Exploring the Corporate Blogosphere:
A Taxonomy for Research and Practice

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Abstract

Corporate blogs have received a great deal of attention recently in the practitioner literature and are gaining interest in the research community, although little is known about the uses and impacts of these blogs. We develop a taxonomy to describe and compare corporate blogs, and then apply it to companies listed on the S&P 500, S&P MidCap 400, and S&P SmallCap 600 indices. Our findings revealed several main clusters of blogs that are currently being hosted by corporations as well as a few uncommon types of blogs that may represent emerging trends in corporate blogging practices. These findings also suggest that our taxonomy is indeed able to differentiate among different types of corporate blogs and will be a useful tool for future research.

1. Introduction

A weblog, or blog for short, is a website characterized by dated entries appearing in reverse chronological order. These websites are usually updated frequently and contain links to other blogs or websites [7]. Beyond this basic structure, however, blogs can vary dramatically in terms of style and content. Most blogs are created by individuals and are used as personal journals or to provide commentary on news, websites, etc. [19].

In recent years, companies have begun to adopt blogs as channels for communication. These corporate blogs, as they are often called, have been utilized in many different ways. The flexibility offered by corporate blogs raises many questions, for example: Which types of corporate blogs are most common? How can we compare different types of corporate blogs? Are there future potential applications of corporate blogs that have not been thought of yet? Answering these questions and many more would be easier with a comprehensive taxonomy that could be used to classify and describe corporate blogs.

In this study, we will develop such a taxonomy based on prior theory and research findings from the fields of management and mass communication. We will then evaluate this taxonomy by applying it to a sample of current corporate blogs and making suggestions for potential future uses of corporate blogs.

2. Corporate blogs

Corporate blogs have received widespread attention in the popular press and practitioner literature. They can be used to market products and services, develop a brand, and increase visibility [1, 23, 33]. They can also help companies build stronger relationships with customers [1, 33, 35] and obtain customer feedback [5, 8]. Corporate blogs do not have to be used for public communication, however. Some companies have begun to use blogs internally as a medium for collaboration and knowledge management [5, 18, 33].

Much of the practitioner literature has focused on the challenges of managing a blog. For example, if a corporate blog is not updated regularly or is seen as nothing but propaganda, then the company might suffer backlash from the blogging community, or blogoshpere [1, 8]. Other challenges include possible intellectual property infringement, disclosure of nonpublic company information, and posting of defamatory comments [23].

Most of this literature has also offered suggestions for dealing with these challenges. Companies are strongly encouraged to establish clear policies and guidelines for employees who blog [15, 23]. They should also be willing to invest the time necessary to keep a blog updated [33] and make sure that the blog has a clear focus that reflects the company's image [8].

Despite the extensive coverage of corporate blogs by practitioners, very little academic research has been conducted on them. Zerfaß [38] proposed the first framework to provide a conceptual foundation for describing corporate blogs. This framework maps several types of corporate blogs on two dimensions. The first dimension seems to describe each blog's communication function and includes information, persuasion, and argumentation. The second dimension describes whether

each blog is used for internal communication, market communication, or public relations.

Lee et al. [26] proposed another framework that describes five types of corporate blogs and five blogging strategies. Their types of corporate blogs are employee, group, executive, promotion, and newsletter. Their blogging strategies are split into bottom-up and top-down approaches. The bottom-up approach is company-wide, whereas the top-down approach can be top management commitment, individual, group, or promotion. Using content analysis, the authors identified the types of blogs and corresponding strategies utilized by 18 of the Fortune 500 companies. Most of these companies used top-down strategies, maintaining a high level of control over their blogs. Top-down blogs tended to focus on thought leadership or promotion, and bottom-up blogs tended to focus on product development or customer service. This framework provides a good starting point for thinking about corporate blogs but does not accurately describe certain types of blogs, such as internal or entertainment blogs, and does not clearly describe the audience of a blog. In addition, the framework cannot be used as a guide to identify potential future uses of corporate blogs.

Jackson et al. [22] examined the use of internal blogs in one global IT company. They found that the internal blog in this company produced strong informational and social benefits for its users. The blog allowed employees to share information and solve problems with other employees. In addition, it helped create social ties among employees both online and offline, which then seemed to increase information sharing and collaboration.

Efimova and Grudin [13] conducted a case study of employee blogging practices at Microsoft. They examined the uses and types of blogs started by employees as well as their motivations for doing so. The content of these blogs was not managed by Microsoft and did not represent official messages of the corporation. The study included blogs hosted on official company servers as well as third-party external servers and both work-related and personal blogs. The main objectives of these employee blogs were to establish direct communication with others inside and outside the organization, depict a more personable or human side of the company, and document and organize work. The authors also describe a specific type of blog called a product blog, the focus of which is on specific products of the company.

Corporate blogging has clearly been discussed extensively in the practitioner literature. It also appears that corporate blogs are gaining interest in the research community, but we still have much more to learn about this phenomenon. An important first step in this area of research is to develop a comprehensive corporate blog taxonomy that would allow researchers to classify and compare current corporate blogs and make predictions about possible future uses of corporate blogs.

3. Corporate blog taxonomy

In this section, we develop a taxonomy that can be used to describe and classify corporate blogs. This taxonomy contains two dimensions, each with three sub-dimensions. The first dimension, Purpose, describes the underlying motivation for hosting a corporate blog and is composed of the blog's target audience, function, and content focus. The second dimension, Operation, describes the administration of a corporate blog and is composed of the blog's management structure, accessibility, and directionality.

Although this taxonomy could be used to describe many different types of work-related blogs, such as externally-hosted employee blogs, we are focusing only on those blogs that are officially sanctioned and operated by the company. In this way, we view blogs as an instrument of the company's communication strategy, which is apparent through our development of the taxonomical sub-dimensions.

3.1. Purpose

Given its widespread use as a communication medium as well as its enormous potential audience, the Internet is undoubtedly a form of mass communication [28, 29]. Since blogs are websites on the Internet that are used for communication, we argue that they are a form of mass communication as well. This perspective allows us to draw from mass communication theory.

According to mass communication theory, the media institution serves as a mediator of social reality [28]. This mediation activity involves both the distribution of knowledge and the efforts of other institutions to filter that knowledge for their own purposes [28]. Drawing from this concept of mediation, we propose that blogs serve as social mediators between corporations and their stakeholders (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Mediation Model of Corporate Blogs

It is important to note that blogs represent only one of many channels of communication between corporations and their stakeholders. Because the focus of our study is on corporate blogs, however, we have included only this channel of communication in our mediation model. In addition, a corporation may have multiple blogs, and those blogs may target a number of different stakeholder groups, which is suggested in Figure 1. Thus, the mediation model is not limited to a single blog or stakeholder group for each corporation.

We can use the mediation model to define the purpose of a corporate blog in terms of three sub-dimensions, the first of which is target audience. Corporations use blogs to communicate with stakeholder groups who constitute the audience of the blogs. The concept of a stakeholder is well-known in management research and practice [12, 27]. Stakeholder theory provides a basis for identifying entities that hold some stake in a corporation and assigning priorities to the needs of those entities [12, 27]. The definition of a stakeholder, and thus the stakeholder model, has varied considerably among the many authors who have published on the topic [27]. Donaldson and Preston [12] define stakeholders as "persons or groups with legitimate interests in procedural and/or substantive aspects of corporate activity" [p. 67]. They also present a stakeholder model which identifies specific stakeholder groups. We believe the stakeholders in this model all have a legitimate stake in a corporation, and each group of stakeholders is a potential target audience for a corporate blog (see Table 1).

Mitchell et al. [27] highlight the fact that not all stakeholders receive the same attention from a corporation's management. Some stakeholder groups will tend to be given higher priority, so we can expect to see more blogs targeting those groups. For example, corporations may be more likely to target customers, investors, and employees because these groups contribute directly to profitability. In contrast, non-profit organizations may be more likely to target political groups and government organizations because these groups have the most power to address societal issues. The stakeholders identified by Donaldson and Preston [12], therefore, represent potential target audiences, but they may not all be the focus of current corporate blogs.

The second sub-dimension is function, which describes the activity of a blog and its author(s). To explain this activity, we draw from the functionalist theory of media, which states that mass media serves the needs of society by performing five main functions [25, 28, 37] (see Table 1).

The first is *information*, which refers to the media's task of "providing information about events and conditions in society and the world" [28, p. 97]. This function can simply be described as providing news [37].

For corporations, this could mean providing information about products and services, strategic objectives, leadership changes, industry trends, etc.

The second, *correlation*, refers to the interpretation and explanation of information presented by the media [28]. This function can be described as providing thoughts, insights, and opinions, which typically reflect the views of individuals within a corporation. These views can relate to anything from the company and its products to hobbies and personal interests. By focusing on relevant business activities, the correlation function can be used to shape stakeholders' perspectives. Corporate blogs might then serve as the correlation function by helping corporations develop positive brand image or temper the effects of bad publicity.

The third, *continuity*, refers to the transmission of beliefs, values, and norms present in the dominant culture [28]. This function can help to increase social cohesion and maintain a cultural consensus [37]. The culture of a corporation is affected by its employees, industry, and home country [16, 17], and this culture can be transmitted through the messages in a corporate blog. For example, the work norms within a corporation can be described in a blog's postings, directly or indirectly, and read by new or potential employees. Similarly, the cultural beliefs of a corporation's home country could be transmitted to its foreign strategic partners and customers through a blog.

The fourth, *entertainment*, serves to provide amusement and relaxation for viewers of the media [28]. This function is not necessarily meant to have an instrumental effect on the viewers [37], although it is certainly possible that some secondary effect could occur. For example, an employee blog that contains entertaining stories and jokes could improve the company's image and lead potential customers to its main website.

The fifth function, *mobilization*, refers to the use of media to promote societal objectives, including political and commercial propaganda [28]. This function consists of activism and rallying support for societal causes. It is likely that this function would be most important for non-profit organizations. Corporations, however, have begun to embrace social responsibility as a method of improving reputation. Using corporate blogs to mobilize society may then become advantageous.

Table 1. Corporate blog taxonomy

Purpose			Operation		
Target Audience		**Function**	**Content Focus**	**Management Structure**	**Accessibility**	**Directionality**
• Customers • Suppliers		• Information	• Individual	• Hierarchy	• Public	• Bidirectional
• Investors • Communities		• Correlation	• Event	• Market	• Private	• Unidirectional
• Employees • Governments		• Continuity	• Product	• Community	• Membership	
• Trade Associations • Political Groups		• Entertainment • Mobilization	• Organization • Market			

The third sub-dimension of purpose is content focus, which describes the actual content of a blog. This characteristic is separate and distinct from the function sub-dimension described above. The function of a blog does not necessarily indicate its content, as content can serve multiple functions [28]. To develop a classification scheme for corporate blog content, we conducted a review of the corporate communication research literature. We identified relevant research that utilized content analysis and provided some type of content classification [3, 9, 10, 24, 31]. We then combined major content categories to create our classification scheme (see Table 1).

We identified five major categories of content focus. The *individual* focus relates to individual employees within the corporation. Content with this focus usually includes stories about a person's personal or professional life. The *product* focus relates to the corporation's products, services, and R&D. The *organization* focus relates to the corporation itself, such as policies, strategic objectives, public relations, etc. The *market* focus relates to the industry in which the corporation operates. Market topics can include competitors, market growth, industry-related products or activities, etc. Finally, the *event* focus relates to specific events involving or affecting the corporation. These events can be fairly short in duration and include leadership change, crisis situations, community events or campaigns, etc.

3.2. Operation

The other dimension in our taxonomy is operation, which we define in terms of three sub-dimensions. The first sub-dimension is management structure. Adler [2] described three structural forms of management in a firm: hierarchy, market, and community. These structures can be applied directly to the management of blogs within a corporation (see Table 1).

A *hierarchy* structure is characterized by a great deal of control and authority over the function and content of a corporate blog. Certain key employees are likely given the formal role of contributing to or maintaining the blog. Blogs that are hierarchically managed represent official, sanctioned messages directed by the corporation's management. In some cases, these blogs may not have individual authors; instead, blog postings may represent messages from the corporation itself.

In a *market* structure, on the other hand, all employees are allowed to contribute, and the content is much less regulated. Often times, there is little or no restriction on the topics allowed in the corporate blog; employees may write about their lives, interests, work, etc. Blogs that are managed by a market structure do not represent official corporate messages, but they do contain much more diverse information than what is found in a hierarchy structure. They also allow individual employees

to communicate with others inside and outside the corporation.

Community structures are less regulated than hierarchy structures, but are usually more focused than market structures. Communities can emerge without any formal role assignments. Employees with similar jobs, skills, or interests might create a blog dedicated to a particular topic. This type of structure is usually regulated by the members of the community and does not generally require intervention from corporate management.

The second sub-dimension is accessibility, which describes who has access to a blog. Most blogs are *publicly* accessible, meaning that anyone on the internet can read them. The objectives of a corporation, however, may warrant the need to restrict access to the blog. For example, blogs that are used to facilitate knowledge sharing among employees would obviously need to be *private*, accessible only to employees of the corporation [5, 11, 18, 33, 35]. A corporation may also want to grant blog access to only a limited group of people; we would call this *membership* access [4] (see Table 1).

The third sub-dimension is directionality. One of the key features of many blogs is the ability for readers to leave feedback or comments on particular postings [5, 8, 11]. This comment feature allows readers to engage in *bidirectional* communication with the author(s) of the blog. If this feature is disabled, the communication effectively becomes *unidirectional*. Some corporations may choose to disable this feature to avoid critical feedback or inappropriate comments [1, 35] (see Table 1).

4. Methodology

The first step in evaluating our taxonomy was to identify companies that host blogs. We wanted to start with a population of small, medium, and large companies from a variety of industries in order to capture a broad range of blogs. The population was then defined as the companies listed on the S&P 500, S&P MidCap 400, and S&P SmallCap 600 indices as of April 1, 2007. Blogs were identified by entering each company's name along with the terms "blog" or "blogs" into the Google search engine. Only blogs that were officially sponsored by the company were included in the sample. Most of these blogs were hosted on the company's domain, but some were not. For example, Southwest Airlines hosts a blog called "Nuts about Southwest" that resides on the domain blogsouthwest.com instead of southwest.com. Through this search method, we identified a total of 74 companies hosting blogs, representing 4.9% of our population.

We see from Table 2 that our sample contains companies in several different sectors, although most are in information technology. Large companies seem to be the most likely to host blogs with 8.2% of the S&P 500 in

Table 2. Number of corporations with blogs by sector and index

		S&P Index			
		S&P 500	MidCap 400	SmallCap 600	
Sector	Consumer Discretionary	8	6	4	18
	Consumer Staples	2	0	0	2
	Financials	1	0	0	1
	Health Care	1	0	0	1
	Industrials	2	1	1	4
	Information Technology	27	9	12	48
		41	16	17	**Total**

our sample; the medium and small companies follow with 4.0% and 2.8%, respectively.

Many of these companies were hosting more than one blog. We wanted to capture the different types of blogs hosted by each company without allowing any one to dominate the sample. In particular, companies that allow every employee to blog (i.e. market blog) could have hundreds of these blogs, which could reduce the importance of other types of blogs in our analysis. We thus decided to code a maximum of five blogs for each company. If a company had more than five blogs, we would select five of the blogs randomly. Using this method, we obtained a sample of 185 blogs.

Each blog was coded by one of the authors through an analysis of its content and structure. Some blogs included a description that explicitly stated the purpose and intended audience of the blog. These descriptions were used as a guide when available. An additional researcher coded a subset of the blogs, and there was 90% agreement between the two sets of codings. This measure of inter-rater reliability was obtained by dividing the number of matching sub-dimensions by the total number of sub-dimensions coded by both researchers.

For each dimension, only the primary characteristic of the blog was coded. For example, a blog may serve as both the information and correlation functions of media. This blog, however, would be coded as only the information *or* correlation function, depending on which function was most salient in the content of the blog.

The reason for this coding scheme is that most of the blogs in our sample share a common set of characteristics. Using the example above, almost all blogs contain information to some extent, but some of those blogs are used primarily to provide insights and opinions. It would thus be more useful analytically to code the latter blogs as serving the correlation function rather than the information function. The same reasoning applies to all of the dimensions in the taxonomy. This coding scheme allows for easier differentiation among blogs because only the overall purpose and operation of the blog is captured.

5. Analysis and results

5.1. Descriptive statistics

Our objective here is to describe different types of corporate blogs through the use of our taxonomy. We begin by providing an overview of the distribution of blogs for each sub-dimension (see Tables 3 and 4). We see that the corporate blogs in our sample were most commonly customer-oriented, provided insight or

Table 3. Distribution of blogs by purpose sub-dimension

Purpose					
Target Audience	% of sample	Function	% of sample	Content Focus	% of sample
Customers	75.1	Correlation	49.2	Market	51.4
Trade Associations	18.9	Information	40.5	Product	28.6
Investors	4.3	Continuity	5.9	Organization	8.6
Community	1.1	Entertainment	3.2	Event	7.0
Government	0.5	Mobilization	1.1	Individual	4.3

Table 4. Distribution of blogs by operation sub-dimension

Operation					
Management Structure	% of sample	Accessibility	% of sample	Directionality	% of sample
Community	46.5	Public	97.9	Bidirectional	78.9
Hierarchy	31.9	Membership	1.1*	Unidirectional	21.1
Market	21.6	Private	1.1*		

* not included in remainder of analysis

information, and were focused on the market or a corporation's products. They were also frequently managed by a community structure, although market and hierarchy structures were found often as well, and most were bidirectional. Almost all of the corporate blogs in this study were publicly accessible. We did find evidence of internal blogs, which will be discussed later, but we were not able to code these blogs.

5.2. Main clusters of corporate blogs

We continue the analysis by identifying the main types of corporate blogs in our sample using two-step cluster analysis, which is an appropriate technique for categorical data [32]. The analysis was conducted on the purpose and operation dimensions separately, as we believe these dimensions represent very different aspects of corporate blogs. Since two-step cluster analysis is sensitive to the order of cases in the data set [32], we ran the analysis three times for each dimension with randomly ordered cases. The number of clusters was automatically selected based on the Bayesian information criterion (BIC). All three analyses for each dimension revealed the same number of clusters, suggesting stability in the results. The composition of the clusters differed somewhat, though, so only the clusters that appeared in all three analyses were retained. These clusters represent the main types of corporate blogs on each dimension.

Five clusters of blogs were identified on the purpose dimension and account for 78.9% of the corporate blogs in our sample (see Table 5). The first three types of blogs target customers. We use the term customer to represent any entity that does or could potentially buy products or services from the corporation. The first type, which we call a market insight blog, provides customers with

Table 5. Main clusters of blogs on the purpose dimension

Blog Cluster	Target Audience	Function	Content Focus	% of sample
Market Insight	Customers	Correlation	Market	27.6
Product	Customers	Information, Correlation	Product	20.5
Market News	Customers	Information	Market	11.9
Trade Insight	Trade Associations	Correlation	Product, Event, Market	10.8
Trade News	Trade Associations	Information	Product, Event, Market	8.1

Total 78.9%

Table 6. Main clusters of blogs on the operation dimension

Blog Cluster	Management Structure	Accessibility	Directionality	% of sample
Bidirectional Community	Community	Public	Bidirectional	41.1
Bidirectional Market	Market	Public	Bidirectional	20.5
Bidirectional Hierarchy	Hierarchy	Public	Bidirectional	17.3
Unidirectional Hierarchy	Hierarchy	Public	Unidirectional	14.1

Total 93.0%

insights related to the market or industry. The second type, which we simply call a product blog, provides customers with information or insights related to the company's products. The third type, which we call a market news blog, provides customers with information related to the market or industry.

The fourth and fifth types of blogs target trade associations. We use the term trade association loosely to represent any entity within a company's industry that is not a direct competitor or customer. In this sense, an association is viewed as more of a relationship than a formal organization. Most blogs of this type in our sample were hosted by technology companies and were used to communicate with third-party developers. Often these developers are not direct customers but are dependent on the company's hardware or software systems to run their own systems. These last two types of blogs, which we call trade insight and trade news blogs, provide trade associations with insights or information related to the company's products, events, or market.

Four clusters of blogs were identified on the operation dimension and account for 93.0% of the corporate blogs in our sample (see Table 6). The first type of blog is managed by a community of people and is bidirectional. The second type is managed by a market structure and is bidirectional. The third and fourth types are both managed hierarchically; one is bidirectional and the other is unidirectional. As mentioned before, all of the blogs in this analysis were publicly accessible.

5.3. Linking purpose and operation

By linking these two sets of clusters, we can examine how specific types of corporate blogs are operated (see Table 7). For each cluster of blogs on the purpose dimension, we have computed the proportion of blogs operating under each corresponding method of operation. A few interesting findings seem to stand out. First, the strictly market-focused blogs are much more likely to be managed hierarchically than the strictly product-focused

Table 7. Linking main clusters of blogs

Blog Cluster	Operation				Total
	Bidirectional Community	Bidirectional Market	Bidirectional Hierarchy	Unidirectional Hierarchy	
Market Insight	41.2%	21.6	27.4	9.8	100%
Product	39.5	28.9	0.0	15.8	84.2%
Market News	50.0	0.0	18.2	27.3	95.5%
Trade Insight	70.0	20.0	0.0	5.0	95.0%
Trade News	33.3	53.3	6.7	0.0	93.3%

(Purpose)

blogs. Second, the trade association-directed blogs are rarely managed hierarchically compared to the customer-directed blogs. Lastly, the only blogs that are not predominantly managed by a community structure are the trade news blogs.

5.4. Uncommon types of blogs

Now that we have identified the main clusters of current corporate blogs, we continue with an examination of some uncommon blogs represented in our sample (see Table 8). The first two types of blogs in Table 8 are not necessarily uncommon, but they are difficult to find because they are not publicly accessible. We did manage, however, to find evidence of four companies hosting such blogs.

The first type of blog, a membership blog, is available only to customers who subscribe to a company's services. One set of these blogs, hosted by *The New York Times*, provides additional op-ed content not found in the company's public blogs [6]. Wells Fargo also hosts a membership blog exclusively for its *Commercial Electronic Office* users [35]. This blog contains discussions about the company's commercial banking products and services as well as customer strategies.

The second type of blog, an internal blog, is entirely private and only open to employees of a corporation. Bob Evans Farms hosts an internal blog that allows employees to share ideas, insights, and even personal stories [33]. The Coca-Cola Company created a temporary internal blog to obtain feedback from employees on a new set of corporate principles [20]. The practitioner and academic literature suggest that internal blogs are gaining in popularity, but collecting a comprehensive list of these blogs was beyond the scope of this study.

The next type of blog in Table 8 is used to mobilize communities for a particular cause. We found two examples of these blogs, both hosted by Procter & Gamble. The Pantene Beautiful Lengths Blog contains stories about the company's campaign to collect hair for women with cancer [29]. The HERO Program Advance Team Blog chronicles a group of young adults' journey to Africa to work with HIV/AIDs-affected kids [4]. The sponsoring program aims to provide African schools with food, water, health care, and educational resources.

The last type of blog in Table 8 is government-directed, of which we only found one example. This blog, called Innovating Government, is hosted by Gartner and engages government officials in a discussion about the challenges and opportunities of new technologies [21].

6. Discussion

Using our taxonomy, we were able to describe the current corporate blogosphere. There currently seem to be five main clusters of blogs in terms of purpose. Three

Table 8. Uncommon types of corporate blogs

Purpose			Operation			# of companies
Target Audience	Function	Content Focus	Management Structure	Accessibility	Directionality	
-	-	-	-	Membership	-	2
-	-	-	-	Private	-	2
Community	Mobilization	Event	Hierarchy	Public	Bidirectional	1
Government	Correlation	Market	Community	Public	Bidirectional	1

clusters of blogs are directed toward customers and provide insights into the market, information about the market, or information or insights related to the company's products. The other two clusters of blogs are directed toward trade associations and provide insights or information related to the company's products, market, or events.

There are also four main approaches to operating corporate blogs. Three of these approaches utilize bidirectional communication along with a community, market, or hierarchy management structure. The fourth approach only utilizes unidirectional communication with a hierarchy management structure.

Market-focused blogs have a greater tendency to be managed hierarchically than product-focused blogs, and blogs directed toward trade associations are seldom managed hierarchically. In addition to the main types of blogs, we examined a few uncommon types of blogs, including membership and internal blogs, community-directed mobilization blogs, and a government-directed blog.

Our findings largely coincide with previous research on corporate blogs. We found numerous instances of product blogs, which were described in detail by Efimova and Grudin [13]. We found that market-focused blogs tend to be managed hierarchically, whereas product-focused blogs tend to be managed by a community or market structure. This finding agrees with Lee et al.'s [26] analysis of top-down and bottom-up blogs. We also found evidence of internal blogs, which were examined in detail by Jackson et al. [22]. Finally, we found multiple membership blogs, which have not been specifically examined in prior research but have been mentioned in the practitioner literature [4].

Trade association-directed corporate blogs have not been examined in prior research either, but they made up a significant portion of our sample. These blogs are rarely managed hierarchically compared to similar customer-directed blogs. Given the audience of many of these blogs (i.e. developers), their content is likely to be technical in nature. It is reasonable to assume that lower-level employees would have greater technical expertise than those in management positions, making these blogs well-suited for community or market management structures.

Trade association-directed blogs that provide insights or opinions are predominantly managed by a community structure, whereas those that provide information are predominantly managed by a market structure. Looking more closely at our sample, most of the insight-oriented blogs were focused on the market, and most of the information blogs were focused on the company's products. Again, because many of these blogs target developers, any information provided by employees is likely to be technical. Since technical jobs are often specialized, we might expect employees to provide

information about particular aspects of a product in their own blogs. Employees who are providing insights into the market, however, can cover a broader range of topics that are less technical. A blog with such a broad topical range would be more appropriate for a community structure.

Our sample of corporate blogs also uncovered some uncommon types of blogs, specifically the mobilization and government-directed blogs. The mobilization blogs are great examples of a company embracing social responsibility. More of these blogs may begin to emerge in the future. The government-directed blog was an unexpected find. In some sense, the government officials targeted by the blog are potential customers, meaning that it could be a customer-directed blog. We felt, however, that the government focus was most salient. Given its correlation function, along with its unique audience, this blog is evidence of the importance of a company's thought leadership in an industry.

Interestingly, one group of stakeholders seemed to be underrepresented – investors. We found several blogs targeting investors, but they made up less than 5% of the sample. This was a surprising result given the importance of investors to corporations and may indicate an area that should be examined in future research.

Two stakeholder groups were not targeted by any of the blogs in our sample: political groups and suppliers. These stakeholders represent potential audiences for future corporate blogs. If mobilization blogs are an emerging trend, then we may see some of these blogs targeting political groups in the future. Suppliers, much like trade associations, can represent a form of partnership between companies in an industry. Corporate blogs could then be used as part of a supply chain integration initiative to discuss process improvements, troubleshoot problems, or just develop a stronger cultural link with suppliers.

6.1. Limitations

As with any study, there are limitations and tradeoffs that should be noted. For one, our sample consisted almost entirely of U.S.-based companies. Although a comparison of national differences among corporate blogs was beyond the scope of this initial study, future researchers should examine these differences. Another limitation of our sample is that the private and membership blogs could not be coded. These blogs would add a new level of analysis to corporate blog research but were not the focus of this study.

Our method of coding represented a tradeoff in the study. By only coding the most salient characteristic for each dimension, we essentially lost some amount of richness in the data. As discussed before, though, most of the blogs in our sample shared a basic set of common characteristics, which would have made differentiation among them much more difficult. An alternative would be

to rank or assign weights to the characteristics for each dimension, but we felt that process would be prohibitively time consuming. We believe our coding scheme accurately captured the primary purpose of each blog.

6.2. Implications for research

We have developed a corporate blog taxonomy using theories and prior research from management and mass communication. Our initial results suggest that the taxonomy is able to differentiate among different types of blogs, making it a useful tool for research. This taxonomy could then be used in future studies to achieve better precision in describing and comparing corporate blogs. In addition, we identified and labeled several clusters of blogs on both dimensions of the taxonomy that represent a majority of current corporate blogs. These clusters include product, market insight, market news, trade insight, and trade news blogs on the purpose dimension and bidirectional community, bidirectional market, bidirectional hierarchy, and unidirectional hierarchy blogs on the operation dimension. We believe that these labels will provide a basis for a standard vocabulary that can be used to describe corporate blogs in research publications.

Our results reveal some interesting findings that should be explored further in the future. From Table 7, we saw that the main clusters of blogs tend to be operated in different ways. Researchers should explore why particular methods are used to operate these blogs and whether certain methods are most effective. We also identified several uncommon or inaccessible types of blogs including private and membership blogs, mobilization blogs, and a government-focused blog. Researchers should include internal blogs in future studies to gain a better understanding of how corporations are using these blogs. Also, researchers should explore why these uncommon blogs are underrepresented and whether they represent potential opportunities for corporations.

The limitations noted above represent some additional issues that should be addressed in future research. For one, future studies should include a geographically broader sampling of blogs. Such studies could examine the differences among corporate blogs in different countries or the types of blogs most common in those countries. In addition, researchers should attempt to capture blogs that are privately accessible to better understand how internal blogs are used. Researchers can also include non-profit and government organizations in their samples to evaluate the generalizability of the taxonomy.

6.3. Implications for practice

The corporate blog taxonomy can serve as a guide for managers making corporate blogging decisions. The main clusters from our analysis reveal common types of blogs that are hosted by corporations. Table 7 also indicates which operating methods are being used for each cluster of blogs. These results collectively reveal the major trends in current corporate blogging practices, which can serve as a starting point for managers looking to establish a blog within their corporation.

The taxonomy can also be used to determine which types of blogs are missing from the corporate blogosphere and thus represent potential opportunities for corporations. For example, several potential target audiences, including investors, were either not represented or underrepresented in our sample. These may be groups that can be effectively reached using blogs. Managers can evaluate each sub-dimension of the taxonomy to determine which type of blog would be most appropriate for their business objectives. Some functions or types of content may be better suited for certain objectives.

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