Creating conversation by pressing a link: Which invitations do third-parties accept?

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Website researchers have defined the existence of links between sites as a mark of conversation between the sites (Ó Baoill, 2004; Herring, Kouper et al., 2005; Kumar, Novak et al., 2005) and a sign of community (Blanchard, 2004; Packwood, 2004). These authors have established through these works that the existence of links between two websites, including weblogs, creates a connection that can be analogous to a dyadic conversation. Of course these links exist in a public forum where readers have access to the connection and are invited to participate in the conversation by clicking the link and visiting the linked site. This changes the nature of the conversation from dyadic to a group conversation.

This preliminary research investigates the following question, what types of links are readers choosing to join with in conversation? The data was gathered from the click-through on links found in the posts and sidebar of the author’s weblog, Professional-Lurker.com. Instances when reader’s choice to click through to pages, other then those found on the Professional-Lurker site were gathered from April 1 through June 30, 2005 using MyBlogLog Pro. Grounded-theory methods were applied to create a content analysis coding scheme for the types of links placed in posts and the sidebar.

During the 90-day period 787 click-throughs were registered by the MyBlogLog software and were coded into 17 categories. 97.7% of the click-throughs occurred in the top 10 categories. The top 10 categories were clicks to other blogs (used for linking to the blog as a whole), blog posts (individual posts only), conference websites, forum.
entries (used for forum or discussion boards), news stories (applied to stories found in main-stream media sources), personal academic articles (articles of which the weblogger is an author), personal websites (websites which provide additional information about the weblogger), software websites, university websites, and general websites (all other websites not individually specified).

The top five categories garnered 672 click-throughs, or 85.4% of the total. Those categories were blogs, blog posts, personal academic articles, personal websites, and general websites. Of these five, three provide additional information on the topic of the blog and its posts, while the remaining two may provide additional information and they also include additional information about the weblogger and her research. Within the top five 50.5%, 38.5% of the click-throughs took the reader to blogs or blog posts with the remaining 21% going to general websites. The remaining 40.5% of click-throughs went to pages related to the author.

In looking within the categories we find that the top 10 links account for 41.2% of the total clicks. Of the top 10, the first six links relate directly or indirectly to the author with 87 clicks that took the readers to my webpage, 50 clicks to my faculty page at the School of Informatics IUPUI, 41 clicks to my academic paper *Bridging the Gap: A Genre Analysis of Weblogs*, 32 clicks to the Ultimate Blogger weblog a contest site in which I was a contestant, 26 clicks to the Weblogg-ed weblog from a statement that the author and the blog were runners up for the best Research Based Blog of 2004, and 21 clicks to my full list of publication citations.

In conclusion readers of the specific academic weblog understudy here primarily look for additional information related to the material presented in the weblog posts and
sidebars (59.5%). Readers also click-through 40.5% of the links to acquire information directly or indirectly related to the weblog author. In short reader analysis of this academic blog requires that they have an understanding of the areas that grant legitimacy to the author, i.e. university affiliations, published articles, and awards; as well as to garner more information on the items discussed within the posts and sidebars. More research will be necessary to allow researchers to see if patterns hold across other academic weblogs and if other genres of weblogs exhibit similar link use to substantiate the identity of the blogger.

Reference List


Packwood, Nicholas (2004). Geography of the Blogosphere: Representing the Culture, Ecology and Community of Weblogs. In Laura J. Gurak, Smiljana Antonijevic, Laurie Johnson, Clancy Ratliff, & Jessica Reyman (Eds.), Into the Blogosphere: Rhetoric,