

Only the lonely write blogs, prof says

People who keep weblogs are isolated and withdrawn, author contends

DEBORAH TETLEY

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Bloggers are a lonely and isolated lot, rebels against the mainstream who live in the make-believe world of cyberspace, where truth is often a casualty of fingers tapping at a keyboard, a University of Calgary professor says in his new book.

But as quickly as Michael Keren's assertions were made public yesterday, bloggers reacted with anger at what some see as an attack on their passion for writing, sharing feelings and advancing their political causes in an international arena.

Keren, whose book is titled *Blogosphere: The New Political Arena*, estimates there are 60 million people worldwide who write weblogs on topics ranging from their cats to Britney Spears to world politics.

Some are celebrities in their own right, such as gossip blogger Perez Hilton, author of "Hollywood's most hated website."

Many bloggers, Keren says, are isolated, lonely and withdrawn, choosing to form virtual relationships instead of the real thing.

"Bloggers think of themselves as rebels against mainstream society, but that rebellion is mostly confined to cyberspace, which makes blogging as melancholic and illusionary as Don Quixote tilting at windmills," Keren says in a statement.

In *Blogosphere: The New Political Arena*, he asks whether the blogosphere is a new political arena or simply a gathering place for powerless citizens.

"Pshaw!" replied blogger Michelle Malkin, a syndicated columnist who lives near Washington and writes a blog that in 2005 was named one of the best political diaries of the year by Forbes magazine.

"Bloggers love company. We are incurable social creatures wrapped in a pose of Internet misanthropy," Malkin added. "Blogging is all about intensive engagement in hometown politics and world affairs alike."

Malkin credited blogs with effecting change in a way other media can't. Bloggers "have raised thousands of dollars for wounded veterans and their families and helped raise hundreds of thousands for natural disaster victims oceans away."

Other bloggers were more incensed.

"That's so disparaging," said Jim Elves, who lives in Waterford, Ont., a town of 3,000.

Elves runs a website for political blogs called *Blogs Canada*, which he says has

11,000 writers.

He said bloggers tend to be better informed and motivated than many Canadians.

He likened blogging to travelling the country, chatting with others living in small towns.

"Because we do this from our basement offices doesn't mean we're lonely," he said.

But Keren, who blames bloggers for what he sees as the fall of public political activism, said he doesn't mean to offend.

"I don't want to be a prophet of gloom," said Keren, who holds a Canada Research Chair in communication, culture and civil society at the University of Calgary. "But many are writing a sermon that no one is going to hear."

Keren says weblogs promise liberation and a freedom of expression not found in any other medium.

"But bloggers do not take advantage of this liberation. Bloggers have compared their writing and ideas to the great conquests in history, yet despite their excessive use of words, they conquer nothing. In the blogosphere, the death of an aging cat is on the same emotional level as an earthquake in Pakistan."

- Online extra: Aided by tips from readers, bloggers get the scoop on restaurants in the Big Apple.

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