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Don't tread on my blog: A study of military web logs

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Abstract

As the popularity of Web logs increases, so, too, have the number of military Web logs. Service members, veterans, and family members are blogging from home, from the base, and from the battlefield. These milbloggers are able to write daily reports that anyone in the world – friend or foe – can read. Military public affairs officers may find it harder to manage the message as milbloggers become conduits for information to the public and the media. Little is known about milblogs. How do they tell the military story, and what messages do they convey? Are they perceived as credible? Do they contain more emotional content? This paper analyzes the content of milblogs and how they depict the military and its personnel. It also compares the credibility and tone of milblogs, traditional media, and Defense Department news sources, and how the content from these three sources influences readers' attitudes toward the war in Iraq and the U.S. military's continued presence in there.

Introduction

The function of military public affairs is to manage the release of information and serve as a conduit from the military to the media and the public. Managing the release of information reduces the chance of military personnel violating operational security or personal privacy. Today, however, service members have instantaneous and direct communication from the battlefield to virtually anywhere in the world. Cell phones, e-mail and instant messaging allow service members to stay in touch with loved ones. Complicating the matter, however, is the advent of military Web logs – personal Web sites, also known as "blogs." Military bloggers are service members, veterans, and their families who are writing uncensored content that anyone in the world – friend or foe – can read. In effect, they have become unofficial conduits of information to the public and the media. However, we know nothing about the messages that military blogs are communicating or the influence they are exerting. How do milblogs tell the military story, and what messages do they convey? Are they perceived as credible? At their worst, milblogs may affect international relations or undermine security. At their best, milblogs may serve to counteract enemy propaganda, influence positive change for the Defense Department, educate the public about the military's culture, people and values, and increase national and international support for the services and their missions.

In the hopes of adding to the body of research on blogs, this paper will examine the phenomenon of milblogs. Specifically, it will employ content analysis to determine what messages military blogs are communicating, how credible they are, and what emotions they elicit. In addition, it will use an experiment to compare milblogs to mainstream Defense Department and civilian online news venues to compare framing effects, emotional response, credibility, and effects on peoples' perceptions of the military and its personnel.

Literature Review

What Are Blogs?

Because blogs are a fairly new phenomenon, it is beneficial to describe the nature of

blogs and their users, provide an overview of military blogs, and discuss their potential impact

on the military. Blogs can be "as basic as an online diary or as fully fledged as a political

community" (Chaddock, 2005, p. 1). The term "blog" is a combined and shortened form of the

words "Web log." According to the online encyclopedia *Wikipedia*, a blog is a "website for

which an individual or a group generates text, photographs, audio files, and/or links, typically but

not always on a daily or otherwise regular basis" (*Wikipedia*, 2005). Blogs contain a

chronological series of posts, many of which include comments from readers and links to other

sites. Besides citing links within postings, most blogs include a blogroll, a permanent list of links

to the author's favorite blogs. These linked and crosslinked blogs create larger online

communities on any topic imaginable. Together, the communities of blogs form the blogosphere,

which Godwin-Jones (2003) describes as a large, loosely woven net of information as bloggers

post new entries, debate issues, and reference and link to other blogs.

The first blogs were created between 1994 and 1998. Until 1999, blogging was done

mainly by computer experts who knew how to use Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) and

could use sophisticated software. The introduction of no-cost, easy to use, content-based

software in 1999 made blogging fairly accessible and relatively inexpensive; suddenly, anyone

with an average understanding of the Internet could build and maintain a blog (Ratliff, 2002). In

addition, new blog architecture enables material to be permanently available so that it can be

linked to and found in the future, which makes blog content relatively long-lived (Miles, 2005).

Other technology has made it relatively easy for people to remain up-to-date on their favorite

blogs; blog servers track updates and notify users when their favorite blogs have new posts (Miles, 2005).

Many blogs are "basement setups – scribbled by one, read by few" (Perlmutter & McDaniel, 2005, p. 61). In contrast, some popular blogs such as *Instapundit*, *Power Line* and *Daily Kos*, receive more daily traffic than many major newspapers or TV news programs (Perlmutter & McDaniel, 2005; Sifry, 2005). Blogs are often described as voices of the people or of political players, and they also may serve as trip-wires for breaking stories. Lennon calls bloggers independent publishers; she believes most blogs function as an editorial form, blanketing niche interests such as medical news and developments in science and technology (Beeson, 2005). Johnson and Kaye (2004b) see blogs as online versions of talk radio in which consumers of the media can communicate directly with the host. Miles (2005), on the other hand, calls blogs "distributed documentaries of the everyday" (p. 66). Turnbull (2002) compares the blogosphere to the Viennese coffee houses of the early 20th century – places where writers and thinkers gather and discuss the issues of the day. Similarly, Klein and Burstein (2005) liken the blog phenomenon to various historical phenomena, including the Talmudic tradition of debating, interpreting, and commenting on religious text passages; the Renaissance artists and thinkers who commented on ancient Greek and Roman culture; and the pamphleteering of Thomas Paine and other American Revolutionaries of the 1700's.

Johnson and Kaye (2004b) report that bloggers are not independent news gathers, but they rely heavily on traditional media for their content. Many blogs are platforms for political activism, and many bloggers, especially those identified as politically conservative, tend to be critical of traditional media. One researcher found an almost equal number of blogs on the right and left ends of the political spectrum. Glance (2005) compiled a list of the most linked-to

political blogs and identified 759 liberal and 735 conservative; her study did not include

moderate, independent or libertarian blogs, which she said were far fewer in number. However,

Johnson and Kaye (2004b) cite several mainstream media sources that claim the blogosphere is

"predominantly right of center, either conservative or libertarian" (p. 626). Although some blogs

link across the ideological divide, Glance (2005) found a great tendency for blogs to link within

their own ideological communities (liberal blogs to liberal blogs and conservative blogs to

conservative ones).

Whether depicted as forums for punditry, documentation or discourse, blogs continue to

skyrocket in popularity. By 2005, the blogosphere is more than 30 times bigger than it was three

years before, with no signs of let-up in growth (Perlmutter & McDaniel, 2005). In November

2005, *Technorati*, the most comprehensive blog-tracking service, was tracking more than 21

million blogs with more being added each day. The total number tracked has doubled every 5.5

months since June 2002 and continues to do so; this equates to 70,000 new blogs created each

day, or about one per second (Perlmutter & McDaniel, 2005; Sifry, 2005). Blogging is a

demanding and time-consuming activity. Evidence suggests that blogging tends to lose its appeal

for many people once the novelty fades. *Technorati* founder David Sifry reports that nearly half

of all blogs are abandoned after just six months, with 45% becoming idle shortly after being

started (Woods, 2005). About 55% of all blogs remain active, however, with 13% being updated

at least weekly (Perlmutter & McDaniel, 2005). Posting to blogs remains vigorous; *Technorati*

tracks about 900,000 new posts every day, which is an average of 10.4 blog entries added per

second (Perlmutter & McDaniel, 2005). Not all blogs are available for anyone to see. Estimates

of the number of blogs that are private or open only to a blogger's family and friends range from

15% to 33% (Memmott, 2005).

Simmons (2005) notes that blogging is an international phenomenon that circumvents traditional geographic and financial barriers. In her study on blogging in Iran, Simmons posits that blogs serve different purposes depending on the environments in which they exist. Her research found that blogs "have the most impact in environments where they assume a unique role as in the case of Iran" (Simmons, 2005, p. 33). In Iran, blogs present a different perspective than that of state-controlled newspapers. Blogs in these countries may or may not be overtly political, but they often discuss political impacts on every day life. In addition, they serve to bring people together within a country while exposing the outside world to those cultures through the eyes of the average citizen (Simmons 2005). Global Voices Online, a media project sponsored by the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard Law School, follows global blogs and posts links to the most interesting ones on their Web site. They use the term "bridge bloggers" to describe bloggers who talk about their country or region to an international audience. According to their Web site, the group's goal is to leverage the power of "citizen's media" in an age when "international English-language media ignores many things that are important to large numbers of the world's citizens" (*Global Voices Online*, 2005). The international character and access of blogs has also resulted in jurisdictional and legal questions. One such example is the case of American bloggers who distributed grisly details from a murder trial in Canada despite a Canadian publication ban (Kirtley, 2005; Woods, 2005).

Who Blogs?

Despite the growth in blog use, the term "blog" is recognized by only 38% of American adult Internet users; the rest are not sure what a blog is, according to the Pew Internet and American Life Project (2005). The project's survey found that about 7% of American adult Internet users reported creating a blog, while 27% said they read blogs; this represents a 58%

increase in readership from the previous year when just 17% of similar Internet users reported

reading blogs. The survey found that blog creators tend to be: male (57% of the blogging

population); young (48% are under age 30); broadband users (70%); veteran Internet users (82%

have been online for 6 years or more); well educated (39% have college or graduate degrees);

and relatively well-off financially (42% live in households earning more than $50,000). The

survey also finds that blog readers are more mainstream than bloggers themselves. Although

blog readers, like bloggers, are more likely to be young, male, and well educated Internet

veterans, the study reports greater-than-average growth in blog readership among women,

minorities, those between the ages of 30 and 49, and those with home dial-up connections (*Pew,*

2005).

Teens are creating blogs at more than twice the adult rate. According to Lenhart and

Madden (2005), 19% of teens (about 4 million) say they have created their own online blog and

38% say they read them. The same study reports that girls ages 15-17 are most likely to author

blogs (25%), compared to boys of the same age (15%); about 18% of younger teens of both

sexes blog. In an interview with Irvine (2005), Lenhart said that teens blog to develop and

maintain friendship networks. Although blogging can help teens connect with friends, exercise

their creativity, and share their views (Gilbert, 2005), the practice can also be an outlet for teens

seeking attention. Some teens are "posting provocative pictures, discussing real or imagined sex

lives, berating and threatening one another, and recounting drinking and drug use" (Gilbert,

2005, p. 1). Other teens may be posting too much personal information causing some adults to

fear they could become targets for Internet stalkers (Sullivan, 2005). Nonetheless, if past patterns

of growth of the Internet and other technologies are any indication, blogs are likely to continue to

grow in popularity as these young people mature. Given the large number of young persons in the military, milblog use also is likely to grow.

Military Blogs

The very nature of blogs described above is likely what appeals to milbloggers. Many people in the military are young, and many embrace technology. Current milbloggers tend to be openly critical of mainstream media coverage of the military and the global war on terrorism. They also fulfill a unique role in society, perhaps even acting as "bridge bloggers" by offering an unfiltered close-up view of military culture that readers do not get from Defense Department or mainstream news sources. Milblogs vary greatly and serve as forums for punditry, documentation, and discourse, enabling service members to connect with like-minded people regardless of where they are stationed. Feeling connected could be especially important during a time when the military is becoming more isolated from the rest of American society. According to Hewitt (2004), long-time *Washington Post* military reporter Tom Ricks describes the phenomenon as the "increasing distance between the civilian and military worlds, and the divergence in the values of both" (p. 1). Perhaps blogging is a way that some milbloggers attempt to close this gap between the civilian and military worlds.

However, because many milblogs are viewable by the public, they also raise security concerns within the Defense Department. At their worst, milblogs may impact international relations or undermine security. Managing operational security is a priority for the Defense Department in an age when information from the battlefield can be made available to a global audience at the click of a button. The Secretary of Defense emphasized the importance of maintaining operational security in a 2003 Defense Department memorandum. The memo cites

an Al Qaeda training manual recovered in Afghanistan that states, "using public sources openly and without resorting to illegal means, it is possible to gather at least 80% of information about the enemy" (Rumsfeld, 2003, p. 1). In addition, an Army Chief of Staff memo, available online, warns that "photos depicting weapons system vulnerabilities and tactics, techniques, and procedures" have surfaced on blogs and other open source Web sites (Schoomaker, 2005, p. 1). Although milblogs are open source, they are not subject to official review; however, military commanders can order service members to stop blogging or to submit entries for review if they believe the content might violate military regulations or security (Memmott, 2005). Memmott (2005) reports that only a few blogs have run into such trouble; among them, *67cshdocs* (Hockenberry, 2005), *Just Another Soldier*, *My War* (Memmott, 2005), and *Leonard Clark* (Finer, 2005). These milbloggers either shut down their sites voluntarily or were ordered to shut them down after being found to contain operationally sensitive information.

In April 2005, the commander of Multinational Forces Iraq issued the first known wide-ranging blog policy within the Department of Defense requiring service members within the command to register their milblogs; the policy also elucidated the military's rules governing release of classified information, names of casualties before next-of-kin notification, and details about incidents that are under investigation (Finer, 2005). The rules are not overly restrictive, however; a military spokesman in Baghdad said that the guidelines are "nearly identical to those required of news organizations that cover the military" (Finer, 2005, p. A01). Another spokesperson "stresses that most soldiers are well aware of Army policy and comport themselves accordingly" (Claburn, 2005). In addition, many milbloggers post disclaimers on their Web sites either voluntarily or to comply with local commanders' policies. For example,

milblogger Matthew Heidt's blog home page states, "The views expressed on this website are my own and DO NOT convey the endorsement of the Naval Special Warfare Command, its tenant commands, or the US Navy" (*Froggy Ruminations*, 2005).

At their best, milblogs may counteract enemy propaganda; influence positive change for the Defense Department; educate the public about the military's culture, people and values; and increase national and international support for the services and their missions. However, little is known about the scope or effect of milblogging. The milblog phenomenon began with the first widely read milblog, *Sergeant Stryker's Daily Briefing,* which was created when a service member became disappointed with mainstream media coverage of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (*The Mudville Gazette,* 2005). As the build-up to operation Iraqi Freedom began, more and more people began to look to blogs for their information needs about the looming conflict. The Iraq war marked the sudden expansion of the growing phenomenon of milblogs. There are few demographics available about milbloggers – who they are, what they are saying, who is reading them, or even how many there are. In May 2005, the number of milblogs was reported to be around 200, with Sifry estimating that there will be about 1,000 by early 2006 (Memmott, 2005). Memmot (2005) attributes the expected surge to new troops rotating into Iraq and Afghanistan who want to communicate online with family and friends at home without remembering, saving, or typing a host of e-mail addresses.

Milblogs are as varied and wide-ranging as their authors. Chris Missick, a soldier who writes *A Line in the Sand,* is pro-military and has aspirations to run for Congress. "Blackfive," a former Army intelligence officer and paratrooper, recently retired from the military; an information technology executive in a major Chicago firm, he continues to blog on his site

Blackfive, which was voted best milblog by his peers in 2004. Another popular blog, the *The Mudville Gazette,* is penned anonymously by a husband and wife team known as "Greyhawk" and "Mrs. Greyhawk." Michael Bautista is an Army National Guardsman who named his blog, *Ma Deuce Gunner*, for his M-2 machine gun. Neil Prackish is an Army reserve officer and Silver Star awardee for valor; a dentist in civilian life, Prackish recently stopped blogging on his popular site, *Armor Geddon,* because of his own concerns for operational security. Matthew Heidt, a member of the Navy special warfare community, pens *Froggy Ruminations*. Cinnamon Wilkinson (*A Female Soldier Story)* and Elizabeth Le Bel (*Life in This Girl's Army)* are among the women milbloggers telling their stories online. At least two soldiers, Colby Buzzell (*My War)* and Jason Hartley *(Just Another Soldier),* have signed book deals based on their blogs.

Given the great potential for positive and negative impacts that milblogs may have on operational security, international coalitions, and public support for the military, it is important to know what milbloggers are saying about the military. Do they communicate a credible message? Is the message more emotional, and what emotions are communicated? Do they frame issues differently from mainstream media and Defense Department news sources? Ultimately, this study seeks to shed light on the phenomenon of milblogs and how they influence attitudes about the military.

*RQ*1: What is the overall tone and depiction of the military portrayed in milblogs?

Milblog Credibility

Although no research exists on military blogs, researchers have begun looking at web logs in general. Virtually anyone with Internet access can post information to a Web log. Are these bloggers perceived as credible? How believable are blogs as a communication channel?

To learn whether milblogs are credible and how they compare with other mass media, one must first define credibility and look at previous credibility studies. Andersen and Clevenger (1963) define the construct of credibility as "the image held of a communicator at a given time by a receiver – either one person or a group" (59). It is a measure of the degree to which the receiver of a message believes the source is credible.

Because blogs reach the masses, it is beneficial to look at the study of mass media credibility, which focuses on both source credibility and medium credibility. Source credibility is a major contributing factor to the believability of a source (Haiman, 1949). When a source is perceived by the audience to be credible, that source is much more persuasive than a source that is seen as not credible or one for which credibility is indeterminate at the outset. Support for this argument is intuitive and has been significantly documented using empirical means (Haiman, 1949; Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Medium or channel credibility is one's judgment of the channels through which messages are sent.

Perception of credibility is the key; even though a source of information may be well informed and highly educated, the receiver must extend credibility to the sender before trusting the information he or she is sending (Andersen & Clevenger, 1963). Kiousis (2001) argues that perceived credibility is a function of both source and channel characteristics. However, he believes that the lines of influence are multidirectional: "In some cases, people's impressions of channel credibility may drive their opinions about source credibility, but in other situations, opinions about source credibility may drive impressions of channel credibility" (Kiousis, 2001, p. 388).

There is little research on the credibility of blogs, but researchers have compared the credibility of online and traditional news sources. Kiousis (2001) found that, although people

were skeptical of news from television, newspapers, and online news, all sources were considered moderately credible, with newspapers considered most credible, followed by online news (defined as primarily news Web sites), and television news.

Johnson and Kaye (1998, 2000, 2002, 2004a) conducted various studies on the relationship between a user's reliance on various media for information and perception of the media's credibility. They found that media use does not strongly predict credibility. However, reliance (how dependent a user is on a particular medium for information) is strongly correlated with credibility. The researchers explain that reliance measures indicate attitudes towards the media source; they differentiate reliance from use measures, which are indicative of behaviors.

Although Johnson and Kaye's (2002, 2004a) first two studies found Internet reliance predictive of users' perception of online news sources as credible, their later studies showed a negative correlation between Internet reliance and credibility. The later studies instead found a correlation between reliance on traditional media sources for information and credibility of online news. The conflicting results perhaps reflect the changing face of the Internet and its new demographics as more people became connected to the Internet.

Overall, the studies consistently show that Internet users who are heavy users of traditional media sources judge the Internet as highly credible (Johnson & Kaye, 2004b). These heavy users tend to be "political junkies" who use the Internet to supplement traditional media sources for their information needs (Johnson & Kaye, 2004b, p. 625). The researchers posit that "traditional media users tend to be highly media literate, knowing what sources to trust and what to discard, and have learned where to go online for credible news" (Johnson & Kaye, 2004b, p. 625).

With respect to blog credibility, Johnson and Kaye (2004b) found somewhat different results. The plurality of blog users surveyed consider various online and traditional mainstream media sources moderately to very credible; these scores seem to reflect that these blog users are among the highly media literate "political junkies" who read blogs along with other media (Johnson & Kaye, 2004b). Although reliance on mainstream media predicted users' perceived credibility of Internet news, Johnson and Kaye (2004b) found that blog reliance is the only strong predictor of blog credibility. Thus, those who rely on blogs as their main source of information tend to distrust traditional media and view blogs as a viable alternative. The researchers say that the results may reflect the paradoxical attitude that these bloggers and blog readers have toward the media: "They may distrust the media, but bloggers link to media sites and pay attention to media content, even if only to hunt for mistakes and look for what they consider bias" (Johnson & Kaye, 2004b, p. 634).

The blog users in their study say they rely on blogs because they provide more depth and analysis than traditional media. Although fairness may be considered a virtue of traditional journalism, these blog users see opinionated writing as independent, thoughtful analysis that fills a gap in mainstream media coverage of world events. The majority of surveyed blog users identified themselves as conservative, and "almost two-thirds say they sought information from conservative or very conservative sites" (Johnson & Kaye, 2004b, p. 633). Almost three-quarters of blog users believe that blogs are moderately to very credible. The researchers concluded that readers are seeking out blogs that support their views, and that readers consider those blogs to be highly credible.

No studies are known to have been done on the credibility of milblogs. The Johnson and Kaye (2004b) study on political blog credibility was measured by surveying blog users, however,

no research is available on the general public's perception of blogs or milblogs. This study seeks to learn how credible the public perceives milblogs to be, and how milblog credibility compares to that of mainstream and Defense Department news outlets. Given the conflicting results of past studies on political blogs and the lack of information on milblogs, this study avoids making a prediction and instead seeks to answer the following research questions.

*RQ*2: Do milblogs communicate a credible message?

*RQ*3: Do people perceive milblogs to be more or less credible than Defense Department and mainstream media online articles?

Emotion and Milblogs

Affect and emotion are powerful appeals that guide human behavior. Research on affect shows that evaluations of people, objects, and issues are influenced by feelings, moods and emotions (Petty, Gleicher, & Baker, 1991). Because emotions are universal, the messages contained in milblogs may promote greater understanding of the military and possibly serve to bridge the gap between the armed forces and the rest of society.

Milblogs are often written by men and women who are serving in dangerous places, performing dangerous duties. Whether blogging from Iraq or from a base in the United States, milbloggers offer an insider's view of war, military life, and the people who are the military. A cursory sampling of milblogs indicates that they express a wide range of emotions, including fear, loneliness, sadness, and even exhilaration. As they describe their experiences, milbloggers often use descriptively detailed language. Some milblogs are "sophomoric and laced with obscenities, while others offer frank and poignant accounts of what it's like to fight this war" (Schulman, 2005). Before it was discontinued, Jason Hartley's milblog, *Just Another Soldier,* was "frequently profane, uproarious, vulgar, searing, and poignant, but always nakedly honest.

(Hartley) writes about life and loose bowels and self-abuse and death – kind of how Holden

Caulfield might write if he loved the Army as much as Hartley says he does" (Gladstone, 2005,

p.1). Hockenberry (2005) likens the blogging of Danjel Bout (*365 and a Wakeup)* to the prose of

"literary warbloggers of yore" like Thucydides and Homer: "Sleep, blessed, blissful, wonderful

sleep. Mother's milk. A full harvest in a time of famine. The storm that breaks the drought. It is

the drug of choice here - assiduously avoided because of the never-ending chain of missions, but

always craved. If rarity is the measure of a substance's worth, then here in Iraq, sleep carries a

price beyond words. There is no more precious moment in my day than the sublime instant

where my mind flickers between consciousness and the dreamworld. In that sliver of time the

day seems to shimmer and melt like one of Dalí's paintings - leaving only honey sweet dreams of

my other life far from Arabia" (p. 1).

Milbloggers' views are distinctive, and they describe events that few Americans outside

the military will experience. Many sites describe the sadness of leaving families to go to war. A

Seattle-area band, 3 dB down, was inspired by one such post on *The Mudville Gazette* and wrote

the simple but meaningful song *On Leaving,* (3 dB Down, 2005; *The Mudville Gazette*, 2005).

Colby Buzzell (*My War)* is among those who blogged about a combat experience in Iraq: "We

were driving there on that main street when all of a sudden all hell came down all around on us. I

was like, this is it, I'm going to die. I cannot put into words how scared I was" (Schulman, 2005,

p. 13). Jason Hartley (*Just Another Soldier)* mentioned in a radio interview a blog entry in which

he described his feelings the first time he shot at someone with the intent to kill: "Intellectually I

know this is morally repugnant….But, that experience - that was the most exhilarating thing that

I've ever experienced in my life, was making a concerted effort to kill someone. I have to admit

this. I don't want to hurt people, but that was really exciting" (Gladstone, 2005, p.1). Milblogger "Sminklemeyer" (*In Iraq for 365*) posts candidly about seeking help for "his struggle with recurring nightmares" (Schulman, 2005, p. 13).

Military families, too, tell emotional stories. "Greyhawk's" daughter posted her thoughts on her father's blog on her birthday in January 2005: "I had these small worries in the back of my mind that I didn't want to grow and haunt me. So I thought as positive as possible, and tried not to think about the dangers. I would think instead of how happy I'd be when he came home. Sometimes it's hard when you hear news like I did yesterday about a helicopter crashing that killed 31 men. A sudden fear struck me that my dad could have been on that helicopter. I feel proud to say that my dad is in Iraq serving our country and helping Iraq become a free nation" (*The Mudville Gazette*, 2005).

Many blogs include photographs and video links of fellow fighters in battle gear, camp life, combat vehicles and weapons, memorials of fallen comrades, babies born during deployments, smiling family members, joyful homecomings, and other images that illustrate military life. Sadly, since January 2005, "the blogs of at least two soldiers have gone dark after their authors were killed in action," Schulman (2005). Milblogger Francisco G. Martinez, who died March 20, 2005 from a sniper's gunshot in Iraq, wrote in August 2004, "My intentions are to come home safe and sound, but my (enemy's) is to prevent that from happening. So tonight, before you sleep, or while you sit to eat, think of me, and my brothers who are going to sacrifice our lives, so that you may enjoy your every day turmoils and frustrations" (Memmott, 2005, p. 4).

Besides giving readers a glimpse into military life, the moving photographs and descriptive language of milblogs likely evoke powerful emotions, both positive and negative. Their content certainly seems more emotional than that of traditional news sources. Although it appears that milblogs communicate an affective message, no research has been done on what emotions are being communicated. To learn more, this study asks the following research questions:

> *RQ*4: Do milblogs communicate an affective message and, if so, which emotions are more prevalent?

> *RQ*5: Do milblogs elicit more or less emotional response than Defense Department and mainstream media online articles?

Influence of Milblogs

Anecdotal evidence suggests that blogs, like traditional mass media, influence the public, media, and policy agendas. Prior to the Internet and specifically the blog phenomenon, only those who could pay start-up costs for some sort of mass media could communicate with the "masses." Now, anyone can. To reach mainstream media-size audiences, "a blogger needs only a computer, Internet access, and an opinion" (Rosenbloom, 2004, p. 31). As Jarvis puts it, "people now own the printing press and the broadcast tower and the barrier to entry to media has been blown away" (Cherkoff, 2004, p. 1). Turnbull (2002) believes that, because of the quality of minds present and the cross-fertilization of ideas, the blogosphere has an influence out of proportion to its number of readers.

Much research has been done on the influence of mass media on society. Lippmann (1922) first suggested that the public must depend on the media to give shape to the facts of life because they cannot be everywhere, doing everything. Media presentation of issues makes the

public aware of issues and, to a certain degree, controls issue salience. Cohen (1963) stated that

the press "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is

stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (p. 13). McCombs and Shaw

(1972) coined the term "agenda-setting hypothesis" to describe how mass media set the agenda:

"most of what people know comes to them 'second' or 'third' hand from the mass media and

from other people" (p. 176). They posited that the mass media have the ability to transfer items

from the news agenda to the public agenda by making them more salient. They also suggest

that the media have the power to frame issues by emphasizing, downplaying, and omitting

certain aspects of an issue, thereby suggesting to the public or other media how to think about

it. Goffman (1974) describes a frame as the definition a person (or the media) gives to the

situation or content in which interaction occurs. Entman (1991) theorized "frames reside in the

specific properties of the news narrative that encourage those perceiving and thinking about

events to develop particular understandings of them. News frames are constructed from and

embodied in keywords, metaphors, concepts, symbols and visual images emphasized in the

news narrative" (p. 7, 1991). Like the bulk of mainstream media stories, many blogs seem to

rely on episodic framing as they offer observations and snippets of daily life. Iyengar (1991)

posited that episodically framed stories are more personalized and may be more influential than

stories framed thematically. Additionally, frames prime access to schema, what Iyengar (1990)

called *accessibility bias;* that is, the tendency of an individual to place greater weight on

considerations that are momentarily prominent or salient (Pfau, Moy, & Szabo, 2001). Priming

temporarily enhances the accessibility of concepts in memory. These become accessible cues,

shortcuts that people use to analyze new information. The more often a theme is repeated, the

greater the accessibility of related schema, and the more they can be expected to influence

behavior.

The cross-linking way of sharing information on blogs serves to amplify a message and

spread it in real time (Fernando, 2004), and this effect has been visible in both the corporate and

political arenas. In fact, anecdotal evidence suggests that blogs are bringing issues to public,

media, and policymaker awareness, as well as framing and priming them. In the corporate world,

for example, no longer can corporate communicators tightly manage messaging about their

products; rather, "a single loyal consumer or an angry critic can have tremendous influence on

thousands of other consumers simply by posting one message" regardless of whether their beliefs

are rooted in reality (Woods, 2005, p. 28). In some cases, blogs have influenced the public and

had a direct impact on corporate bottom lines. For example, one blog that logged 15 million hits

began a movement that forced Apple to create a longer lasting battery for its iPod, and Web

pages about Coca-Cola's new C2 beverage impacted Japanese consumers' thoughts about the

product before its widespread distribution (Crain, 2004); additionally, Kryptonite had to replace

$10 million in bicycle locks after bloggers spread stories about how to open the locks with a

disposable pen (Sudhaman, 2005).

Blogs also can bring issues to the media agenda by supplementing, echoing, amplifying,

and sometimes challenging mainstream media reports, particularly in politics. Crain (2004)

reports that more people are turning to blogs to read about political events of the day. Although

many journalists are critical of bloggers, "they increasingly rely on blogs for story tips,

information, and access to stories from media throughout the world" (Johnson & Kaye, 2004b, p.

625). Taylor (2004) argues that the events and the political climate of the last few years would

have been an entirely different had it not been for bloggers. In fact, bloggers have led media to

stories and kept stories in the public eye long enough for the public to force leaders to act on issues that otherwise might have died in the mainstream press. A few events have triggered "blog storms," a surge of activity and information within the blogosphere (Parks, 2005). The first national public figure swept up in a blog storm was Senator Trent Lott (Dillon, 2004). Initially, ABC News was the lone mainstream outlet that reported racially divisive remarks the Senator made; the story appeared to be fading away until bloggers began covering it. The blog storm spawned coverage by multiple mainstream outlets, generating a host of articles and opinion pieces in mainstream media that pressured the Senator to resign as Senate majority leader.

In the 2004 presidential election, bloggers helped spread allegations against Democratic candidate John Kerry that originated with Swift Boat Veterans for Truth; blogs also played a role in the resignation of CBS news anchor Dan Rather and CNN's Eason Jordan (Pollack, 2005; Taylor, 2004). In addition, bloggers noticed that a Bush campaign commercial had digitally inserted additional soldiers into a scene where the president was addressing a rally; the campaign subsequently altered the commercial (Taylor, 2004).

Howard Dean was the first to harness the power of the Internet to raise funds for his bid for the Democratic nomination for president in 2004. Now it appears that other policymakers are trying to harness the power of blogs. Senator Patrick Leahy has the distinction of being the first Senate blogger (Chaddock, 2005); now many others have their own blogs or post occasionally on prominent blogs (Perlmutter & Metzgar, 2005). Members of both parties on Capitol Hill are following blogs (Chaddock, 2005). In October 2005, Republicans from the House of Representatives convened the first ever "Capitol Hill Blog Row" (Chaddock, 2005). For half a day, top Republicans met with bloggers who blogged the conversation live from the meeting room on Capitol Hill. It remains to be seen how much sway blogs will play in future politics, but

Perlmutter and Metzgar (2005) offer that blogs may be like a "virtual primary," in which

candidates must work the blogosphere one blog at a time, much like visiting coffee shops and

town halls in Iowa and New Hampshire during the primaries. They argue that "the politician who

takes them for granted will find himself standing alone" (Perlmutter & Metzgar, 2005, p. 1).

Thus, blogs influence the public, media, and policy agendas and frame and prime issues

by echoing and amplifying the voices of those speaking out in society, whether the voices come

from the public, politics, the media, academia, or other bloggers. By extension, military public

affairs officers may find it harder to manage the message as milbloggers become conduits for

unofficial information to the public and the media.Given the influential nature of blogs as a

medium, this research seeks to understand how milblogs, through their presence in the

blogosphere and their unique viewpoints may be setting agendas by framing and priming various

military issues. This study, therefore, seeks answers to the final two research questions.

*RQ*6: Compared to mainstream media and Defense Department news sources, what

impact do military web logs have on the public's attitudes toward the U.S. military, the

war in Iraq, and the military's continued presence there?

Methods

The purpose of this study was two fold. The first part of the study was to examine the

credibility, emotional tone and depiction of the military revealed in milblogs by performing a

content analysis. The second part of the study was to perform an experiment to observe the

elicited credibility, emotional tone and perceptions of the military produced by milblogs versus

traditional media forms. The study was undertaken to answer some fundamental questions

regarding the use of blogs as a means of communication, particularly about military events and

people. As the Internet increasingly grows as an information source it is imperative that

communicators attempt to understand who uses blogs as a means of communication and what types of information are passed through blogs. The experimental phases of the project sought to conduct analysis between the breadth and accuracy of information from three distinct types of internet news sources as a means of evaluating their mass media impact.

Content Analysis

> *Procedures.* A content analysis was conducted of blogs written by military personnel. Military personnel are defined as active duty military, reserve military, family members and retirees. The analysis focused on milblogs which were determined to be the most frequently mentioned as military blogs by other bloggers and readers. This was determined by a cross reference check of milblogs that were recognized during the 2004 Military Weblogs Awards, by the website milblogging.com and those mentioned as sources during reporting on military blogs by Army Times Publishing Company, *USA Today* and *Wired Magazine*. The 10 most frequently mentioned sites by these three sources were chosen for study.

> The unit of analysis was each single post to the milblog about a person or event. The posts were chosen to be analyzed if they fell in the dates dictated by the study.

> It was determined to analyze milblogs across a six month period to ensure the information analyzed was consistent, as opposed to in response to one particular news event. The samples of Internet based news stories were stratified by month and week. The final week of analysis coincided with the Iraqi Constitutional Referendum vote.

> Six DoD public affairs personnel, who were enrolled in the Joint Communication Course at a Midwestern university, conducted the content analysis. Coding norms were established during supervised training sessions conducted using a representative sample of complete military blog enteries for two key weeks. During training, coders established a high degree of

standardization resulting in inter-coder reliabilities of (α=.97), based on the Effective Intercoder

reliability scale (Rosenthal, 1987).

   Variables coded. The investigation examined four variables. Overall tone of coverage

toward the military was assessed with a global attitude measure adapted from Burgoon, Cohen,

Miller, and Montgomery (1978). It consisted of six 7-interval scales (α=.95), including:

good/bad, positive/negative, wise/foolish, valuable/worthless, favorable/unfavorable, and

acceptable/unacceptable. Depiction of military personnel in the milblog was assessed using the

Individualized Trust Scale (ITS), developed by Van Lear and Trujillo (1986) based on four, 7-

interval items including trusting/untrusting, candid/deceptive, and sincere/insincere, and

honest/dishonest (α =.98).

   Multiple item indicators were used to evaluate emotion. The emotion scale was based on

the previous work of Dillard and colleagues (Dillard, Plotnick, Godbold, Freimuth & Edgar,

1996; Smith & Dillard, 1997). Featured emotions and alpha reliabilities were: anger (angry,

irritated, and annoyed), α = .93; surprise (surprise, astonished, and amazed), α = .90; puzzled,

(puzzled, bewildered and confused), α = .90; sad, (sad, dreary and dismal), α =.85; fear, (fearful,

afraid, and scared), α = .95; happy, (happy and cheerful), α = 84.; contentment, (mellow,

tranquil, peaceful and contented), α = .89; pride, (dignity, honor, and gratification) α = .91; and

humor, (funny, witty, and amusing), α = .86. The dimensions of pride and humor were added to

Dillard's measures for the purpose of this particular study.

   Credibility of the milblog was measured using the news credibility scale (Gaziano &

McGrath, 1986). The scale consists of 12-item indicators on a semantic differential scale

bounded by 1 for more negative words and 7 for more positive words. The word pairs included:

unfair and fair, biased and unbiased, doesn't tell the whole story and tells the whole story, is

inaccurate and is accurate, invades people's privacy and respects people's privacy, does not watch after readers' interest and does watch after reader's interests, is not concerned about the community's well being and is concerned about the community's well-being, does not separate fact from fiction and does separate fact from fiction, cannot be trusted and can be trusted, is opinionated and is factual, is concerned about profit and is concerned about public and reflects a poorly trained reporter or well trained reporter. The effective intercoder reliability for all measures was $\alpha = .97$. The total $n = 528$.

Experiment

The study sought to compare the effects of three versions of the same news story about these issues. The versions were: a story from a milblog, a story from a military news agency and a story from a traditional on-line media source such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, or *L.A. Times*. The topics covered in the stories were the Iraqi constitution, Iraqi military or explosive devices.

These three topics were chosen as important news events that parallel stated U.S. and coalition goals in Iraq. The three topics chosen included: the writing and ratification of the Iraqi constitution, the training of the Iraqi military, and reports on improvised explosive devices (IEDs). IEDs were chosen as the third topic due to their representation of the insurgency in Iraq as being contrary to coalition goals. Word counts were edited to be of comparable length to reduce bias. Word counts of the three news stories were 400 words each.

Participants. Participants in the study were drawn from the pool of communication students at a Midwestern university and students were awarded extra credit for participating in the study. The study was conducted in one phase. A total of 326 participants reported for the study and completed an optional questionnaire. The questionnaire recorded demographic

information on research participants to include gender (170 males, 156 females), age (mean 20.37 years), and year in school (63 freshman, 111 sophomores, 86 juniors and 69 seniors). Additionally, an exposure and attention measure of blogs, newspaper, and TV, was also collected to determine whether participants were familiar with the type of information that is found on these Internet based sources and to gauge their perception of the credibility of these news sources. Finally, participants were asked about their attitudes regarding U.S. military presence in Iraq and the importance of continued U.S. military presence in Iraq.

Next, participants were randomly assigned to one of three events: Iraqi constitution, Iraqi military or explosive devices. Participants were then assigned to read a story from either a milblog, the military news source, or the traditional newspaper source. Subjects were assigned randomly with the exception that care was taken to ensure conditions were relatively balanced in regards to initial involvement. The participant's attitudes toward the military were record prior to their exposure to the story.

After reading the story, research participants were again asked about their attitude toward the U.S. military presence in Iraq as well as the importance of continued U.S. military presence in Iraq. Participants were also asked their perceptions of the credibility of the story and their emotional response to the story they read. Finally, they were asked about their uses of blogs, and their attention to newspaper news, television news, and blogs and if they had discussions with parents, friends, or in classes about the information they read on the blogs.

Measures. Overall attitude about U.S. military presence in Iraq was assessed before and after message exposure with a global attitude measure adapted from Burgoon, Cohen, Miller, and Montgomery (1978). The measure's six-point bipolar adjective scale. Multiple item indicators were used to include; unacceptable/acceptable, foolish/wise, unfavorable/favorable,

negative/positive, bad/good, and wrong/right (before exposure, α =.96; after exposure α = .97).

The importance of continued U.S. military presence in Iraq was measured before and after

message exposure using a six-point bipolar adjective scale (Zaichkowski, 1985). The scale

included; unimportant/important, or no concern/of much concern, means nothing/means a lot,

doesn't matter/matters to me, insignificant/significant, and irrelevant/relevant (attitude before, α

= .95, attitude after, α = .96).

Credibility of the milblog was measured using the news credibility scale (Gaziano &

McGrath, 1986). The scale was a 12-item indicators on a semantic differential scale bounded by

1 for more negative words, and 7 for more positive words. The word pairs included: unfair and

fair, biased and unbiased, doesn't tell the whole story and tells the whole story, is inaccurate and

is accurate, invades people's privacy and respects people's privacy, does not watch after readers'

interest and does watch after reader's interests, is not concerned about the community's well

being and is concerned about the community's well-being, does not separate fact from fiction

and does separate fact from fiction, cannot be trusted and can be trusted, is opinionated and is

factual, is concerned about profit and is concerned about public and reflects a poorly trained

reporter or well trained reporter, α = .87.

Multiple item indicators were used to evaluate emotion. The emotion scale was based on

the previous work of Dillard and colleagues (Dillard, et. al., 1996; Smith & Dillard, 1997).

Featured emotions included anger (angry, irritated, and annoyed) α = ,93 ., surprise (surprise,

astonished, and amazed) α = .90 ., puzzled (puzzled, bewildered and confused) α = .90 , sad

(sad, dreary and dismal) α = .85 ., fear (fearful, afraid, and scared) α = .95, happy (happy and

cheerful) α =.84, contentment (mellow, tranquil, peaceful and contented) α = .89, and pride

(dignity, honor, and gratification) α = .91 and humor (humorous, funny and witty) α = .86. The

dimensions of pride and humor were added to this measure for the purpose of this particular study.

Use of blogs was measured using the Palmgreen, Wenner, Rayborn (1980) scale of uses and gratifications. Five dimensions (general information seeking, decisional utility, entertainment, interpersonal utility, and parasocial interaction) of uses and gratifications were measured using a 7 (applies a lot to me) to 1 (does not apply at all to me) Lickert-type scale. The five dimension were: general information seeking (α = .72), consisting of: I read blogs to keep up with current news and issues, I read blogs so I won't be surprised by higher prices and things, and I read blogs because you can trust the information that they give you; decision utility, (α = .75), consisting of: I read blogs to find out what kind of job our government officials are doing, I read blogs to help me make up my mind about the important issues of the day, and I read blogs to find out about issues affecting people like myself; entertainment, (α = .87), consisting of I read blogs because it is often entertaining, I read blogs because they are often dramatic and I read blogs because they are exciting; interpersonal utility, (α = .85), consisting of: I read blogs so I can support my own viewpoints to other people, I read blogs so I can pass the information on to other people, and I read blogs to give me interesting things to talk about; and parasocial interaction, (α = .77), consisting of I read blogs because the writers give a human quality to the news, I read blogs to compare my own ideas to what the persons on the blogs are saying and I read blogs because the blogger is like other people I know.

<div align="center">Results</div>

This investigation featured two components. A content analysis was conduced in order to describe the content of milblogs: specifically, their credibility, emotional content, and their depiction of the U.S. military and its personnel. Then, an experiment was conducted to compare

the effects of milblog exposure versus military and civilian on-line news venue exposure in terms of their impact on people's perceptions of the credibility of news stories, the emotional impact of news stories, and the influence of news stories on user's involvement and overall attitude about the U.S. military.

Content Analysis

Research Questions 1, 2, and 4 simply probed the content of milblogs. The results of the content analysis address these questions. Since the questions simply ask the nature of the content of milblogs, the analysis was limited to descriptive statistics.

Research Question 1 asked about the overall tone and depiction of the military portrayed in milblogs. To answer this, researchers examined the overall means of two measures: one that assessed the overall tone of coverage toward the military and the other that measured the trust in U.S. military personnel. Both measures were 7-interval scales with 4.0 as the absolute midpoint.

The overall tone of milblog coverage was 4.37 (*n*=528), indicating a very weak positive valence. With 4.0 as the mid-point, 4.37 suggests a near-neutral overall depiction of the military in milblogs. The results were similar on the measure of trust in military personnel. The mean trust score was 4.42 (*n*=528), suggesting a weak positive depiction. Of the individual milblogs examined in the content analysis, some were more positive than the overall mean, including Maj. K (*M*=5.51, *n*=22); 365 and a Wake Up (*M*=5.48, *n*=13); and Sgt. Hook (*M*=5.05, *n*=10). All of the other milblogs were neutral to slightly positive in tone, including A Line in the Sand (*M*=4.59, *n*=11), Ma Deuce Gunner (*M*=4.46, *n*=14), Mudville Gazette (*M*=4.38, *n*=202), Blackfive (*M*=4.35, *n*=103); Lt. Smash (*M*=4.33, *n*=108), 2Slick (*M*=4.19, *n*=8); and Froggy Ruminations (*M*=3.99, *n*=37). We are confident in the overall results. However, the results of individual milblogs are unstable due to differences in the number of stories coded across sites.

Descriptive statistics for the tone, trust, and credibility of the individual milblog sites are shown in Table 1.

Research Question 2 asked whether milblogs communicate a credible message. To assess this question, researchers examined the overall mean of the news credibility measure. It was a 7-interval set of scales with a 4.0 midpoint. The overall credibility of milblogs was 3.96 (n=528), which is very close to the midpoint.

Finally, Research Question 4 asked whether milblogs communicate an affective message and, if so, which emotions are more prevalent. To evaluate this question, researchers used mean scores across nine emotions. The emotion measure consisted of 0-6-point scales with 3.0 as the midpoint. The 528 cases revealed very little emotional content. Emotional content, in order from greatest to least emotion, were: pride (M=0.33), anger (M=0.25), happiness (M=0.18), surprise (M=0.13), sadness (M=0.13), puzzlement (M=0.11), fear (M=0.06); contentment (M=0.04), and humor (M=0.04). The results indicate that milblogs did not elicit much emotion (see Table 2) and, what little emotion was revealed consisted of more pride and anger than others. The emotional content of the individual milblog sites are shown in Table 2.

Experimental Results

Research questions 3, 5 and 6 addressed differences between milblogs and military on-line news or civilian on-line news stories. To assess these questions, a 3 (on-line site: milblog, military news, and civilian news) x 3 (topic: Iraqi constitution, IEDs, and Iraqi military forces) MANCOVA was computed on the dependent variables of: attitude toward military, involvement, credibility of news source, and emotional response (surprise, puzzlement, anger, sadness, fear, pride, humor, happiness, and contentment). Covariates included gender and use of blogs for international news.

The omnibus results indicated significant differences for the covariate of gender, Wilks' λ $F(12, 293) = 5.00$, $p < .001$, partial eta^2 = .17. Subsequent univariate tests revealed significant differences for the covariate gender on the dependent variables of attitude toward the military $F(1, 315) = 2.92$, $p < .10$, partial eta^2 = .01; and the emotions of surprise $F(1, 315) = 13.37$, $p <$ .001, partial eta^2 = .04, puzzlement $F(1, 315) = 33.92$, $p < .001$, partial eta^2 = .10, anger $F(1, 315) = 4.81$, $p < .05$, partial eta^2 = .02, sadness $F(1, 315) = 26.38$, $p < .001$, partial eta^2 = .08, and fear $F(41, 315) = 30.02$, $p < .001$, partial eta^2 = .09. All valences were positive, thus indicating that females were more positive toward the military and manifested greater emotional response to the news stories. There were no main effects for the covariate use of blogs for international news, but subsequent univariate tests for the covariate revealed significant differences for the dependent variables of surprise $F(1, 315) = 8.08$, $p < .05$, partial eta^2 = .03, puzzlement $F(1, 315) = 5.41$, $p < .05$, partial eta^2 = .02, and sadness $F(1, 315) = 6.92$, $p < .01$, partial eta^2 = .02. Those who used blogs to stay informed about international news were more likely to feel emotion.

The omnibus MANCOVA also revealed significant results for the independent variable of experimental condition, Wilks' λ $F(24,586) = 2.04$, $p < .01$, partial eta^2 = .08; and topic Wilks' λ $F(24, 586) = 3.99$, $p < .001$, partial eta^2 = .14; and an interaction of topic and experimental condition Wilks' λ $F(48, 1130) = 2.01$, $p < .001$, partial eta^2 = .08.

Subsequent univariate tests revealed significant differences for the independent variable experimental condition on the dependent variables of surprise $F(2, 315) = 3.05$, $p < .05$, partial eta^2 = .02, anger $F(2, 315) = 8.57$, $p < .001$, partial eta^2 = .05, sadness $F(2, 315) = 6.43$, $p < .01$, partial eta^2 = .04, fear $F(2, 315) = 3.62$, $p < .05$, partial eta^2 = .02, and happiness $F(2, 315) =$ 2.60, $p < .10$, partial eta^2 = .02. The source of the news stories impacted emotional response to them.

This independent variable was most central to this investigation, which sought to determine whether milblogs, compared to on-line military and civilian news venues, exert different effects in overall tone, credibility, or emotional response. The univariate results indicated no main effect differences involving either tone or credibility. However, results revealed main effects involving a number of emotions.

Scheffe post-hoc tests were used to find the where the specific differences were located. Civilian on-line news sources ($t(217)=4.84$, $p<.01$) and milblogs elicited more surprise than military on-line news sources ($t(214)=4.27$, $p<.01$). Civilian on-line news sources elicited more anger than military on-line news sources ($t(216)=8.17$, $p<.01$) and milblogs ($t(218)=5.18$, $p<.01$). Milblogs elicited more anger than military on-line news sources ($t(214)=3.00$, $p<.01$). Civilian on-line news sources elicited more sadness than military on-line news sources ($t(217)=7.67$, $p<.01$) and milblogs ($t(219)=5.22$, $p<.01$). When looking at the dependent variable fear, civilian on-line news sources elicited more fear than military on-line news sources ($t(217)=5.60$, $p<.01$); and milblogs elicited more fear than on-line military news sources ($t(214)=3.45$, $p<.01$).

There were several significant differences depicted by subsequent univariate tests for the independent variable of topic on the dependent measures of attitude toward the military $F (2, 315) = 3.58$, $p < .05$, partial eta^2 = .02, anger $F(2, 315) = 5.25$, $p < .01$, partial eta^2 = .03, sadness $F(2, 315) = 13.17$, $p < .001$, partial eta^2 = .08, fear $F(2, 315) = 13.55$, $p < .001$, partial eta^2 = .08, humor $F(2, 315) = 4.04$, $p < .05$, partial eta^2 = .03, and happiness $F (2, 315) = 9.17$, $p < .001$, partial eta^2 = .06. Topic affected overall attitude and emotional response to the news stories.

Scheffe post hoc tests were also used to examine the specific differences in topic (IED, constitution, or Iraqi forces). Attitude toward the military was more positive for those in the

constitution condition ($t(213)$=4.55, p<.01) when compared to those in the IED condition. Attiude toward the military was also more positive for those in the topic condition of Iraqi forces when compared to IEDs ($t(219)$=4.45, p<.01). The omnibus test has depicted significant differences on the emotions of anger, sad, fear, humor, and happiness. Scheffe post hoc tests revealed that participants in the IED topic condition experienced more anger than those in the Iraqi forces condition ($t(218)$=6.45, p<.01) as well as those in the constitution condition ($t(215)$=2.90, p<.01). Participants in the IED condition also felt more sadness when compared to those in the Iraqi forces condition ($t(219)$=9.33, p<.01) and those in the constitution condition ($t(216)$=8.56, p<.01). The IED condition also elicited more fear when compared to the constitution condition ($t(216)$=9.20, p<.01) and the Iraqi forces condition ($t(219)$=9.10, p<.01).

Humor was elicited more when reading stories about the constitution when compared to the IED condition ($t(216)$=5.83, p<.01) as well as when reading stories about Iraqi forces compared to IED stories ($t(219)$=3.83, p<.01). Happiness was elicited more when reading stories about the constitution than IED stories ($t(216)$=7.33, p<.01), as well as when reading stories about Iraqi forces compared to IEDs ($t(219)$=7.22, p<.01).

 Subsequent univariate tests for the interaction effect revealed significant differences for the following dependent variables: credibility $F(4, 315) = 1.99$, $p < .10$, partial $eta^2 = .03$, anger $F(4, 315) = 3.33$, $p < .05$, partial $eta^2 = .04$, pride $F(4, 315) = 2.49$, $p < .05$, partial $eta^2 = .03$, and happiness $F(4, 315) = 3.51$, $p < .05$, partial $eta^2 = .04$.

The findings for anger and happiness override the main effect findings reported for experimental condition and topic. Scheffe post hoc tests revealed some significant differences in the pattern of means across experimental condition and topic. When reading milblog stories, the constitution stories elicited more anger than IEDs stories ($t(69)$=3.47, p<.01). Constitution stories

also elicited more anger than stories about Iraqi forces ($t(70)=3.74$, $p<.01$). Civilian news stories about IEDs elicited more emotion than those about Iraqi forces ($t(70)=3.05$, $p<.01$). Military on-line news sources found more anger depicted in IED stories than those about Iraqi forces ($t(70)=3.05$, $p<.01$). For the emotion pride, milblogs found more pride elicited when comparing the IED stories to the constitution stories ($t(69)=5.05$, $p<.01$) and stories about Iraqi forces ($t(73)=2.84$, $p<.01$). Civilian on-line news stories elicited more pride when reading stories about Iraqi forces when compared to IED stories ($t(72)=3.68$, $p<.01$); and when reading stories about the constitution compared to IEDs ($t(74)=2.44$, $p<.01$). When examining happiness, milblogs elicited more happiness when reading stories about Iraqi forces when compared to stories on the constitution ($t(70)=2.31$, $p<.05$). Military on-line news elicited more happiness in stories about the constitution ($t(69)=7.44$, $p<.01$) and Iraqi forces ($t(70)=7.56$, $p<.01$) when compared to stories about IEDs. Civilian on-line news stories about the constitution ($t(74)=6.67$, $p<.01$) and Iraqi forces ($t(72)=3.80$, $p<.01$)both elicited more happiness then stories about IEDs.

Regression Results

Finally, regression analysis examined the relative impact of uses of milblogs, TV news, and newspapers for securing information about international affairs, national affairs, and weather/sports. The results indicated that use of milblogs for national news was a positive indicator for discussing blogs with others($\beta=.36$, $p<.05$). The use of blogs for international news was a positive predictor for the amount of knowledge students had about the war in Iraq ($\beta=.36$, $p<.05$) and involvement about the issue and the war ($\beta=.34$, $p<.01$). There were no significant effects for TV news or newspaper use.

<div align="center">Discussion</div>

This investigation explored military web logs, or milblogs, a new and growing source of

communication about the U.S. military and its war operations. Despite the explosion in milblogs during the period surrounding the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq and the implications of milblogs for public affairs communication, nothing is known about them: the nature of messages communicated or the influence of messages on users. This investigation examined the content of milblogs communicating about the war in Iraq to determine what milblogs have to say about the military, the emotional content of milblog messages, and how milblogs communicate (credibility of their message). In addition, the investigation assessed the effects of milblogs on users. An experiment was conducted to compare milblogs versus on-line military and civilian news venues in terms of their impact on users perceptions of the military, emotional response to stories, and overall credibility.

The results of this investigation suggest, that for now, milblogs do not pose a problem for the U.S. military, either in terms of what they communicate or in terms of the effects they exert.

The content analysis revealed that milblogs are relatively neutral to mildly positive in terms of what they are communicating about the U.S. military. This was true in terms of overall tone of coverage and trust in military personnel. Some individual sites were positive toward the military; most were relatively neutral.

Milblogs do not communicate a particularly credible message. Average credibility ratings hovered near the mid-point of the news credibility measure. Finally, milblog messages do not communicate a very emotional message. Overall, messages contained scant emotional content, with scores not exceeding 1.0 on any affect dimension.

The experiment compared milblogs to military news and civilian news venues in terms of their impact on readers, perceptions of the military, overall credibility, and emotional influence. The results indicated that milblogs didn't affect users' perceptions of credibility or their attitudes

toward the military. However, milblogs did elicit emotional responses in users. Milblogs were found to elicit more surprise, anger and fear than military news. This could be explained by their use of personal points of view rather than institutional points of view. Individuals play a larger part in milblog stories and have greater emotional appeal to the reader.

The topic of stories exerted considerable effects. Not surprisingly, IED stories leave readers less positive about the military and elicit more anger, sadness, and fear and less humor and happiness than stories about the Iraqi constitution and/or the training of Iraqi forces. The experimental condition and topic means interacted on the dependent measures of credibility and pride, and overrode main effect findings on the dependent variables of anger and happiness. When reading milblog stories, the constitution stories elicited more anger than IED stories and Iraqi forces stories because the IED story was a positive story about successfully disabling IEDs before they had a chance to injure any military personnel. Milblogs elicited more pride when reading IED stories compared to constitution stories and stories about Iraqi forces. Civilian on-line stories elicited more pride about Iraqi forces when compared to IED stories. Most likely because the subject of Iraqi forces is a positive topic about forward progress in Iraq where as IED stories accentuate the ongoing dangers to U.S. forces.

Finally, regression analysis examined the relative impact of uses of milblogs, TV news, and newspapers for securing information about international affairs, national affairs, and weather/sports. The results indicated that use of milblogs for national news was a positive indicator for discussing the content of blogs with others. The use of blogs for international news was a positive predictor for the amount of knowledge students had about the war in Iraq and overall involvement in the issue of the war. Blog use exerted some effects relevant to the war. By contrast, TV news and newspaper use exerted no impact.

Future Directions

Ten milblogs were selected based on their popularity and frequency of reference by other blogs and the mainstream media. While the selected milblogs had a wide variety of content, this study's sample of ten milblogs may have been insufficient to fully represent all milblogs.

This study was limited to milblogs. Future studies should also include examples of blogs that are more conservative or liberal. People are starting to seek out media that reinforces their political and ideological values. Including these blogs might better tap what is happening to influence attitude toward the military. Future studies should focus on expanding the types of blogs which are examined. They should include all blogs, especially political blogs that comment on military matters, and try to determine what is more influential, the milblogs or non-military blogs.

In addition, future studies should attempt to include linked material. In this study, material that was linked to by the original milblog was not included. A method should be found to allow subjects to view the linked material or observe what types of linked material is most viewed by the subjects. This could add a new dimension to the understanding of blogs' effects on subject perceptions.

Also in future studies, blogs and other media sources should be viewed in their original form. For our study, the milblog, main stream media, and DoD news articles were printed in identical form on plain paper with black text and no pictures. In future studies, the subjects should be allowed to view the material using full color prints or using an electronic format that will allow the subject to experience the blog with the blogger's full creative license still intact.

Limitations

In the survey, there were differences in topics. Improvised Explosive Device (IED) stories produced more emotion than stories on the Iraqi Constitution and the training of Iraqi Armed Forces. The IED topic lends itself to being more emotional. When searching for topics, these were the ones in the news at the time of the postings, and they were in the news throughout the dates covered by the content analysis.

With regard to the content analysis, in order to avoid bias when deciding which milblogs to select, the milblog entries were not examined for content prior to conducting the content analysis but were chosen instead based on their popularity ratings. However, several of the milblogs selected consisted of headlines from other blogs and the mainstream media and had no independent content of their own to study. These blogs probably served more to confound the results of the content analysis than to represent the true content of other milblogs. Another confounding variable to the content analysis was the fact that from the six weeks of milblogs from which entries were analyzed, some of the milblogs had postings for the dates selected and some did not which further reduced the total number of postings.

Prior to this study, many milblogs that were considered to be controversial by the blogger's military command, or deemed to be in violation of operational security, had already been shut down. This reduced the range of topics and may have limited the number of negative milblogs available for study.

Finally, all the members of the content analysis team were military affiliates and their preconceived bias about the military may have swayed reported opinions about the milblogs. This would have been most prevalent in the analysis of a milblog's fairness or accuracy and could have also affected perceived trust in the milblogger. In addition, the content analysis team members were instructed to score emotions very low and that if any emotion were to be reported,

it should be very low on the scale. This could explain the lack of emotion found in the content analysis results.

Conclusion

The results of the study indicate that there is no significant difference in the effects of milblogs on public opinion as compared to the mainstream media's effect on public opinion. This would indicate that military public affairs professionals should not be concerned with milblogs having a negative effect on public opinion and should encourage the chain of command to allow individuals in the command to produce blogs. However, all milblogs should continue to be monitored by the military to ensure that they do not include operational security violations, force protection information or violations of the privacy act.

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