

WHAT MAKES CORPORATE BLOGS SUCCESSFUL? – A CROSS-CULTURAL EMPIRICAL STUDY OF CORPORATE BLOG CHARACTERISTICS

Nils König

Daimler AG, Mercedesstraße 132, 70327 Stuttgart, Germany /
Otto-von-Guericke-Universität Magdeburg, Universitätsplatz 2, 39106 Magdeburg, Germany
nils.koenig@daimler.com

Abstract

Empirical studies of the blogosphere so far have focussed on cultural differences in private blogging practices. Corporate blogs have become a prominent means of corporate online communication but have as yet been approached through theoretical models only, owing to the limited number of observable projects and lacking access to corporate data. Approaching this research gap from a New Institutional Economics perspective, the objective of this explorative study was to identify institutional framework effects on corporate blogging practices and readership. Based on a quantitative analysis of content and characteristics of a total of 107 English-, German- and Russian-language corporate blogs the study revealed significant language-area-specific differences with respect to authors, post length and formality as well as blog layout characteristics. In addition, several factors were identified that contribute to a corporate blog's success in terms of Technorati Authority and comment frequency, including blog age, the number of authors, and the blog authors' networking efforts.

Keywords

Corporate blog, weblog, social media, institutional framework, web 2.0

1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to explore the functional relation between corporate blog characteristics and the level and value of social capital creation resulting from corporate blogging activity. The concept of social capital is well established in sociological literature and increasingly expands into economics and management thinking. Following the seminal works by Putnam [20], Bourdieu [1] and Granovetter [6, 7], as well as the economics-oriented approaches by Coleman [2], Lin [15] and Grootaert [8], social capital has become an important basic concept for the analysis of internet phenomena in general and social media developments in particular. Incorporating research on social networks, wikis and weblogs, it is generally agreed that social media have the potential to strengthen strong ties (or bonding social capital) and to create weak ties (or bridging social capital), thereby effectively contributing to an overall increase in social capital [4, 17, 21].

Though potential applications of social media in the corporate environment are widespread and go beyond Porter's [18] proposed applications of the internet in the value chain, management research has so far only produced few satisfactory guidelines for managers willing to employ social media. Corporate blogs in particular feature prominently in corporate social media theory, but suffer from a severe lack of empirical studies owing to a limited number of observable and comparable projects, a lack of access to corporate data, as well as the position of blog research at the intersection of multiple academic disciplines, including communication and management, economics, sociology, psychology, linguistics and computer science. This is aggravated by "the specific cross-sectional tasks, concepts, goals, and processes of corporate communication" [5: 238]. However, an increasing number of corporate blogs enables researchers to extend theoretical constructs by empirical analyses and therefore develop corporate blogging guidelines. Thereby, companies that recognise the importance of acquiring social media competencies can develop competitive advantages by improving their value chain activities.

1.1 Literature on corporate blogging

The various research directions can be distinguished with respect to a general analytical model of blogging practices, which represents a blog as a combination of rules, relations and code [24]. As displayed in figure 1, a blog employs *code*, i.e. the software and equipment used to create the blogging episode, and *rules*, i.e. author, content and format selection mechanisms, to create and maintain *relationships*, i.e. social capital.

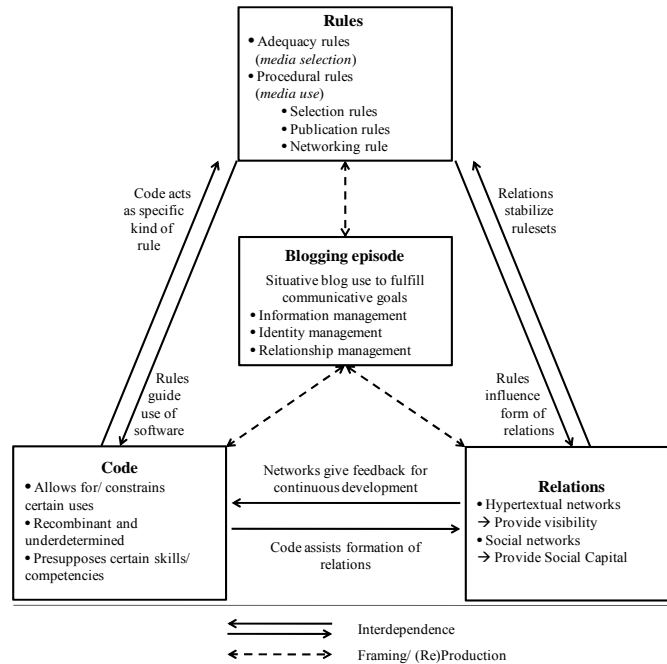


Figure 1: Analytical model of blogging practices [24: 1419]

In the corporate context, different typologies have been developed to describe the various strategic approaches towards the aim of creating social capital through blogging. Zeffass/Boelter [28] distinguish the three public relations goals of information, persuasion and argumentation and consequently differentiate eight types of corporate blogs. Other typologies focus on target groups, topics, or author types, and therefore relate to the rules governing private as well as corporate blogging activities. Author selection mechanisms of corporate blogs, for example, can follow *bottom-up* or *top-down strategies*: While the former is based on the establishment of a general blogging platform, which all employees can utilise to create individual blogs, the latter represents a more directed form of corporate communication [13]. These *top-down blog strategies* include blogs that are run by selected individuals such as a CEO, an employee group, or the communication or marketing department. Such differences in author selection mechanisms have been observed for English and Korean blogs, finding that Korean corporate blogs widely apply anonymous blogs for direct promotion, while in the USA companies rather employ those blogging practices that feature more authentic and transparent corporate blogging e.g. by providing author names and pictures [12].

Regarding the application of code, blog research has focussed on software, layout and feature selection. It has been found that most blogs rely on standard software with limited effort in adapting the visual character of a weblog. However, sidebar elements were found to feature a high level of alterations initiated by the publishers, indicating the authors' desire to provide additional information or improve the navigation experience for readers [23]. In addition, the role of the underlying software for the performance of private and corporate blogs has been approached by empirically relating the use of standard blog software systems to popularity rankings. The results showed that the employed software platform played a significant role for blog popularity owing to better networking features as well as simple content administration and presentation [3].

2 MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

Research highlights the difficulty of evaluating success in the blogosphere and the empirical comparability of corporate blogging activities. Early models of corporate blogs and their value for companies have been shaped by marketers, assigning corporate blogs advertising value such as cost per mille CPM or cost per impression CPI [14]. However, this relative evaluation of corporate blogs in the context of one-directional internet banners or newspaper advertisements does not capture the multidimensional communication potential of corporate blogs outlined in the introduction. Therefore, a valuation model was developed that focuses on the social capital potential of a corporate blog.

2.1 Corporate blogs as social capital creators

A company can have three main purposes when establishing a corporate blog and initiating connections to individuals: It can aim at *information*, *communication* or *collaboration* with target groups, where every flow of information within the network around the corporate blog can potentially benefit the initiating company. For the model it should be assumed that every link established through the blog to an individual person i out of a target group with size N has a value a_i for the company, for example representing money spent on company products as a result of reading the corporate blog. If member i of the network can also communicate back to the company, the gained information has an average value b_i , which can for example represent the value of the information for marketing, production or quality assessment purposes. Finally, a communication stream between member i and other members of the network that is observable to the company through the corporate blog has the value c_i . This value can for example represent marketing data, quality discussions or word of mouth. Figure 2 exemplifies this relationship model using a corporate blog and a small network of size $N = 3$:

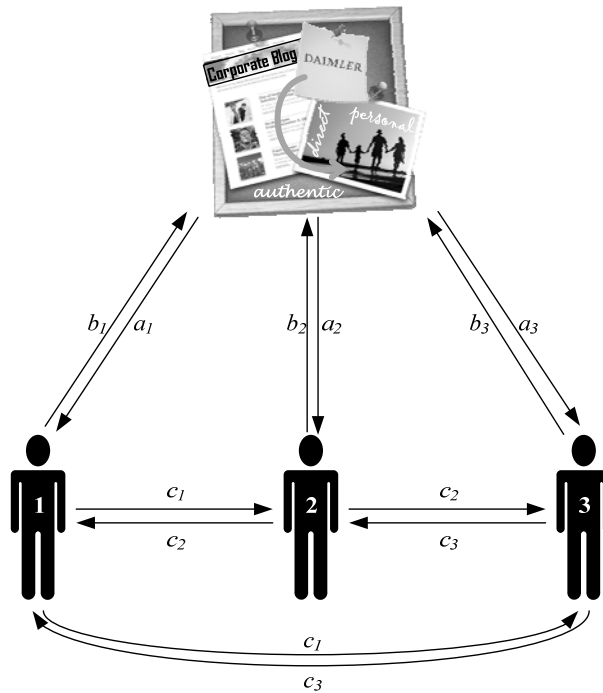


Figure 2: Visualisation of social capital created by a corporate blog

Consequently, the total value of a corporate blog to a company can be distinguished with respect to the three corporate blogging goals information, communication, and collaboration. A corporate blog that only aims at informing a target group benefits through the publication of messages and yields a value to the company which is proportional to the number of individuals reached at factor a_i in line with Sarnoff's Law which was developed to estimate the values of television broadcasting networks [27]:

$$V_{\text{Inf}} = \sum_{i=1}^N a_i = \bar{a}N \quad (1)$$

A company that uses its corporate blog to actually communicate with target groups, which includes a feedback loop in addition to the information function, yields a network value which still follows the linear Sarnoff's Law, though the factor increases to $a_i + b_i$:

$$V_{\text{Com}} = \sum_{i=1}^N (a_i + b_i) = (\bar{a} + \bar{b})N \quad (2)$$

A corporate blog that creates a network where benefits are obtained not only from company-initiated or -directed communication but also from communication streams between the members of the network c_i , representing the collaboration function of social networks, yields a value which deviates from Sarnoff's Law because it grows exponentially as predicted by Metcalfe's Law for the valuation of collaborative social networks [25, 27]:

$$V_{\text{Col}} = \sum_{i=1}^N (a_i + b_i) + (N - 1) \sum_{i=1}^N c_i = (\bar{a} + \bar{b})N + \bar{c}N(N - 1) = (\bar{a} + \bar{b} + \bar{c}N - \bar{c})N \quad (3)$$

Simplifying these expressions by introducing the generalised value variable \bar{d} , which represents the average value from a link within the created network, thereby replacing \bar{a} , \bar{b} and \bar{c} :

$$V_{\text{Inf}} = \bar{d}N \quad (4)$$

$$V_{\text{Com}} = 2\bar{d}N \quad (5)$$

$$V_{\text{Col}} = (\bar{d} + \bar{d}N)N = \bar{d}N^2 + \bar{d}N \quad (6)$$

A differentiation with respect to network size yields the following marginal network values:

$$V'_{\text{Inf}} = \bar{d} \quad (4')$$

$$V'_{\text{Com}} = 2\bar{d} \quad (5')$$

$$V'_{\text{Col}} = (\bar{d} + \bar{d}N)N = 2\bar{d}N + \bar{d} \quad (6')$$

Assuming non-negativity for the benefit from the links (as the information gained can be worthless in the worst case, i.e. $\bar{d} \geq 0$), the value of the network to the company increases with the size of the network, similar to the overall value created by social networks, without saturation [16].

2.2 Corporate blog characteristics and their effect on social capital

A corporate blog is assumed to feature a vector of M distinguishable blog characteristics x_j , i.e. $x_j = (x_1, x_2, \dots, x_M)$. Popular blog characteristics cited in research on blog rules and code include authors, readers and the format of the blog [5]. In addition, research highlights the importance of the posted texts itself as well as of general blog features, such as design elements and media usage [9, 19].

These characteristics affect the corporate blog's social capital, i.e. the size of the network around a corporate blog N according to the vector $\beta_j = (\beta_1, \beta_2, \dots, \beta_M)$, as expressed by the following equation:

$$N = \sum_{j=1}^M \beta_j x_j \quad (7)$$

Consequently, the model links the characteristics of a blog, the creation of social capital for the company and eventually the value of the corporate blog activity. Substituting the size of the network N in (1), (2), (3) and (4), (5), (6) respectively by the formula derived in (7) yields a functional relation between the set of blog characteristics β_j and the value of the created social capital for the company:

$$V_{\text{Inf}} = \bar{a} \sum_{j=1}^M \beta_j x_j = \bar{d} \sum_{j=1}^M \beta_j x_j = \quad (8)$$

$$V_{\text{Com}} = (\bar{a} + \bar{b}) \sum_{j=1}^M \beta_j x_j = 2\bar{d} \sum_{j=1}^M \beta_j x_j \quad (9)$$

$$V_{\text{Col}} = (\bar{a} + \bar{b} + \bar{c} \sum_{j=1}^M \beta_j x_j - \bar{c}) \sum_{j=1}^M \beta_j x_j = (\bar{d} + \bar{d} \sum_{j=1}^M \beta_j x_j) \sum_{j=1}^M \beta_j x_j \quad (10)$$

2.3 Research questions and hypotheses

Assuming non-negativity for \bar{a} , \bar{b} , \bar{c} and therefore also \bar{d} , yields a non-negative relation between the value of the corporate blog and the network size. Hence, the two vectors x_j (blog characteristics) and β_j (characteristics' effects), which affect the size of the network as outlined in formula (7), are crucial to corporate blog valuation. Consequently, two main research questions emerge in the light of the above derived model:

1 How do corporate blogging practices x_j differ among companies, branches and cultures?

2 How is the publicity potential of blog characteristics β_j , affected by the institutional framework?

Answering these two questions will allow companies to create corporate blogs more effectively and more efficiently, with management, functionality, and content tailored particularly to target groups.

In this context, the goal of the study was to assess how blog characteristics x_i differed between different blog sets, and to estimate the effect of these characteristics β_j , drawing on the following hypotheses:

Blogs that are subject to different institutional frameworks differ significantly with respect to

1.1 author (group) characteristics,

1.2 content characteristics, and

1.3 infrastructure characteristics.

The social capital created by corporate blogs is significantly affected by

2.1 author (group) characteristics,

2.2 content characteristics, and

2.3 infrastructure characteristics.

3 MATERIALS AND METHODS

To evaluate corporate blogging practices, a list of external corporate blogs was compiled. Because national boundaries are blurred in the blogosphere and most multinational corporations do not and cannot limit their blogging activities to specific countries, research focussed on language areas, in particular English, German and Russian. Blogs included in the study had to meet pre-defined criteria to ensure comparability. They had to be set up by *medium-size or large companies* with revenues exceeding €100m in 2007; to be *active*, that is to feature at least one new post during the period January 7th - March 16th 2008; to be *publicly accessible* via the internet without restrictions such as passwords or registration; and to be older than 10 weeks on March 16th 2008.

It was found that 77 English, 20 German and 10 Russian corporate blogs fulfilled these four criteria. The complete content of all corporate blogs was archived on March 17th 2008, using the software tool ScrapBook, which allows extracting and archiving complex website networks. The resulting data covered 2,621 blog posts as well as 13,120 comments.

As indicators for social capital, blogs' Technorati Authority, which measures the number of incoming links from other blogs, and comment frequency (average number of reader comments per blog post) were selected. The empirical study focussed on eleven observable or constructible parameters to compare corporate blogging practices and to model their effect on social capital: *number of authors, gender of authors, topical dimensions, formality, post frequency, media usage, post length, blog age, design complexity, interactivity and networking*. The parameters number of authors, gender of authors, post frequency, media usage, post length, blog age could directly be extracted from the data. The size of the blog roll was used as an estimator for networking, the sum of design elements was used as an estimator for design complexity and the sum of communication and interactivity features on a blog was used as estimator for a blog's interactivity. Finally the parameter topical dimension was constructed based on a transformation scheme for qualitative data proposed by [26] which included an extensive coding process, and formality was estimated using statistical text analysis software and an estimator model for the contextuality of language (F-score) developed by Heylighen/Dewaele [10].

First, analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted to detect significant differences in the means of the independent variables over all three sample sets. Unpaired t-tests were used to reveal significant mean differences that would indicate varying blogging practices caused by differences in the institutional frameworks. Facing small sample sizes with respect to the German and the Russian sample set, explorative stepwise regression analyses were employed to analyse the data. The used stepwise regression method was forward selection in order to identify the variables that were to be included or excluded. Regression analyses were conducted for each sample set individually as well as the overall sample set, in order to examine the effect of the outlined independent variables on the social capital indicators. For this purpose the probability to enter the model was set to '0.250' and the probability to leave the model was set to '0.100'. The software used for both the analyses of variance and the stepwise regression analyses was SAS JMP® 4.0 [22].

4 RESULTS

4.1 Blog characteristics

Table 1 provides a detailed overview of the means and standard deviations of the collected data broken down by language set. The results of the subsequent ANOVA calculations are given in table 2.

Variable	Mean			Standard deviation		
	ENG	GER	RUS	ENG	GER	RUS
Technorati Authority	214.79	20.60	14.90	1038.01	28.16	29.81
Comments per post	3.893	11.480	4.844	7.104	38.687	3.047
Topical dimensions	4.091	3.850	4.100	2.034	2.007	1.729
Post frequency	2.336	2.335	3.510	2.469	1.708	4.614
# of authors	6.494	5.150	10.100	10.059	5.715	8.306
Blog age	588.990	504.350	540.100	375.505	270.966	371.922
Post length	373.479	216.833	234.908	177.863	159.876	150.881
Gender disparity	0.362	0.392	0.273	0.179	0.145	0.166
Formality (F-score)	68.671	62.649	77.507	4.368	5.470	4.304
# of sidebar elements	5.545	5.300	3.300	1.465	2.179	1.252
# of blogroll elements	10.416	5.550	15.1	13.473	10.670	41.318
Media usage per post	0.891	0.656	1.199	1.140	0.640	1.432
Interactivity elements	2.351	2.100	2.100	0.997	0.852	0.876

Table 1: Means and standard deviations

Variable	ENG/GER	ENG/RUS	GER/RUS
Topical dimensions	-	-	-
Post frequency	-	-	-
# of authors	-	-	RUS > GER (p = 0.0652)
Blog age	-	-	-
Post length	ENG > GER (p = 0.0005)	ENG > RUS (p = 0.0209)	-
Gender disparity	-	-	GER > RUS (p = 0.0530)
Formality (F-score)	ENG > GER (p < 0.0001)	RUS > ENG (p < 0.0001)	RUS > GER (p < 0.0001)
# of sidebar elements	-	ENG > RUS (p < 0.0001)	GER > RUS (p = 0.0123)
# of blogroll elements	-	-	-
Media usage per post	-	-	-
Interactivity elements	-	-	-

Table 2: Results of analyses of variance (ANOVA)

Consequently, it can be said that Russian corporate blogs have the highest average number of authors, resulting in a statistically significant difference with respect to German corporate blogs. The average number of authors of English corporate blogs is situated in between these values but shows no significant difference in both directions. Post length is the largest in English-language corporate blogs. German and Russian blog posts are significantly shorter. To some extent this may be due to general language characteristics, as e.g. identical texts might differ in length when translated into various languages. However, as clear inter-language text length patterns have not yet been found by linguistics researchers, the identified differences are assumed to be due to different blogging practices. The average gender disparity is highest in German corporate blogs and smallest in the Russian sample set, yielding statistically significant differences. Again, the English dataset average is in between and shows no statistically significant differences in both directions. The number of sidebar elements is significantly lower in the Russian dataset compared to the English and German values. Finally, the calculated F-scores show the most

significant pattern of mean differences among all observed parameters. German blog posts feature significantly smaller F-scores than English and Russian blog posts, while at the same time English posts feature significantly lower F-scores compared to Russian posts. This pattern cannot directly be interpreted as a difference in blogging practices with respect to formal or informal language, but rather shows linguistic differences between the three languages, which nevertheless are determinants of the (formal) institutional framework. However, an additional statistical comparison of the formality of corporate blog texts and corporate press releases showed that for all three languages, corporate blogs were significantly less formal than press releases, as displayed in table 3.

Language	Press releases F-score mean	Press releases F-score st. dev.	Blogs F-score mean	Blogs F-score st. dev.	Paired t-test	Unpaired t-test
ENG (n=77)	78.155	2.994	68.671	4.368	$F_{\text{Press}} > F_{\text{Blog}}$ (p < 0.0001)	$F_{\text{Press}} > F_{\text{Blog}}$ (p < 0.0001)
GER (n=20)	75.597	4.884	62.649	5.470	$F_{\text{Press}} > F_{\text{Blog}}$ (p < 0.0001)	$F_{\text{Press}} > F_{\text{Blog}}$ (p < 0.0001)
RUS (n=10)	83.847	3.579	77.507	4.304	$F_{\text{Press}} > F_{\text{Blog}}$ (p = 0.0042)	$F_{\text{Press}} > F_{\text{Blog}}$ (p = 0.0021)

Table 3: Comparison of formality indicators for blog posts and press releases

4.2 Effects of blog characteristics

Table 4 provides the results of the forward selection regressions.

Variables	Technorati Authority				Comments per post			
	ALL ^a	ENG	GER	RUS	ALL ^a	ENG	GER	RUS
Intercept	-978.385	-411.574	-35.836	-10.082	-13.285	-8.638	-15.661	31.503
Topical dimensions	out	out	1.819 (1.05)	out	out	0.461 (1.39)	-4.918 (-1.25)	-0.104 (-3.97)
Post frequency	-34.182 (-1.17)	-59.393*** (-1.49)	out	out	out	out	out	out
Number of authors	58.513* (6.46)	58.634* (4.88)	0.998** (1.94)	out	out	out	out	0.223* (40.53)
Blog age	0.516* (2.89)	0.583* (2.79)	0.018*** (1.62)	out	0.007*** (1.54)	0.007* (3.82)	out	out
Post length	out	out	0.054* (2.81)	out	-0.011 (-1.29)	out	-0.068*** (-1.66)	-0.005** (-6.44)
Gender disparity	1131.90* (2.76)	767.142*** (1.62)	out	out	out	out	out	out
F-score	-	out	out	out	-	out	out	-0.441* (-32.43)
# of sidebar elements	out	-82.936*** (-1.52)	out	out	3.495* (3.65)	out	14.064* (4.49)	0.930* (16.29)
# of blogroll elements	12.762* (3.33)	28.331* (4.02)	0.480*** (1.60)	0.664* (7.12)	out	0.187* (3.78)	out	0.034* (44.58)
Media per post	out	-84.070 (-1.21)	31.910* (5.76)	out	out	1.837* (3.27)	-20.919** (-1.78)	0.341*** (4.56)
Interactivity elements	out	out	out	7.123*** (1.62)	out	1.371* (2.15)	out	1.396* (33.50)
Adjusted R ²	0.472	0.584	0.823	0.850	0.107	0.403	0.501	0.999
F	19.74*	16.24*	15.73***	26.41*	5.23*	11.264*	5.776*	1482.84*
N	107	77	20	10	107	77	20	10

^a For the combined regression analyses, F-score as a parameter was excluded because of linguistic considerations.

* p < 0.05.

** p < 0.10.

*** p < 0.15.

Table 4: Results of stepwise regression analysis

For both dependent variables significant estimator models were derived¹. The stepwise regression analyses show a significant positive impact of the number of authors with respect to Technorati Authority for the English and the German sample, and with respect to comment frequency for the Russian sample. The gender of authors has no decisive impact over all sample sets. The indicator for the number of topics on a blog has been selected to enter almost all models, but statistical relevance could not be detected. With respect to F-scores, a significant negative effect of formality on comment frequency was derived for the Russian sample set, indicating that that less formal blogs receive more comments per post. The impact of post frequency on the dependent variables is statistically insignificant. The stepwise regression analyses present varying impacts of media usage on blog performance. Most remarkable are a positive impact with respect to the German sample and Technorati Authority and a positive impact on comment frequency for the English sample. For post length, the analyses yield a small but statistically positive effect on Technorati Authority, but a small significant negative effect on comment frequency for the German and the Russian sample. The analyses also identify small but positive effect of blog age on popularity as well as comment frequency for the English sample set, and a positive impact of the number of sidebar elements for the German and the Russian sample set. Interactivity, as expressed by the number of interactivity elements, is crucial for conversations on a blog, as shown by significant positive factors calculated for the English and Russian sample. Finally, clear and considerable effects of the number of blogroll elements on blog popularity as well as comment frequency across all sample sets indicate that networking is an important factor to affect blog performance.

5 DISCUSSION

Both, the ANOVA as well as the forward selection regression, yielded remarkable results. Comparing the observed blogging practices hints at significant institutional framework effects. A considerably larger author group size of Russian-language corporate blogs is likely to be attributable to the more collectivist character of the Russian culture as outlined by Hofstede [11]. Similarly, the significantly higher share of women in Russian author groups can be related to the lower masculinity score of the Russian culture, which is an indicator for the prevalence of male values as well as the varying roles of men and women in society [11]. In addition, the institutional framework has been identified to affect selected content characteristics, in particular post length and text formality. Finally, the number of sidebar features as a code element varies significantly between data sets, affirming assumptions in previous studies [23]. Other corporate blog characteristics, particularly the blog equipment concerning design and functionality, did not show meaningful differences. As corporate blogs mostly employ standard blogging software such as Wordpress, LiveJournal or Movable Type, the high level of feature standardisation is likely to be a main cause for this relative homogeneity.

Despite a small number of observable corporate blogs for the German and Russian data set, the exploratory stepwise regression analyses yielded significant models, estimating effects of the various blog characteristics on linking and comment frequencies. The positive impact of the size of the author group indicates the importance of authenticity and personal visibility, i.e. more (visible) authors attract more readers. Post length has varying effects. Longer texts attract more readers, as they feature more content and contain more data for internet search engines. Shorter texts, however, can attract more comments as they provide more space for conversation. Blog age has a positive impact, because blogs can build a loyal audience over time, publishers can adapt the blog over time to better meet reader requirements, and unsuccessful blogs are likely to be abandoned at early stages. A higher number of interactivity elements positively impacts on comment frequency, because additional features such as recommendation and ranking features effectively stimulate conversations. Finally, the size of the blogroll has a positive effect on popularity and conversations, likely because it can be interpreted as an indicator for the publishers' networking efforts and their integration into the blogosphere.

5.1 Management implications

These results have several implications for corporate communication management. Firstly, the cultural insights may be important for multinational corporations. As the authors are of particular importance to corporate blogs' effects, e.g. regarding writing style, conversations, and topic selection, motivation and collaboration problems

¹ The estimate for 'comments per post' for the Russian language set gives an almost perfect fit. However, the very small sample size results in high correlations between several independent variables, especially between '# of sidebar elements', 'post length', and 'media per post'. Therefore, this result has to be considered carefully. A two-stage least squares regression could eliminate the correlation effects and create new uncorrelated variables. Yet, the resulting model would lack comparability to the other sample sets and the resulting new variables would lack a theoretical foundation, and therefore it was decided not to apply this modification.

could be traced to the composition of the author groups, especially if the group has been handpicked by the communication or marketing department.

The derived regression models can be used to develop particular guidelines for blog managers and to evaluate success or failure of individual corporate blogs. In general, it can be recommended to motivate many employees to contribute to a corporate blog, as this will positively affect the extent of social capital creation. Furthermore, increases in networking efforts as well as the addition of sidebar and interactivity elements will likely yield positive results. Regarding post length, it is recommended that blog managers evaluate their blogging strategy. If they focus on comment frequency, i.e. conversation and collaboration, shorter blog posts can contribute to better results, while longer texts are better suited for information purposes. Finally, managers should avoid short time horizons for corporate blogging projects. Slowly emerging reader loyalty and blog improvements over time are likely to have positive effects, justifying a certain degree of patience.

5.2 Limitations and further research

The current study aimed at developing and testing a model of corporate blogs as social capital creators. In the course of modelling, certain assumptions were introduced that need to be put into perspective. In particular the generalisation of the value of network contacts to a company as constants (\bar{a} , \bar{b} , \bar{c} , \bar{d}) is oversimplifying reality, as the value of a network is commonly believed to be a saturating function of the network size [16, 27].

In addition, the restriction of factors influencing a corporate blog's social capital to inherent blog data, neglects potentially important external factors that cannot be observed from the blog directly. For example, the type and size of the company were excluded, though the number of employees maybe an important factor for the size of a blog's audience. Furthermore, the empirical study revealed some mixed results that require further research to be resolved, for example the impact of media usage in corporate blogs. Therefore, two additional studies will be conducted. In a quantitative multi-language blog audience study corporate blog readers will be surveyed for their reading motivations and preferences in order to determine further effects of the institutional framework and blog controlling opportunities. A subsequent series of qualitative interviews with corporate blog managers from the three language areas will provide insights into applied practices, completing this multi-perspective analysis of blogging as a corporate communication instrument.

6 REFERENCES

- [1] BOURDIEU, P., WACQUANT, L.J.D.: An invitation to reflexive sociology. University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- [2] COLEMAN, J.S.: Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital. The American Journal of Sociology, 1988, vol. 94, no. 1, pp. 95-120.
- [3] DU, H.S., WAGNER, C.: Weblog success: Exploring the role of technology. International Journal of Human-Computer Studies, 2006, vol. 64, no. 9, pp. 789-798.
- [4] ELLISON, N.B., STEINFELD, C., LAMPE, C.: The Benefits of Facebook "Friends": Social Capital and College Students' Use of Online Social Networks. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 2007, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 1143-1168.
- [5] FLECK, M., KIRCHHOFF, L., MECKEL, M., STANOEVSKA-SLABEVA, K.: Applications of Blogs in Corporate Communication. Studies in Communication Sciences, 2007, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 227-245.
- [6] GRANOVETTER, M.S.: The Strength of Weak Ties. American Journal of Sociology, 1973, vol. 78, no. 6, pp. 1360-1380.
- [7] GRANOVETTER, M.S.: The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited. Sociological Theory, 1983, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 201-233.
- [8] GROOTAERT, C.: Social Capital: The Missing Link? Social Capital Initiative Working Paper. World Bank, 1998.
- [9] HERRING, S.C., SCHEIDT, L.A., KOUPER, I., WRIGHT, E.: A longitudinal content analysis of weblogs: 2003-2004. Blogging, citizenship, and the future of media, Routledge, 2007, pp. 3-20.

- [10] HEYLIGHEN, F., DEWAELE, J.M.: Variation in the Contextuality of Language: An Empirical Measure. *Foundations of Science*, 2000, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 293-340.
- [11] HOFSTEDE, G.: *Culture's consequences - Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations*. Sage Publications, 2001.
- [12] JEON, S., YOON, S.N., KIM, J.: A cross cultural study of corporate blogs in the USA and Korea. *International Journal of Information Technology and Management*, 2008, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 149-160.
- [13] LEE, S., HWANG, T., LEE, H.H.: Corporate blogging strategies of the Fortune 500 companies. *Management Decision*, 2006, vol. 44, no. 3, pp. 316-334.
- [14] LI, C., STROMBERG, C.: *The ROI of Blogging*. Forrester Research, 2007.
- [15] LIN, N.: *Social Capital : A Theory of Social Structure and Action*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- [16] MAYFIELD, R.: *Social Network Dynamics and Participatory Politics*. *Extreme Democracy*, Lulu, 2005, pp. 116-132.
- [17] MCAFFEE, A.: Eine Definition von Enterprise 2.0. *Enterprise 2.0 - Die Kunst loszulassen*, Rhombos Verlag, 2008, pp. 17-35.
- [18] PORTER, M.E.: Strategy and the Internet. *Harvard Business Review*, 2001, vol. 79, no. 3, pp. 62-78.
- [19] PUSCHMANN, C.: "Thank you for thinking we could" - Use and function of interpersonal pronouns in corporate web logs. *Approaches to Syntactic Variation and Genre*, Mouton de Gruyter, forthcoming.
- [20] PUTNAM, R.D.: *Bowling alone - The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon & Schuster, 2000.
- [21] QUAN-HAASE, A., WELLMAN, B.: *How Does The Internet Affect Social Capital? Social capital and information technology*, MIT Press, 2004, pp. 113-131.
- [22] SALL, J., CREIGHTON, L., LEHMAN, A.: *JMP Start Statistics: A Guide to Statistics and Data Analysis Using Jmp*. SAS Publishing, 2001.
- [23] SCHEIDT, L.A., WRIGHT, E.: *Common Visual Design Elements of Weblogs*. *Into the blogosphere: Rhetoric, community, and culture of weblogs*, University of Minnesota, 2004.
- [24] SCHMIDT, J.: Blogging practices: An analytical framework. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 2007, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 1409-1427.
- [25] SHAPIRO, C., VARIAN, H.: *Information rules: a strategic guide to the network economy*. Harvard Business School Press, 2000.
- [26] SRNKA, K.J., KOESZEGI, S.T.: From Words to Numbers: How to Transform Qualitative Data into Meaningful Quantitative Results. *Schmalenbach Business Review*, 2007, vol. 59, no. 1, pp. 29-57.
- [27] SWANN, G.P.: The functional form of network effects. *Information Economics and Policy*, 2002, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 417-429.
- [28] ZERFASS, A., BOELTER, D.: *Die neuen Meinungsmacher: Weblogs als Herausforderung für Kampagnen, Marketing, PR und Medien*. Nausner & Nausner, 2005.