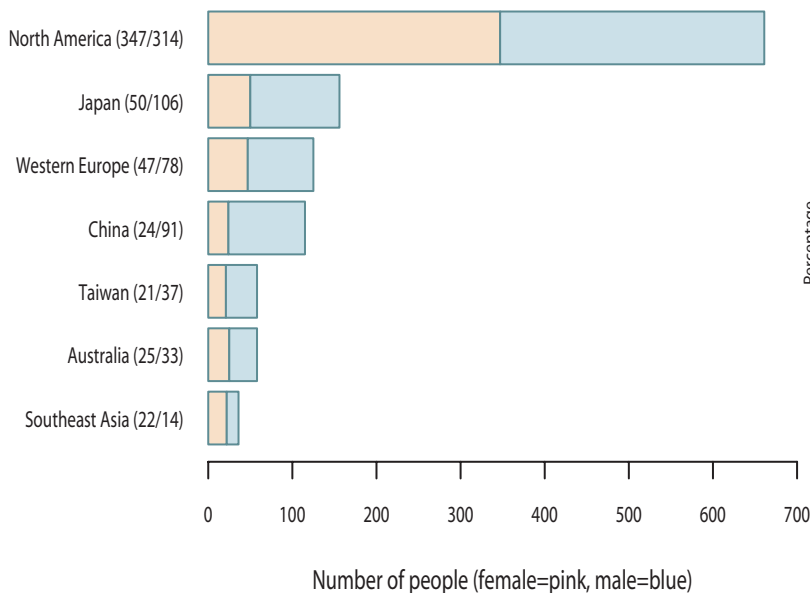
Blogs, short for weblogs, support the formation and maintenance of a social network of both writers and readers. This is reflected in blogging technology that allow the creation of social ties to encourage interactions: blogrolls, stable permalinks, trackback links, comments and RSS feeds.

Blogging is a world wide phenomenon not limited to the U.S. At least a million bloggers reside in areas such as Australia, China, Japan, Southeast Asia, Taiwan and Western Europe.

We ask the research question: **Do nationality and geographic region affect how bloggers experience community, or rather do bloggers worldwide experience the same sense of community irrespective of the country or region where they live? Does an Internet culture exist for bloggers that influences a uniform sense of community?** We conducted an international study of bloggers to investigate this question.

### Methodology

Data for our study was gathered via a web-deployed survey that was targeted for blog writers. Participation in the survey was strictly voluntary and all respondents were informed that their responses would be anonymous. Native speakers of (traditional and simplified) Chinese, Japanese and Korean translated the English survey. The survey was deployed in the summer of 2004.



The regions where valid participants were living at the time they filled out the survey. A total of 1232 valid participants were recorded.

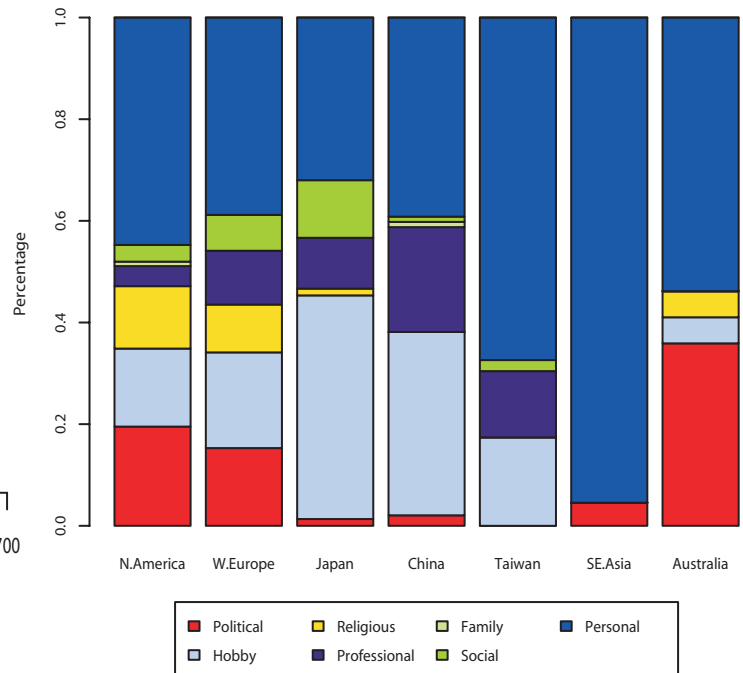
### Dimensions of Community

We have chosen to focus on examining in blogs several dimensions of a community that according to Preece and Maloney-Krichmar (2003) are particularly relevant:

- **Activism:** To what degree do bloggers seek to influence events?
- **Reputation:** How accountable are bloggers for their content, and how important is their blog's reputation to them?
- **Social Connectedness:** How connected are bloggers to each other?
- **Identity:** Do blog writers reveal or hide their identity?

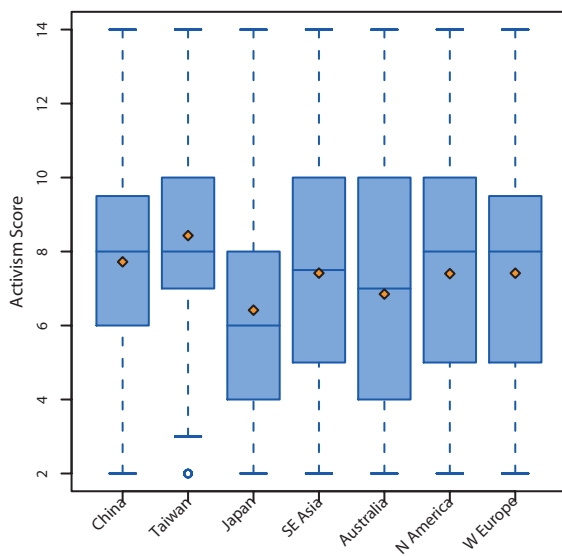
### Analysis of Community

Each dimension was derived from a linear combination of question scores whose coefficients were determined by PCA. Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the internal consistency of questions in each dimension category. The facing page has *box plot diagrams* of each community dimension across cultures. The horizontal line represents the median, and the diamond represents the mean. The bottom and top of the box represent the first and third quartile, respectively. Points that lie outside of the whiskers (the end points of the lines) are not within the 1.5 interquartile range. Each box plot corresponds to the principal component scores for a particular country.



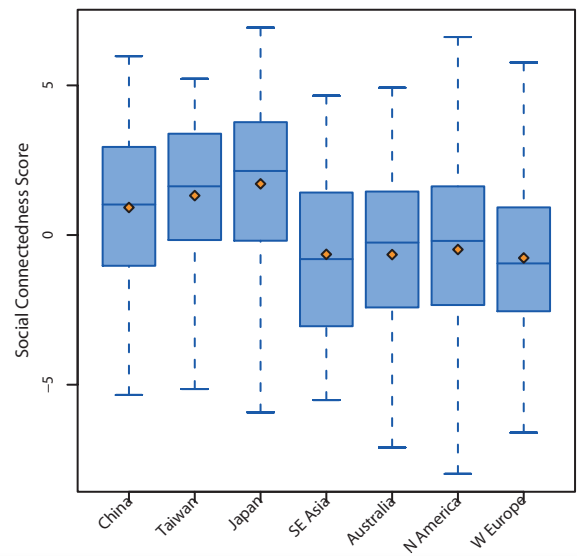
Primary content of blogs grouped by regions.

\*From Bo Wang's famous poem *Seeing Du Shaofu off to His Post in Shu Zhou* which expresses how community can be experienced despite geographic separation, foreshadowing the advent of virtual communities.



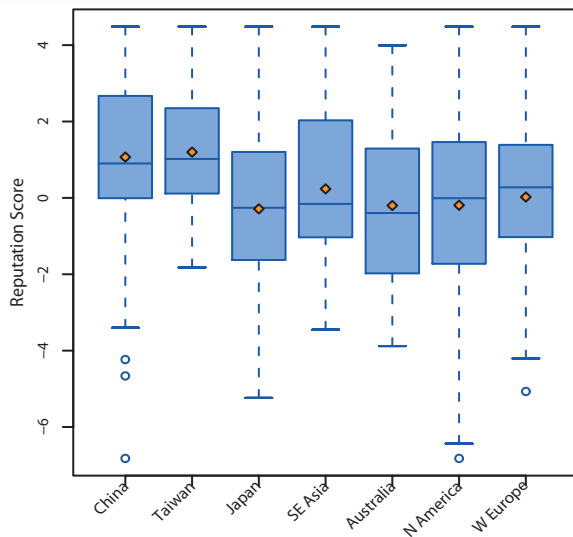
**Activism (high scores = more concern w/ activism)**

Statistically Significant contrasts:  
Japan-Taiwan, Japan-China, Japan-N Am, Japan-W Euro



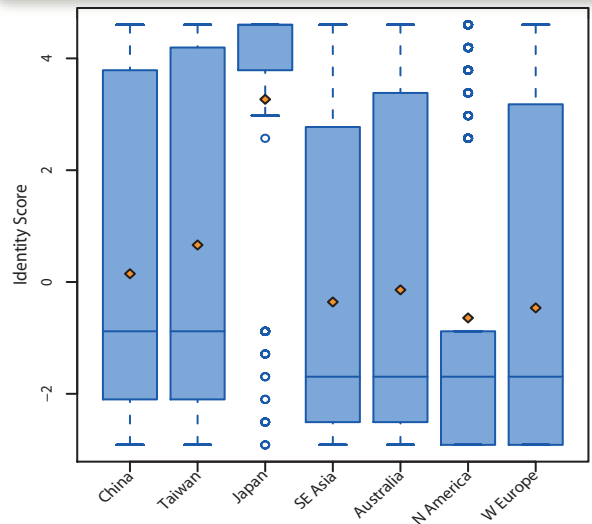
**Social Connectedness (high scores = lower social connections)**

Statistically Significant contrasts:  
Japan-N Am, Japan-W Euro, Japan-Australia, China-N Am, Taiwan-W Euro, China-W Euro, Japan-SE Asia, Taiwan-Australia, China-Australia, Taiwan-SE Asia, China-SE Asia



**Reputation (high scores = more concern w/ reput.)**

Statistically Significant contrasts:  
China-N Am, Japan-China, Taiwan-N Am, Taiwan-Japan, China-W Euro, China-Australia, Taiwan-Australia, Taiwan-W Euro



**Identity (high scores = reveals less of identity)**

Statistically Significant contrasts:  
Japan-China, Japan-N Am, Japan-W Euro, Japan-Australia, Japan-SE Asia, Japan-Taiwan, China-N Am, Taiwan-N Am

**Findings**

The significant differences in blogging communities can be partially explained by the cultural, political and economic differences in the bloggers' regions (see Hofstede, 1991). However, the *magnitude* of difference in data distributions of the dimensions across cultures was more often than not small. Bloggers painted a remarkable picture of congruity (e.g., Chinese and Taiwanese bloggers were very much alike) in their experiences with activism, reputation, social connectedness and identity. Thus, we can posit that bloggers themselves represent a unique culture that permeates through regional boundaries. It is indeed heartening to see that despite the large seas that separate our lands, the global blogger, our "bosom buddy", nevertheless brings these distant lands near.

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