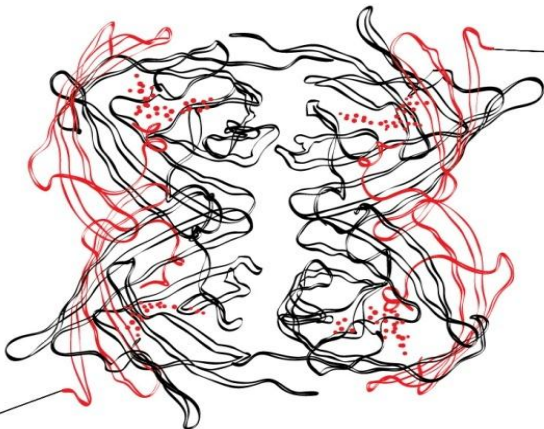




THE TRUE POTENTIAL OF CORPORATE BLOGGING

Enhancing our understanding of the blogosphere and its
applicability for companies



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UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE

PUBLIC VERSION

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Note: This is a public version which means that some information is unavailable.

Acknowledgements

I started my premaster Business Administration in 2007, at the University of Twente, and managed to complete the courses within the requisite time. This enabled me to start my master Business Administration in 2008, or more in particular, the International Management track. I managed to complete all the courses the first time around and started my master thesis, the final part the master program, in the second semester of 2008/2009. That was the moment I either made a big mistake or an audacious choice with regard to my study. Prior to studying at the University of Twente, I completed the higher vocational education study Commercial Economy at Saxion Deventer. During this study I became very interested in the Internet phenomenon, in particular in webmarketing. This preference led to a study on the subject as my graduation project. Webmarketing really sparked my interest, and I officially started my own business in webmarketing 'Teelen Webmarketing' in 2009. About to start the final part of the master program in Business Administration at the University of Twente, I decided to leave it for a while and to invest my time in my company.

So here I am, three years later, finally completing my master thesis. My preference for webmarketing and the fact that I am still running my own – successful – webmarketing company, led to the subject of this research: Web 2.0 and, in particular, the blogosphere. I decided on independent research into how companies should act in the blogosphere and how they can use blogs to their benefit.

I started this assignment in the beginning of 2011. As a result of the complexity of my research topic, the completion of my thesis took somewhat longer than the prescribed 5 months and were it not for the support I received, I would still be working on it. I would, therefore, like to thank several people, without whom the realization of my assignment would not have been possible. First of all, all the interviewees who, despite their prestige within the field, were very supportive and enthusiastic about my research topic from the beginning and gave me every opportunity to carry out my research. My special thanks to Mark van der Wolf, Joris van Meel, Freek Janssen, Paul Gillin and Debbie Weil.

Secondly, my special thanks to my supervisors Efthymios Constantinides and Sjoerd de Vries, for their input and support during my research. Their valuable insights helped me to get a grip on this complex topic.

In the third place, I would like to thank Kitty Hamersma for her support and her advice with regard to the text of this report.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my parents, family and friends for providing me with the necessary time and space that I needed to complete my research, and for giving me their trust and support to do so successfully.

Twello, 16 September 2012

Robbert Teelen

Abstract

This study found that corporate blogging could be beneficial throughout the company and will remain a prominent competence for companies in the future. The long-form nature of blogs provides a unique opportunity for companies to discuss topics in-depth and to establish an online content hub, for which blogs are considered to be the critical backbone of a company's Social Media strategy. This provides an ideal communication platform for knowledge-intensive companies to discuss their expertise and gather thought leadership, while bypassing the traditional media.

Communicating through the new, social, media is becoming an increasingly important competence for companies, since customers are turning away from the traditional media and are seeking for a more personal and authentic approach. This radical change in the communication paradigm is a direct result of the developing internet, which can be defined as the defining technological revolution of our age. Right now, almost two billion people have Internet access and use the web to gather, create, revamp and distribute information around the world. The possibility for people to contribute to the web directly (a development dubbed 'Web 2.0') has opened up new channels, leading to an unimaginable wealth of knowledge. The internet empowers humanity by promising people an equal voice and potential. Hence, it poses a particular challenge to our notions of hierarchical power, ownership and creativity, which makes it increasingly meaningful for companies to enhance their understanding of Web 2.0 in order to optimally cope with the Web 2.0 environment.

This study examined the effect the blogosphere has on the organizational environment and the values a company could reap through a corporate blog. In order to carry out this study and answer the research question, the research approach of this study is mainly explorative. However, a literature study has been conducted in order to examine prevalent theories and to identify the relevant list of themes for further research. This list of themes served as a rationale for conducting the primary data collection. The data collection method that was applied during the empirical part of this research is *semi-structured interviews*. For these in-depth interviews, a nonprobability sample of 5 experts within this field of research was identified and selected. Due to the complexity of the research topic, these interviews were focused on getting an understanding of the predefined list of themes (deductive), but also to seek and identify new insights with regard to the research topic.

This study found that although the whole "hype" around corporate blogging has vanished, corporate blogging has an important function for companies in their Social Media strategy. The reason why the hype passed and some companies tend to ignore blogs and to prefer short-tools such as Facebook and Twitter, is directly related to the current unawareness of corporate blogging and its true potential for companies. Companies are expected to become increasingly aware of this true potential in the near future, which will lead to a higher adoption rate.

This study aims to contribute to this state of awareness. First of all, this study examines the different natures of blogs and how these natures enable certain business competences. The main finding here is that blogs are considered to be a sender-oriented publishing platform, allowing companies to become publisher and to spread a real-time message themselves. This is considered a very valuable communication practice, since it is a low-cost solution, has a very wide range and can be utilized without any interference of the traditional media. It is therefore considered to be particularly suitable for SMEs, who often have but a limited PR and marketing budget.

Secondly, this study has founded a comprehensive corporate classification model, that classifies four different genres of corporate blogs based on two dimensions, namely: the corporate blogs' topic and the number of authors. In short, the four founded corporate blog genres are:

1. Employee blog. Internal or external blog, maintained by a single employee and focused on a company-driven topic.
2. Expert blog. External blog, maintained by a single employee and focused on a subject-driven topic.
3. Company blog. Internal or external blog, maintained by multiple employees and focused on a company-driven topic.
4. Topic blog. External blog, maintained by multiple employees and focused on a subject-driven topic.

Lastly, this study found that although the values of corporate blogging can be numerous, a company should not engage unprepared. Over the years, the absence of a clear plan of approach has been a pitfall for many. Corporate blogging is a long-form publication platform and should be applied with a long-term perspective. It therefore requires patience and commitment, in which a clear plan of approach would be very beneficial and supportive. This study found that the following aspects should be elaborated on in the company's blogging plan of approach:

1. The goal of the blog
2. The authors and the responsible of the blog
3. The value that the blog is going to add to the blogosphere/the topics to discuss
4. The metrics to determine the blogs' ROI.
5. Blog policies and ethics.
6. The required competences and resources of the company, to be able to live up to this predefined plan of approach.

In conclusion, this research has found that the blogosphere still holds many untapped opportunities for companies, because companies are insufficiently aware of the true potential of corporate blogging and the ethics and resources needed to succeed. However, the long-form nature of blogs provides a value that, especially with regard to the future, is considered to be of great importance within a company's Social Media strategy. It is therefore to be expected that companies will pick up on this in the future and that corporate blogging will remain an important Social Media tool, or even grow in popularity, over the years. Based on these results, suggestions and recommendations for further research are outlined.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

This study aims to elaborate on the use of corporate blogging to overcome the new realm of challenges in the Web 2.0 environment that companies face these days. In a Web 2.0 environment, a company is not only confronted by its competitors, but also by its consumers, who are busy generating and sharing content, avoiding ads, turning to each other's opinions and more (Evans D., 2008; Gillin, 2009; Weil, 2010). This innovative approach is only marginally related with the technological developments in intercommunication technologies. It rather represents a totally different mindset, where people turn away from the traditional media and use the internet medium to read, create and share content all over the world. In this way users can express themselves through user-generated content (UGC) in a manner that may be heard worldwide. Therefore the current key issue for companies concerns the manner of implementing Web 2.0 applications in a successful corporate social strategy in order to obtain added value by reaching (new) customers, deriving real-time feedback, participating in branch related discussions and engaging in co-creation practices.

Several types of applications are available to companies wishing to participate in the Web 2.0 environment. Constantinides and Fountain (2008) have categorized these types of Social Media applications as follows:

- Weblogs
- Social Networks
- Content Communities
- Forums / Bulletin Boards
- Content aggregators

A distinctive characteristic of weblogs in contrast to other Social Media tools is their long-form nature, which makes weblogs pre-eminently well-suited to discuss topics in-depth. How the nature of a weblog, including this unique characteristic, corresponds with the enabling business competences and the obtainable values will be the main focus of this research.

1.2 Research problem

As has been mentioned, this research will be focused on the corporate blogging phenomenon and the values that companies can obtain through corporate blogging. Essentially I argue that the blogosphere, the defining term for all blogs together, is an inevitable phenomenon for companies and that the utilization of a corporate weblog, hereinafter blog, can positively affect the presence of a company in a Web 2.0 environment.

1.2.1 Research Question

The above elaborated perspective leads to the following general research question:

“What values can be obtained by corporate blogging?”

1.2.2 Research boundaries

Although the blogosphere is a world-wide evolution, the adoption of corporate blogging differs per country. This is especially due to technological developments and, for example, applied barriers by a government. The potential of corporate blogging in industrialized countries is, however, considered to be mutual, since Web 2.0 is all about enhancing the interchangeability of information and increasing transparency of the world-wide markets. Nevertheless in order to increase the generalizability of this research, the following criteria have been formulated for selecting the interviewees:

- Acknowledged experts in the field of corporate blogging
- Represent different nationalities

Based upon the above formulated criteria, 5 experts have been selected.

1.2.3 Propositions

In order to give a comprehensive answer to the primary research question, the research questions below have been formulated. The partly exploratory nature of this research allowed some additional questions to be formulated (2c, 2f and 2g). These questions serve as a complement to the understanding on the research topic. The following research questions have been formulated:

1. How can the Web 2.0 phenomenon be identified?
 - a. Which are the key principles of Web 2.0?
 - b. Which are the enabling applications and technologies that make Web 2.0 possible?
 - c. How did the emergence of Web 2.0 affect our social environment, such as our long-held notions about ownership, value and expertise?
2. What is corporate blogging?
 - a. How can corporate blogging be defined?
 - i. Which are the key characteristics of corporate blogging?
 - b. Which genres of corporate blogs can be identified?
 - c. What is the current awareness and adoption rate of corporate blogging among companies?
 - d. Which are the values of corporate blogging?
 - i. Which business competences are enabled through corporate blogging?
 - ii. How are the key characteristics of corporate blogging related to the enabling business competences?
 - iii. Which are the resulting values that can be obtained through a corporate blog?
 - e. Can a conceptual model be designed to classify the variation in corporate blogs and its obtainable values?
 - f. Which success factors and best practices can be identified for engaging the blogosphere?
 - g. What is the future perspective of corporate blogging?

1.3 Research justification and objective

Web 2.0 has created a new interactive platform on which people can gather, create, revamp and distribute a variety of information around the world. Web 2.0 has empowered humanity while posing entirely new challenges along with new opportunities for companies. The transparency that the web currently offers has led to an era based on more open, honest and authentic communication. Many authors therefore argue that it is essential for companies to respond to the Web 2.0 phenomenon in order to remain operating (Constantinides and Fountain, 2008; Evans D., 2008; Gillin, 2009; Spellings, 2009; Tanuri, 2009; Weil, 2010).

Multiple authors argue that a corporate blogs ought to be at the core of any Social Media strategy, since that any published content on Social Media needs a clear “backbone”, where people can read more and discuss. Corporate blogs are the ideal platform to achieve this (Gillin, 2009; Weil, 2010; Levanto, 2011).

Recently, companies become increasingly aware of the potential and value that the blogosphere can add to their businesses (Ahuja et al., 2011; O’Leary, 2011). The adoption of corporate blogging practices is, however, still in its infancy (Weil, 2010). The Social Media Examiner’s study, by Michael A. Stelzner, (2011) showed that of all social platforms, the current adoption rate of corporate blogging takes fourth place (Appendix 1). However, that same study found that 75% of the 3342 marketers interviewed will increase their blogging activities in the next few years (Appendix 2), and 69% of the interviewees want to learn more about corporate blogging, which results in a second place (Appendix 3).

Nevertheless, there still is a shortage of academic research regarding the full potential of the blogosphere for companies (Hsu et al., 2011; Huang et al., 2011; O’Leary, 2011). Therefore many companies fail to really live up to real the value that a corporate blog could obtain. This study aims to enhance our general understanding of the Web 2.0 phenomenon, in particular the blogosphere and its potential for companies. Attention will be paid to the origin and nature of blogs, the different genres of corporate blogs and the specific values that corporate blogs can offer a company. Additionally, due to the exploratory nature of this research, attention will also be paid to the current awareness and adoption rate, the best practices, success factors and future perspective of corporate blogging.

According to the classification model of Yin (2009), case studies are preferred particularly when a “how” or “why” question is being asked, the researcher has little or no control over the behavioral events and where the focus is on a contemporary set of events. Saunders et al. (2009) argues that a case study research strategy is particularly applicable for the establishment of a rich understanding on a contemporary phenomenon in its original context. Therefore the use of a case study is especially well-suited to the examination of the blogging phenomenon, since the blogosphere, in particular, leaves no room for controlling the behavioral events. In addition, this research of the blogosphere is focused on contemporary events. A case study offers the opportunity to study the complexity of the research topic in particular, and enhance our understanding on how corporate blogging can be of value for companies. The justification for the applied research design will be further discussed in chapter 3.2.2.

1.4 Research method

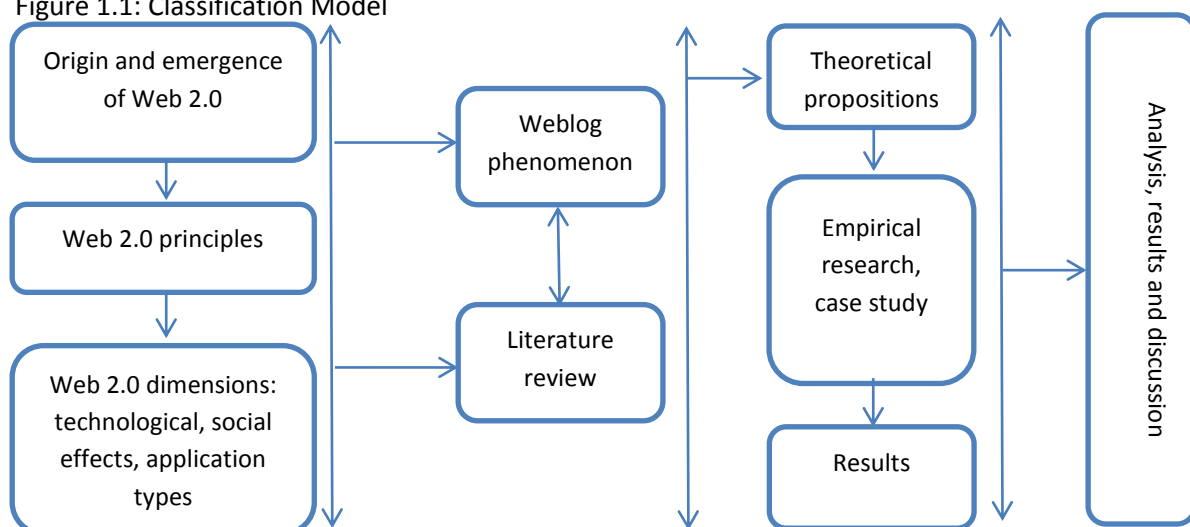
The qualitative data analysis and collection has partly a deductive and partly an inductive approach. First of all the theoretical propositions, to collect and analyze the data upon has been mainly identified based on literature study (deductive). These propositions served as a rationale for the semi-structured interviews. However, the complexity of the research topic and in-depth nature of the interviews, required to some extent an inductive approach (Saunders et al., 2009).

Because of the shortage of academic literature, this research is to a great extent exploratory in its nature. However, a review of publications was used as a starting point in order to survey the prevalent theories for further clarification upon the Web 2.0 phenomenon and, in particular, the blogosphere. This literature study elaborates on the relevant themes, which will serve as a theoretical framework for the empirical part of the research: the case study. It is in this latter phase of the research that primary data will be collected and analyzed using the pattern matching technique. Based on the outcome of this analysis, conclusions will be drawn in order to evaluate the formulated theoretical propositions and answer the research question.

1.5 Research structure

This study will be based on the following structure. Chapter 1 will be devoted to the research questions and objective. Chapter 2 will review the existing published research. Chapter 2.2, the parent theory, aims to further clarify and frame the Web 2.0 phenomenon. Chapter 2.3, the research theory, will be devoted to study prevalent theories regarding the main research topic and will serve as a rationale for the empirical part of this research. Chapter 3 will further discuss the research design, theoretical propositions and applied methodology in order to conduct this research. Chapter 4 is concerned with the empirical part of this research, such as collecting and analyzing the gathered primary data, with regard to the main research topic. Chapter 5 will be devoted to answering the primary research question, drawing conclusions and elaborating on the research discussion, implications for theory, limitations of this research and recommendations for further research. The elaborated structure has been visualized by the following classification model.

Figure 1.1: Classification Model



Source: based on the guidelines by Verschuren & Doorewaard (2007)

1.6 Definitions

Blogosphere: a collective conversation: a community where text, opinions, links, audio, video and other media can be shared easily (Weil, 2010).

Blogger: someone who updates a blog with new content.

Bloggng: updating a weblog.

Corporate blogs: the use of blogs to further accomplish company goals (Weil, 2010).

RSS or Really Simple Syndication: a family of web feed formats used to publish frequently updated works—such as blog entries, news headlines, audio, and video—in a standardized format (Kaplan et al., 2009).

SEO or Search Engine Optimization: the art of improving the visibility of a website or a web page in search engines via the "natural" or un-paid search results (Scott, 2010; Wikipedia, 2012).

Tags: A keyword label that a user can assign to online content. Tags can be used to categorize, sort and search information and can also be shared to help others find related content (Gillin, 2009).

Social Media: is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, allowing the creation and exchange of User Generated Content (Kaplan, 2009).

Weblogs or blogs: easy-to-publish online journals that are written in a conversational, authentic and informal style (Weil, 2010).

Web 1.0: refers to the first stage of the World Wide Web, offering a read-only medium for the majority of users (Casoto et al., 2008).

Web 2.0: platform for harnessing collective intelligence: a range of technologies encompassing collaboration, continuous development, personal publishing and software delivered as a service over the internet (O'Reilly, 2005; Gillin, 2009)

1.7 Delimitations

This research aims to study the complex nature of Social Media and, in particular, the blogosphere. Because of this complex and evolving nature, besides an extensive literature study, an empirical study was conducted through semi-structured interviews with five interviewees within this field, originating from multiple countries. However, the complexity of this research left some limitations with regard to the internal and external validity. First, it should be taken into account that the sample size of this research is relatively small, possibly causing the social nature of the blogosphere to be susceptible to cultural differences. Therefore, the findings of this research cannot be generalized to other countries without caution. Furthermore, this research elaborates on a wide variety of different values that a company could reap through corporate blogging. However, there is often a lack of statistical evidence for a direct relation between a corporate blog and certain obtainable values. In addition, the explorative nature of this research encouraged the foundation of a three-dimensional classification model on the corporate blogging phenomenon. This three-dimensional classification model is still an initial model. Therefore these aspects might need to be taken into consideration with regard to the internal validity. Nevertheless, this research gained considerable insights with regard to

the research topic and identified some interesting topics for further research. Therefore, this research is considered to have immediate theoretical relevance as it contributes to our understanding and the available body of knowledge with regard to the research topic.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Chapter two will discuss prevalent theories with regard to the research questions. First, the parent theory will be discussed in chapter 2.2, in order to clarify and frame the Web 2.0 phenomenon. This chapter is concerned with research question 1 and its secondary questions. Second, the research theory will be discussed in chapter 2.3, in order to study prevalent theories with regard to the main research topic. This chapter is concerned with research question 2 and its secondary questions.

2.2 Parent theory Web 2.0

2.2.1 Introduction

In order to provide a comprehensive understanding on the blogosphere, and the obtainable values for companies, the origin and potential of blogs within the Web 2.0 phenomenon is of high relevance. Therefore this chapter aims to further clarify and frame the Web 2.0 phenomenon. Research question 1 and its secondary questions will be discussed in this chapter.

2.2.2 Defining Web 2.0

Although the new stage of the internet has initially been coined by Darcy Dinucci in 1999, Tim O'Reilly has been widely recognized for popularizing the term Web 2.0 in 2005. O'Reilly originally defined Web 2.0 as "a platform for harnessing collective intelligence". Nonetheless, nowadays there is still an ongoing discussion on the definition of Web 2.0. This imprecision is especially due to the different backgrounds that authors within the Web 2.0 communities possess. Some definitions focus specifically on the social networking applications and software, while others emphasize the sociological impact of Web 2.0 and still others the technical features that allow Web 2.0 applications to function (Constantinides et al., 2008). Moreover Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the Web, told in an interview on BBC that he is not sure if we can even speak about Web 2.0, since Web 1.0 was all about costless information sharing and connecting individual people already (Berners-Lee, 2010). Berners-Lee is however in agreement with the observed shift in the web utilization, but rather considers Web 2.0 as a greater realization of the web's true potential. These elaborated perspectives illustrate that Web 2.0 does not possess a hard boundary, but rather, a gravitational core (O'Reilly, 2007). In order to give a better understanding of the variety of Web 2.0 definitions and perspectives that are circling around, a short enumeration is stated in Appendix 4.

2.2.3 Web 2.0 principles

In 2006 Tim O'Reilly proposed seven principles that are widely accepted as the foundation of the Web 2.0 phenomenon. These seven principles served as a starting-point for further examination and research of the Web 2.0 phenomenon. Below the most prominent Web 2.0 principles are elaborated.

2.2.3.1 The web as a platform

The web is the only place that unites people among the world. In order to optimally harness collective intelligence, a decentralized architecture is needed where as many people as possible are included. Therefore the web should be easily accessible worldwide and serve as an open platform with open standards (Mayfield, 2008; Shirky, 2009).

2.2.3.2 The power of the crowd

Crowd sourcing has been widely considered as the core principle of Web 2.0. The decentralized architecture of Web 2.0 allows users to read, create and share user-generated content (UGC) all over the world through online applications that are compatible among multiple platforms and devices (Anderson, 2007; Rollyson, 2007; Mayfield, 2008). UGC is defined by OCDE (2007) as “any kind of published content, result of a non-professional activity with creative effort” (Casoto et al., 2008). This holds that the user is in control, as they provide and enrich the value on the web. A good example of crowd sourcing is Wikipedia, whose value is totally dependent on the contribution of individual users (Shirky, 2009).

2.2.3.3 Data on an epic scale

Users generate and use an ever-increasing amount of data on the web. In order for users to harness all this collective intelligence, the capacity to quickly process large amounts of data must be sufficient. Therefore, efficient data management has become a core competence for companies (Anderson, 2007).

2.2.3.4 Software conceived as a service rather than a product

As mentioned above, Web 2.0 applications decentralize power as it mainly relies on user-generated content. This caused for collective intelligence and collaboration to emerge. Therefore software needs to be conceived as a collaborative service, rather than a restricted product (O’Reilly, 2007; Shirky, 2009). This principle caused the software development philosophy “perpetual beta” to emerge. Perpetual beta holds that there is no definitive software version, instead software is constantly refined and improved through collective collaboration (O’Reilly, 2007).

2.2.3.5 Lightweight programming models

To further extend the reach and speed of Web 2.0 applications, the use of lightweight programming models is required. This means that applications need to offer simple, unfussy and customizable user interfaces, in order to make it fast and accessible for the public (O’Reilly, 2007; Constantinides and Fountain, 2008; Ullrich, 2008; Levy, 2009).

2.2.3.6 Software integration

In order to successfully harness collective intelligence, software needs to be interchangeable and compatible among multiple platforms and devices. Therefore, application standards are required. A good example is Apple that puts great effort into the interchangeability and compatibility of its products and operating systems (i.e. iTunes, iPad, Ipod, iPhone).

2.2.3.7 Rich user experiences

In order to encourage extensive utilization of Web 2.0 applications, it is essential to offer rich user experiences (RIA) and user interfaces. As elaborated above, software standards enable the interchangeability of desired features from multiple applications. This positively influences the ability to enrich user experiences and usability. In order to successfully accomplish this, O’Reilly (2007) further argues that it is essential for companies to monitor and study their users’ behavior and generated content. This provides valuable user insights, which enables companies to further enhance the user interface and experience.

2.2.3.8 New business opportunities

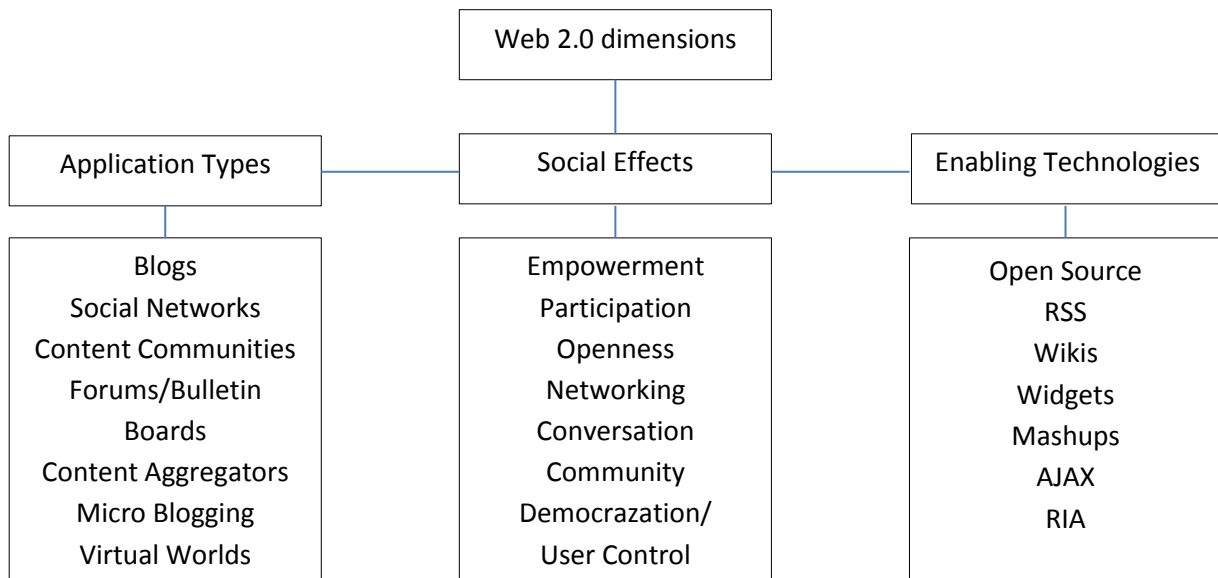
Additionally, Constantinides and Fountain (2008) emphasize on the required business models and evolving business opportunities in a Web 2.0 environment. They argue that offering new individual

communication practices, requiring new service-based business models, enable companies to develop a cost-effective long-term relationship with customers and reach untapped niches.

2.2.4 Different Web 2.0 dimensions and applications types

Constantinides et al., (2008) proposed a three-dimensional classification in order to further elaborate upon the Web 2.0 phenomenon. The proposed Web 2.0 dimensions are: Application Types, Social Effects, Enabling technologies. This classification model is illustrated below:

Figure 2.1: The Three Dimensions Of Web 2.0



Source: Constantinides et al. (2008), Mayfield (2008), Kaplan (2009), Murugesan (2010)

In order to enhance our understanding upon the Web 2.0 phenomenon, the three-dimensional classification model will be further elaborated below.

2.2.4.1 Application types

2.2.4.1.1 Blogs

Blogs are considered to be the leading Web 2.0 application, because they are easy to create and update, require little formatting, and can be maintained easily by individuals without the requirement of technological knowledge (Casoto et al., 2008; Li et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2008; Singh et al., 2008; Gillin, 2009; Scott, 2010; Weil, 2010). Blogs can be defined as “*easy-to-publish online journals that are written in a conversational, authentic and informal style*” (Weill, 2010). Blogs can serve as a personal online journal, but also as a community platform where information, opinions, podcasts, videocasts, photos, RSS feeds and other forms of media are easily shared (Edelman et al., 2005; Singh et al., 2008). Additionally, blogs are widely considered as a very valuable tool for companies in order to listen in on customers, humanize the company and actively engage with customers. (Constantinides et al., 2008; Singh et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2008; Casoto et al., 2008; Gillin 2009; Scott, 2010; Weil, 2010; Huang et al., 2011). This will be further discussed in chapter 2.3.

2.2.4.1.2 Social networks

Social networks are applications that allow users to create their own profile and connect to other profiles within the network. The primary leverage of social networks is to connect people with similar or dissimilar interests, desires or talents. This enables people to harness, discuss and enrich

collaborative intelligence (Evans D., 2008; Mangold et al., 2009). Social network profiles may represent specific people, but also companies, products or specific groups. Therefore social networks can be applied for professional and personal purposes (Evans D., 2008). Moreover social networks have been considered as a supportive tool for blogs (Singh et al., 2008; Kaplan et al., 2009). Examples of social networks are Myspace, Facebook, Hyves, Friendster and LinkedIn.

2.2.4.1.3 Content communities

Content communities, or photo and video sharing websites, are communities where people can share content like text, videos, photos and audio (podcasts, music). Various types of content communities exist:

1. Photo and video sharing, examples are: Flickr, Youtube, Google Video (Casoto et al., 2008).
2. Text sharing, examples are: BookCrossing, Slideshare (Casoto et al., 2008).
3. Review/rating sites, examples are: Amazon, Kieskeurig, eBay, Yelp (Kaplan, 2009).
4. Collaborative authoring, examples are: Wikipedia, citizendium.org, other wiki's (Kaplan, 2009; Scott, 2010).
5. Folksonomies, social bookmarking and knowledge sharing, examples are: Del.icio.us, digg.com (Kaplan, 2009).

Compared to social networks, the big difference is that content communities do not place emphasis on profiles, but on the content itself. Users are therefore often not required to sign-up in order to access the provided content.

2.2.4.1.4 Forums and Bulletin boards

Forums and Bulletin boards emerged throughout an application that already existed in the Web 1.0 environment. Forum platforms allow users to share expertise, ideas or information and are usually focused on specific topics, products or brands (Casoto et al., 2008). Corporative forums may be used for both internal collaborative knowledge sharing between employees and external collaborative knowledge sharing for its users.

2.2.4.1.5 Content aggregators

Content aggregators are applications that allow users to customize and organize web content. This holds that users can aggregate syndicated web content such as news, blogs or podcasts through feed aggregators, like Real Simple Syndication or Rich Site Summary (RSS) (Constantinides et al., 2008; Palmer, 2009).

2.2.4.1.6 Micro blogging

Micro-blogging is a broadcast medium that allows users to quickly share small elements of content, both text and multimedia. Examples are Twitter and Plurk (Mayfield, 2008; Kaplan, 2009; Murugesan, 2010).

2.2.4.1.7 Virtual worlds

Virtual worlds are online platforms that replicate a three-dimensional environment. Users can sign-up, personalize their own avatar and interact with other users. Kaplan et al. (2009) distinguish two different groups of virtual worlds:

1. Virtual game worlds. In this group users have to behave according to strict game rules, which limit the degree of self-disclosure and self-presentation.

2. Virtual social worlds. In virtual social worlds users can behave more freely, compared to the virtual game worlds. In this group they are limited to no restrictions in the scale of possible interactions with other users, except for basic physical laws as gravity.

Kaplan et al. (2009) stated that virtual worlds offer multiple marketing opportunities for companies. From traditional communication practices, like game advertising, towards real-time interaction with customers, like virtual product sales.

Despite the above-discussed different Social Media applications, Kaplan et al. (2009) and Kim et al. (2010) argue that the different applications are merging and will merge further in the future. They argue that applications will increasingly add features of other applications in order to enhance its capabilities and enrich the user experience. This phenomenon is also known as Mashups, which combines services and data from multiple sources (Anderson, 2007; Jain et al., 2007).

2.2.4.2 Social effects

Web 2.0 overturns long-held notions of power distribution, ownership, value and expertise. This is especially due to the societal effects that Web 2.0 lays on its users. Web 2.0 tends to set people free and offers an interactive and transparent medium for users to generate, publish, share, respond and distribute information quickly worldwide at any time they want. Therefore the information flow start to emerge by the masses from below, instead of being handed down by the experts from above. In other words, Web 2.0 empowers individuals and, since Web 2.0 depends upon user-generated content, the user is in control. By peer reviews, product and brand comparison, communities, blogs, tags and other user-generated content, customers are gaining product and brand insights provided by parties that are beyond marketers' control. In addition the web offers users the ability to start conversations with experts that were formerly not accessible through the traditional media.

These new sources of intelligence affected both the customers' bargaining power and their decision making process. Porter (2008) pointed out that the internet affected the company's position negatively among every dimension of his 5-forces model (Appendix 5). Additionally, the new communication paradigm caused for an increasing complex customers' decision making process (Appendix 6). Therefore it is important for companies to embrace the new communication paradigm and determine new unprecedented ways to engage with their customers, in order to sustain in a Web 2.0 environment (Rollyson, 2007; Constantinides, 2008; Evans D., 2008; Porter, 2008; Gillin, 2009; Mangold et al., 2009; Weil, 2010).

2.2.4.3 Enabling technologies

Most Web 2.0 technologies were already present in the Web 1.0 environment, there is, however, a big difference in the exploitation of the technologies (O'Reilly, 2007; Constantinides et al., 2008; Berners-Lee, 2010). As already has been mentioned in chapter 2.2.3, Web 2.0 technologies need to be open source, transparent, interchangeable, lightweight and highly customizable in order to support collaborative, real-time, knowledge sharing at low costs. Below the most popular technologies are briefly discussed (Constantinides et al., 2008):

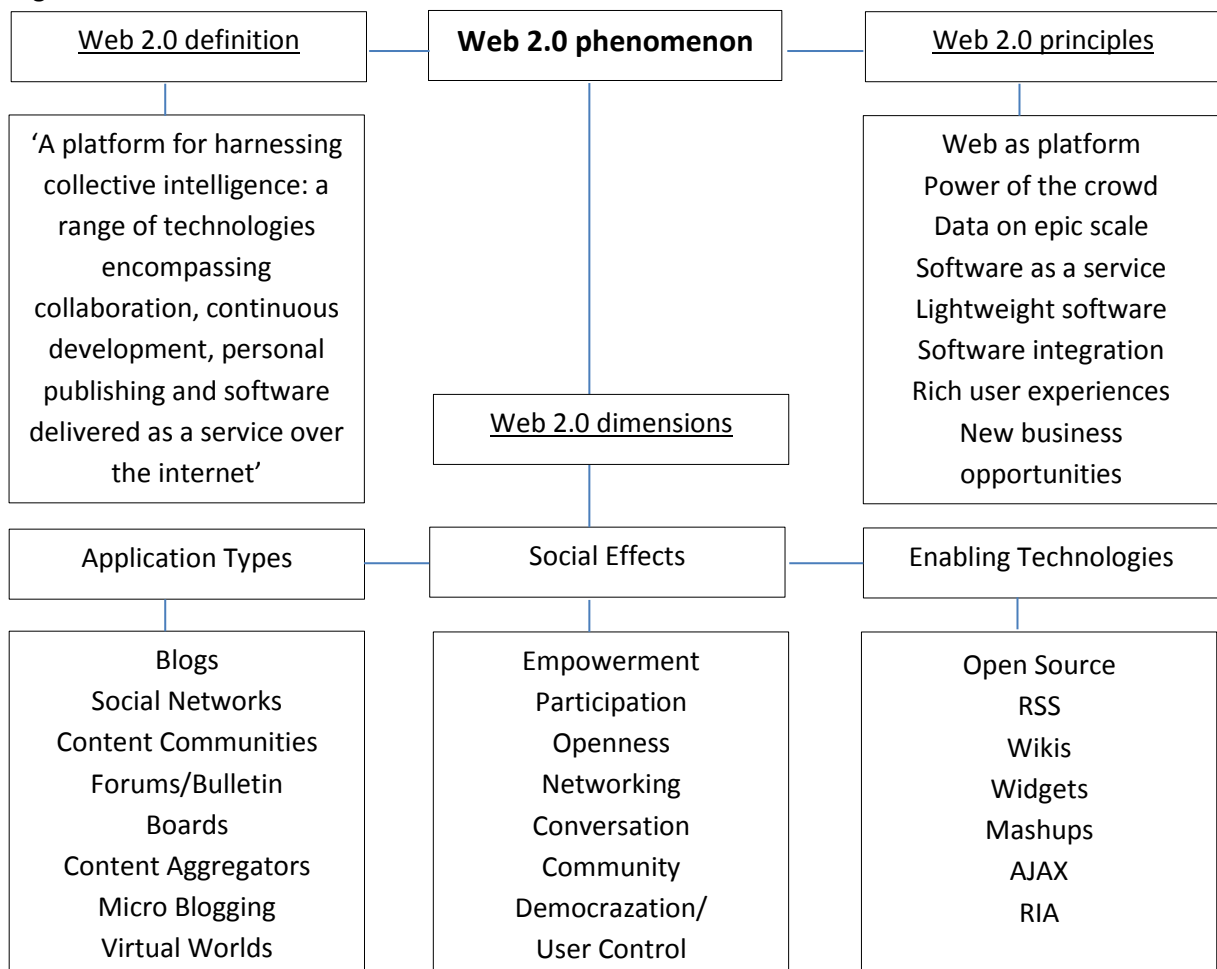
1. Open Source. Web 2.0 software often offers free redistribution and access for developers to further develop and collaborate on the software.
2. Rich Site Summary or Really Simple Syndication (RSS) is a technology to easily syndicate and customize content from multiple online sources, in order to present automatic updates to the user.

3. Collaborative authoring or Wiki's are platforms that provide tools for collaborative authoring and intelligence.
4. Widgets are small portable applications that can be embedded into multiple websites or devices. This allows users to customize their user interface and enhance their personal experience and interaction with the application (Dawson, 2007; Cashmore, 2009).
5. Mash-ups combine different types of data, from different sources, in order to create a new service (Anderson, 2007; Jain et al., 2007).
6. Asynchronous JavaScript and XML (AJAX) is a combination of different technologies, providing interactive web applications that allow continuous actualization of website content (Kaplan et al., 2010).
7. Rich Internet Applications (RIA) are web applications that have similar features and characteristics as the traditional desktop applications.

2.2.5 Web 2.0 assessment model

A concluding Web 2.0 assessment model is presented below. This assessment model aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the insights on the Web 2.0 phenomenon, acquired during the literature review in chapter 2.2. The model elaborates on the technological and social revolution initiated by Web 2.0. Web 2.0 presents new challenges for companies, since their market environment has changed. How corporate blogs can be applied to overcome these challenges, and to what end, will be discussed in chapter 2.3.

Figure 2.2: Web 2.0 Assessment Model



2.3 Research theory

2.3.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to further discuss the corporate blogging phenomenon, including defining the corporate blogging phenomenon, providing a classification of the different corporate blog genres and elaborate on its obtainable values. Research question 2 and its secondary questions will be discussed in this chapter.

2.3.2 Corporate blogging

Blogs evolved in the late 90s and were initially used by companies as an internal collaborative authoring tool. The purpose of these blogs was to streamline internal communication practices and to facilitate incremental collaborative intelligence within the company. Ever since then, blogs have continued to evolve and have gained considerable popularity by the public, particularly as a result of growing internet use, the emerging Web 2.0 and the simple user interface that blogs offer (Gillin, 2009; Weil, 2010; Huang et al., 2011). Nowadays the blogging phenomenon has reached a critical mass. The blogosphere surpasses 100 million blogs with an estimated 80.000 blogs created every day (Weil, 2010). Michal A. Stelzner showed in The Social Media Examiner's study (2011) that the current adoption rate of corporate blogging takes fourth place (Appendix 1). However that same study also found that 75% of the 3342 marketers interviewed will increase their blogging activities (Appendix 2), and 69% of the interviewees want to learn more about corporate blogging in the next few years, which results in a second place (Appendix 3). The blogosphere is often defined as "a collective conversation: a community where text, opinions, links, audio, video and other media can be shared easily". This revolution caused for conversations to move online. Innovative companies picked up on this and monitored blogs or started to blog themselves, from which the term "corporate blogging" originated. Corporate blogging can be defined as "the use of blogs to further accomplish company goals" (Weil, 2010). Nevertheless, it is important to be aware that blogs are written in an informal and conversational style that tells an authentic story, and that traditional marketing practices are considered inappropriate in the blogosphere. Blogs might have some similarities with conventional websites, but differ in the certain attributes (Gillin, 2009; Weil, 2010). A blog:

- is an interactive, two-way communication medium;
- is written in an authentic and transparent voice;
- refers and links to each other;
- invites comments;
- is mostly created on instant publishing software, with no IT expertise required;
- provides an efficient tool to alert interested readers when a new article is published, without using traditional methods such as email;
- is a very effective tool to get higher in search rankings, if frequently updated;
- is a type of viral marketing.

It is however important to mention that a company should not enter the blogosphere unprepared. Apart from the presence of a detailed plan of approach, there are also a number of success factors of interest. A list of success factors can be found in appendix 7. A comprehensive theoretical map of engagement can be found in Appendix 8.

2.3.3 Classification of corporate blogs

Companies can create and implement a corporate blog in various ways. Gillin (2009) proposed a classification of corporate blogs focused on the authors. This classification served as a rationale to further discuss the different typologies of corporate blogs.

2.3.3.1 Internal blogging

Internal corporate blogs are communication platforms, accessible and maintained by employees or a dedicated department. This approach allows employees to jointly gather, share and enhance knowledge among the company (Weil, 2010).

2.3.3.2 CEO's Blog

A CEO's blog is, as the name already suggests, written by a company's CEO and provides a unique opportunity for a CEO to personally connect with all kinds of constituent. This, for instance, allows customers or employees to enter into a real-time conversation with the CEO, but also enables the CEO to gather unfiltered feedback from the different parties (Kaplan, 2009). Given the exceptional expertise that a CEO possesses, the precise focal topic is not really of concern (Gillin, 2009; Weil, 2010). The main challenge for CEOs to overcome is to change their culture from closed to open and transparent (Weil, 2010).

2.3.3.2 Executive blog

This blogging type allows a predefined group of senior managers to create their own blogging platform on the company's website. It is, as such, a good opportunity for a company to showcase its management team's talent and to provide insights from multiple dimensions (Weil, 2010). To maintain content variety, it is feasible to build blog content around topics, rather than people. This rationale also provides some protection for the continuity of a blog, for instance when a senior manager is reassigned (Gillin, 2009). All the same, it is important to mention that one should safeguard the blogging ethics such as transparency, authenticity and the use of a personal voice (Weil, 2010).

2.3.3.4 Group blog

This is a popular approach, since it deals with the barriers that many corporate bloggers confront, namely the required time to maintain the blog. A group blog allows a preselected group of bloggers to contribute to the corporate blog on a scheduled, rotating basis. This ensures varied content and is less time-consuming for the individual blogger. A group blog, however, requires clear guidelines so that every blogger involved has a clear understanding of the blogs' objective, the editorial profile and the desired voice (Gillin, 2009).

2.3.3.5 Company blog platform

This practice allows employees to publish and maintain their own specialized blog on a company's website. It is, therefore, a good way to showcase the talent that exists throughout the company. This practice provides company insights from multiple perspectives since different professions are represented, but above all, it allows the sellers (employees) to get in direct touch with the buyers (customers). The empowerment of employees, however, requires a proper set of policies, a code of ethics and a disclaimer (Gillin, 2009; Weil, 2010).

2.3.3.6 Topical blog

Topical blogs focus on the creation of a real-time and ongoing conversation between employees and customers on the features and the functionality of company products. The intent of topical blogs is to establish a mutually collaborative conversation that offers practical product information for the users and generates feedback for the employees (Gillin, 2009). By applying even more transparent company practices, companies can allow customers to actively take part in the product research and development process (Weil, 2010).

2.3.3.7 Customer service blog

A customer service blog is a platform for direct contact between the customers and the technical support staff. This allows customers to get real-time product support and enables companies to identify early warnings and act quickly if necessary (Weil, 2010; Hsu et al., 2011).

2.3.3.8 Advocacy blog

Advocacy blogs are applied by companies that want to express their point of view upon a specific public policy or legal issue. This is especially useful when the topic of interest is controversial, since it enables companies to enhance their image as a thought-leader or an activist. Controversial topics can quickly popularize an advocacy blog, which can become a powerful platform, for example for interested parties to argue with critics or undermine legal issues imposed by the government (Gillin, 2009; Shirky, 2009; Weil, 2010).

2.3.3.9 Promotional blog

Traditional selling practices do not apply in the blogosphere, but in some instances marketers can combine the informative nature of blogs with product promotion. Blogs for these purposes are called promotional blogs and they are effective since they focus on the promotion of products or services in an informational and transparent manner (Gillin, 2009).

2.3.4 Obtainable blogosphere values for companies

Many different goals and objectives have been emphasized in recent literature, and a distinction can be made between a passive and an active approach, as well as between internal and external corporate blogging. Some articles focus in particular on the potential value of monitoring the blogosphere (F. Li et al., 2011; O'Leary, 2011; Zehrer et al., 2011), while others go further still and elaborate on the values that can be obtained by companies actively engaging the blogosphere (Ahuja et al., 2011; Bergstrand, 2011; Chun, 2011; Hsu et al., 2011; Hu et al., 2011; Huang et al., 2011).

2.3.4.1 Obtainable values for the passive approach

Since the blogosphere is primarily built upon user-generated content, the platform offers an ideal opportunity for companies to monitor their markets and gather market intelligence. In the early days, companies tended to monitor their markets by using surveys or focus groups, but nowadays the blogosphere offers companies a real-time market monitoring tool (Weil, 2010). This provides a cost-effective solution to identify new influencers and early warnings, such as market needs, market trends, customer insights, competitive movements and customers' feedback and demands (Li et al., 2008; Gillin, 2009; Weil, 2010; O'Leary, 2011). Monitoring the blogosphere, therefore, has been widely agreed to be crucial for companies in order to sustain themselves in a Web 2.0 environment (Constantinides, 2008; Constantinides et al., 2008; Jerving, 2009; Gillin, 2009; Weil, 2010; Hsu et al., 2011; Zehrer et al., 2011).

2.3.4.2 Obtainable values of corporate blogs (active approach)

Recent literature shows that the current adoption rate of corporate blogging is mostly in the monitoring stage, however, an increasing amount of literature exist regarding corporate blogging and its obtainable values. Here, too, the main distinction is between internal and external corporate blogging.

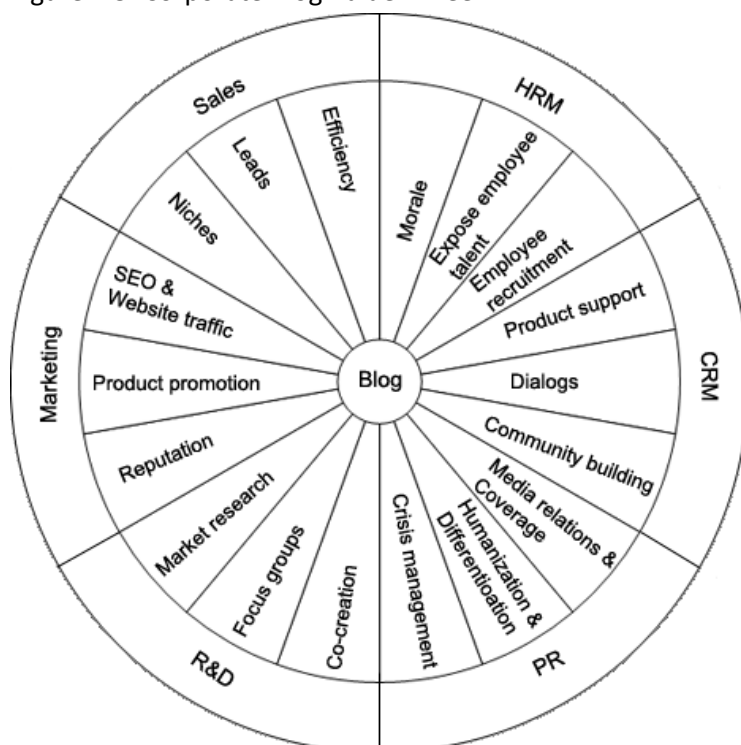
2.3.4.2.1 Internal communications

Internal collaborative intelligence

Internal blogging platforms are ideal for mutual knowledge sharing among employees, teams or even entire companies. This allows companies to effectively harness and classify collective intelligence, and in doing so to enhance the company's expertise. The immediate accessibility of the company's intelligence provides opportunities for mutual learning and even cross-company cooperation. Cross-company intelligence networks can support the company's supply chain management (SCM) by enhancing the interchangeability of knowledge. This can fulfil customers' demands and improve customer support. Furthermore, RSS feeds allow employees to subscribe to any relevant topics and avoid irrelevant topics or spam (Singh et al., 2008; Blinn et al., 2009; Kaplan, 2009; Weil, 2010; Huang et al., 2011; O'Leary, 2011).

The next step is to actively engage the blogosphere and create a corporate blogging platform (external blogging). In order to further elaborate on the values that a company could reap for its different functional areas, a blogging value wheel is applied.

Figure 2.3: Corporate Blog Value Wheel



Source: Wolf (2007), Constantinides and Fountain (2008), Gillin (2009), Weil (2010), Ahuja et al. (2011), Huang et al. (2011), Y. Li et al. (2011), Zehrer et al. (2011)

2.3.4.2.2 HRM

Morale

By allowing employees to contribute to the company's blog, a company applies transparent business practices and expresses trust to its employees. Additionally, it may enable employees to enter a discussion with their superiors. This makes employees feel heard and respected by the management, which positively affects their morale (Wolf, 2007; Gillin, 2009; Weil, 2010).

Expose employee talent

Corporate blogging offers an innovative medium for companies to expose its employees' talents. Exposing their talents might positively affect the employees' morale, as has been explained above, but might also serve as a showcase to persuade customers (Weil, 2010).

Employee recruitment

Corporate blogging enable companies to reach out to new recruits who would otherwise not have considered to join or are hard to reach through traditional recruitment (Wolf, 2007). Current employees could even stimulate new recruits by publishing advocatory stories on the company's blog. Thus, a corporate blog allows job applicants to get a first impression of the company's vision and culture, which enhances the probability that a job applicant fits into the company (Wolf, 2007; Weil, 2010).

2.3.4.2.3 CRM

Product support

A corporate blog can provide an ideal platform for companies to gather real-time product feedback and provide customer service. A customer service blog can serve as an open and transparent collaborative knowledge source for both the customers and the company (Weil, 2010; Hsu et al., 2011). This has several benefits compared to the traditional customer service practices, such as peer-to-peer customer support and real-time product feedback through blog syndication and its high potential for search engines (Yang, 2007).

Personal and real-time dialogues

A corporate blog is a very effective tool for establishing a real-time dialogue with customers. This allows companies to gather customer insights such as preferences and opinions, which allows a more personalized customer approach (Singh et al., 2008; Weil, 2010; O'Leary, 2011). Personalization enhances the company's interaction with customers (i.e. provides personalized recommendations, enables cross-selling and filters website content based on personal preferences and demographic aspects) and as such improves the customer retention and the competitive position (Goy et al., 2007; Mulpuru, 2007; Constantinides et al., 2008).

Community building

Corporate blogging enables companies to enhance their interaction with current and prospective customers (CRM). It is considered a low-cost opportunity for companies to build a customer community, where customers can directly interact with other customers and with the company itself. A blog community can serve various purposes. Beside gathering product feedback and enabling peer-to-peer product reviews or customer support, a corporate blog could also serve as a platform for product advocates to discuss new features or product ideas. A blog community, therefore, can be a

very valuable tool for companies to further strengthen the interrelation with customers (Wolf, 2007; Gillin, 2009; Bergstrand et al., 2011; Huang et al., 2011).

2.3.4.2.4 Public relations

Media relations & coverage

Due to the opinion-driven and social nature of the blogosphere, it is been conceived as an ideal opportunity for companies to quickly reach (new) influencers, to recruit brand advocates or even to find support on controversial topics (Wolf, 2007; Gillin, 2009; Weil, 2010; Zehrer et al., 2011). Furthermore, a corporate blog enables companies to bypass traditional media, become a part of the online conversation and in doing so gain some influence and control over these conversations. The sender-oriented nature of blogs, enables companies to provide unique and interesting content on a corporate blog, which might even create a viral buzz over time. This way companies can increase their coverage and market awareness (Singh et al., 2008; Scott, 2010; Weil, 2010; Huang et al., 2011).

Differentiation and humanization

With the recent market transparency and fierce competition, distinguishing oneself from competitors is an increasingly important competence for companies, and a corporate blog is considered to be an ideal means to do so at low cost (Huang et al., 2011). Corporate blogging offers a differentiated communication channel for customers and employees to expose their talents (Gillin, 2009; Weil, 2010). Furthermore, corporate blogging humanizes the company and enhances the loyalty, commitment and trust among all kinds of stakeholder, since it addresses the stakeholders' need for personalized rather than mass communication practices. It is, therefore, very effective to establish a low-cost and long-term relationship (Palmer, 2009; Ahuja et al., 2011; Bergstrand et al., 2011; Chun, 2011; Hsu et al., 2011; Zehrer et al., 2011).

Crisis management

Real-time insights enable companies to identify early warnings, such as customer experiences or market needs and act quickly, if necessary. For instance, a company might further engage with customers if their feedback is positive, or apply a well-directed retention campaign if their feedback is negative (Ahuja et al., 2011; F. Li et al., 2011).

2.3.4.2.5 Research and development

Co-creation

Co-creation is conceived as a very effective approach to fulfil customer needs, as it allows customers to customize their products and to actively take part in the product research and development process (Casoto, 2008; Constantinides, 2008; Constantinides et al., 2008; Tanuri, 2009; Huang et al., 2011; Hu et al., 2011). Co-creation, therefore, requires open and transparent business models. This enables a company to tap into their customers' ideas and creativity, and engage customers as product support specialist or brand advocates in a very effective way. Nambisan and Nambisan (2008) elaborate upon different roles that customers can fulfil as a co-creator, namely: product conceptualizer, product designer, product tester, product support specialist and product marketer. Engaging customers as co-creators can be very rewarding, since peer products are perceived as more trustworthy by customers (Casoto, 2008; Constantinides, 2008; Constantinides et al., 2008).

Focus groups

A company could test prototypes by creating a password-protected blog, accessible only to a predefined focus group, and ask for product feedback and user experiences (Gillin, 2009; Weil, 2010).

Market research

A real-time dialogue with customers enables companies to monitor their markets and gauge various valuable customer insights, from customers' sentiment, product feedback and desired features to applicable price ranges and the effectiveness of a developed marketing strategy (Gillin, 2009; Weil, 2010; Ahuja et al., 2011; Huang et al., 2011; Y. Li et al., 2011; Zehrer et al., 2011).

2.3.4.2.6 Marketing

Reputation

The open, transparent, personal and trustworthy nature of the blogosphere might positively affect the reputation of a blogging company (Weil, 2010; Ahuja et al., 2011). This can be highly effective if a company attempts to repair a damaged reputation (Wolf, 2007).

Product promotion

Although the traditional marketing practices are not applicable in the blogosphere, the informative nature of blogs can coexist with the promotion and awareness of certain products or services (Gillin, 2009; Weil, 2010; Zehrer et al., 2011). Especially when a product offers unique or innovative features, the blogosphere is an ideal platform to be picked up on this and spread the word. This supports word-of-mouth marketing and might result in a viral over time (Casoto, 2008; Gillin, 2009; Tanuri, 2009; Weil, 2010).

SEO and website traffic

Search engine optimization, hereinafter SEO, has been an important competence for the company's online presence for many years. Blogs often score well in search engines, mainly because they possess a rich amount of content, are frequently updated and have an interconnecting nature. In addition, reciprocal linking between a corporate blog and its conventional website will increase the search engine ranking and attract more visitors and potential customers to the company's conventional website (Chun, 2011; Huang, 2011).

2.3.4.2.7 Sales

Niches

The blogosphere enables consumers to create aggregated demand for niche products or services and as such, corporate blogging is considered to be an ideal and low-cost way for a company to reach untapped niche markets. This, for instance, enables companies to sell products to very specific niches (Godin, 2008; Constantinides and Fountain, 2008; Gillin, 2009; Levy, 2009; Scott, 2010; Weil, 2010; Huang et al., 2011).

Leads

As has been mentioned, corporate blogging offers companies unique opportunities to increase their reputation, generate coverage in the blogosphere and increase the market awareness. This may positively affect the customers' intention to buy and lead to inbound calls from prospects (Wolf, 2007; Hsu et al., 2011; O'Leary, 2011; Stelzner, 2011; Zehrer et al., 2011).

Efficiency

Corporate blogs may provide a supporting function for the sales department. People increasingly use the internet to gather information on products or companies before they proceed to purchase the product. Therefore, a corporate blog may be an ideal backbone for companies to communicate on their products and to provide a first impression to customers. In addition, since corporate blogs give insights in customers' needs and demands, sales staff can use this information to make their sales strategy more efficient (Wolf, 2007; Singh et al., 2008).

2.4 Corporate blog value assessment model

A concluding corporate blog value assessment model is presented below. This model provides a comprehensive overview of the insights acquired during the literature review in chapter 2.3. The model elaborates on the different corporate blogs genres that companies could use, the various values that a company could gain through corporate blogging, and the degree of suitability of a blog genre to a value.

Figure 2.4: Initiated Corporate Blog Value Model

Corporate blogs VS Obtainable values		Internal	CEO	Executive	Group	Company platform	Topical	Customer service	Advocacy	Promotional
IC	Internal collaborative intelligence	XXX								
HRM	Morale	XXX	X	X	XX	XXX	XXX	XX	XXX	XX
	Expose employee talent	XX		X	XX	XXX	XXX	XX	XXX	XX
	Employee recruitment		X	X	XX	XXX	XXX	X	XXX	X
CRM	Product support	XX				X	XX	XXX		
	Personal & real-time dialogs		X	X	XX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	X
	Community building		X	XX	XX	XX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XX
PR	Media relations & coverage		XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX		XXX	XXX
	Differentiation & humanization	XXX	XX	XX	XX	XXX	XXX	XX	XXX	XX
	Crisis management					X	XX	XXX		
R&D	Co-creation					X	XXX			
	Focus Groups						XX	X		
	Market research	X			X	XX	XXX	XX	XX	X
Marketing	Reputation		X	X	XX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XX
	Product promotion		X	X	X	XX	XX		XX	XXX
	SEO & Website traffic		XX	XX	XX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX
SALES	Niches		X	X	X	XX	XXX	X	XX	XXX
	Leads		X	X	X	XX	XXX	X	XXX	XXX
	Efficiency		X	X	X	XX	XX	X	XX	XXX

Note: XXX: very suitable; XX: suitable; X: suitable sometimes

Source: Goy et al. (2007), Mulpuru (2007), Wolf, 2007; Casoto (2008), Constantinides et al. (2008), Nambisan and Nambisan (2008), Singh et al. (2008), Blinn et al. (2009), Gillin (2009), Kaplan (2009), Scott (2010), Tanuri (2009), Weil (2010), Ahuja et al. (2011), Bergstrand et al. (2011), Chun (2011), F. Li et al. (2011), Y. Li et al. (2011), Hsu et al. (2011), Huang et al. (2011), O'Leary (2011), Zehrer et al. (2011)

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The research design is concerned with the planning and structure of the research. It elaborates on the methodological choices and research procedures that were applied in order to conduct this study. Elements of relevance are the research strategy, credibility issues, data collection methods, data analysis methods and the timeframe in which the research is conducted.

3.2 Research strategy

3.2.1 Research approach

This research is considered to have direct and immediate relevance to its field as it elaborates on issues that are important for companies in order to enhance the understanding and potential of the corporate blogging phenomenon. The research findings will be presented in a way that companies can understand and act upon. Therefore, this research can be typified as “applied research” (Saunders et al., 2009).

Since the lack of research and understanding of the corporate blogging phenomenon, this research is mainly exploratory. However, a review of publications is used as a starting point to survey the prevalent theories and to clarify the Web 2.0 phenomenon. The literature study will serve as a theoretical lens for the empirical part of the research: the case study. As has been mentioned by Yin (2009), the development of a predominant theory is an essential part of the case study design. This enables the researcher to determine initial theoretical propositions, which data to collect and which strategies are appropriate to analyze these data. During the case study, primary data will be collected and analyzed using a pattern matching method of analysis. Based on the outcome of this analysis, conclusions will be drawn in order to answer the research question.

For the primary data collection and the qualitative data analysis, a partly deductive and partly inductive approach will be taken. First of all, the list of themes for the data collection and the data analysis has been identified primarily based on literature study (deductive). This list of themes served as a rationale for the semi-structured interviews. However, the complexity of the research topic and in-depth nature of the interviews required to some extent an inductive approach (Saunders et al., 2009).

3.2.2 Justification research design

To determine which method is best for this research, a methodology of Yin (2009) was applied. Yin (2009) proposed a classification model that elaborates on three different research conditions and their relation to five major research methods. The three research conditions are: the type of research question, control over behavioral events and the focus on contemporary events. Figure 3.1 displays these three conditions and their relation to the different research methods.

Figure 3.1: Methodologies

METHOD	(1) Form of Research Question	(2) Requires Control of Behavioral Events?	(3) Focuses on Contemporary Events?
Experiment	how, why?	yes	yes
Survey	who, what, where, how many, how much?	no	yes
Archival Analysis	who, what, where, how many, how much?	no	yes/no
History	how, why?	no	no
Case Study	how, why?	no	yes

Source: Yin (2009)

According to the classification model of Yin (2009), case studies are preferred particularly when a “how” or “why” question is being asked, the researcher has little or no control over the behavioral events and where the focus is on a contemporary set of events. As has been mentioned in chapter 1, this research aims in particular to answer a “how” question. In addition, the research question also contains a partial “what” form. Yin (2009) emphasizes that there are two possible types of “what” questions. First, “what” questions that are more exploratory by nature, such as “*What can be learned from studying this business?*”. In this case Yin (2009) argues that any of the five research methods can be applicable. Second, “what” questions that are actually a form of “how many” or “how much”, such as “*What communities have assimilated new immigrants?*” Such a research question favors survey or archival research methods over any other.

Saunders et al. (2009) argues that a case study research strategy is particularly applicable for the establishment of a rich understanding of a contemporary phenomenon in its original context. The use of a case study is especially well-suited to the examination of the blogosphere, since the blogosphere leaves no room for controlling the behavioral events. In addition, this research of the blogosphere is focused on contemporary events. A case study offers the opportunity to study the complexity of the blogosphere in particular, and enhance our understanding of how it can be of value to companies.

3.2.3 Case study selection

Saunders et al. (2009) emphasizes that a single case is often applied when it represents a critical, extreme or unique case. Conversely, Saunders et al. (2009) argues that a single case study can be selected when a case is typical or when it enables the researcher to research a phenomenon that few have considered before. For this research, a holistic single case study has been selected since the case, the blogosphere, is a complex topic that only few have researched before. The literature review, discussed in chapter 2, serves as a rationale for the determination of the feasible units of analysis to be able to comprehensively research the case. These units of analysis are elaborated in chapter 3.4.

3.3 Credibility research findings

While conducting the research, it is of great importance to be aware of possible credibility issues concerning the research findings. Saunders et al. (2009) points out that attention has to be paid to two particular emphases on the research design: reliability and validity. These aspects will be discussed below.

3.3.1 Reliability

Reliability refers to the ability of another researcher to replicate the research and find similar results. The objective of reliability is to minimize errors and biases in the research (Yin, 2009). Saunders et al. (2009) elaborates on three questions in order to assess reliability. These are:

- Will the measures yield the same results on other occasions?
- Will similar observations be reached by other observers?
- Is there transparency in how sense was made from the raw data?

Saunders et al. (2009) emphasizes that there are four threats to reliability. These are discussed below.

1. Subject or participant error. In order to avoid errors with regard to the subject or participant, the interviews were conducted in similar settings. All interviews were conducted through Skype and as such held in a trusted environment for the interviewer and interviewee. Therefore, there is no reason to doubt this aspect.
2. Subject or participant bias. Prior to each interview, the interviewee received a list of themes to be discussed during the interview, enabling him/her to prepare. Saunders et al. (2009) argues that this positively affects the research reliability, although it may also enable the interviewee to prepare answers to certain themes that they are unwilling to talk about. The list of themes, however, is considered to be mutually interesting to the interviewer and interviewee, especially because of the continuously evolving nature of the research topic. In addition to this, all interviewees were very enthusiastic about their participation in this research, since they consider it an opportunity to further develop on the research topic. There is, therefore, no reason to believe that inadequate answers were given. Besides that, the interviews contained only open-ended questions, providing all the necessary freedom for the interviewees to formulate their own answers.
3. Observer error. Although the interviews were held in a semi-structured manner, the researcher did prepare thoroughly for the interviews. Due in part to the extensive literature review, the researcher was well informed on the current developments regarding the research topic. This allowed the researcher to add depth to the interviews and to establish a mutual collaborative conversation.
4. Observer bias. Although there was a clear distinction between the role of the interviewer and the role of the interviewee during the interview, sometimes the interview demanded a more equal voice in order to create a more collaborative discussion. This means that, at times, the points of view of the interviewer were asked and given, but this was considered to be very beneficial to the mutual trust and the value of the profundity of the interview. In addition, the interviews were audio-recorded, which enabled the researcher to focus entirely on the interview and to extract the valuable insights afterwards. These approaches are considered to have a positive influence on the validity and reliability (Saunders et al., 2009).

3.3.2 Validity

The validity of research refers to the degree in which a certain measurement accurately reflects the phenomenon that the researcher is trying to measure (Saunders et al., 2009). Three different types of validity can be distinguished, namely: construct validity, internal validity and external.

Like any other research method, the case study method has its own strengths and weaknesses. Critics of case studies argue that case studies in particular find it difficult to comply with validity, since there is a lack of methodological procedures to follow in conducting a case study. Furthermore, critics place special notations on the external validity of case studies, as they find it unrealistic to generalize scientifically on the basis of a single case study. In reaction, Yin (2009) argues that scientific facts are rarely based on single experiments, rather, they are based on a multiple set of experiments, which research the same phenomenon under different conditions. Saunders et al. (2009) argues that within a case study, a range of people and activities are invariable examined. As a result, a case might cover numerous settings from various locations and, in contrast, a survey might be restricted to one particular location. Therefore, a well-designed case study might be more rigorous than more quantitative research methods (Saunders et al., 2009; Yin, 2009). In compliance to this, the collected data for this research originates from multiple countries, which positively influences the external validity.

In addition, it has to be mentioned that case studies only permit analytical generalization, as opposed to statistical generalization used for survey research, because cases cannot be applied as sampling units. Therefore, analytical generalization seeks to test and compare a previously developed theory with the empirical results gathered from the case study and looks for patterns, defined as pattern matching (Saunders et al., 2009; Yin, 2009).

3.4 Data collection

Applying an appropriate data collection method is an important element in successfully conducting the research, as it addresses to the construct validity and reliability of the research. Yin (2009) emphasizes that three principles of data collection are extremely important in high quality case studies, i.e.: the use of multiple sources of evidence, creation of a case study database, and maintaining a chain of evidence.

3.4.1 Multiple sources of evidence

Using multiple sources of evidence allows researchers to draw from a broader range of data. This enhances the ability to build a sustainable theory and an accurate conclusion. Patton (2002) refers to this principle by the term 'triangulation' and distinguishes four different types. The triangulation that will be applied to this research is identified as "data triangulation". Data triangulation aims to gather data from multiple sources to corroborate the same phenomenon (replication). This positively affects the construct validity, which refers to the degree that the operational measures are correctly identified for the concepts that are being studied (Yin, 2009).

3.4.2 Creation of case study database

This principle concerns the reliability of the research. Yin (2009) emphasizes that every case study should possess a structured study database, so that other researchers are able to review the gathered evidence and use it as a rationale for further research. Below the different applied elements for the case study database are elaborated:

1. Notes. The researcher should provide any notes taken during, for example, document analysis or direct observations. These will provide a better insight into the origin of the collected research data. Notes may be documents or audio recordings.
2. Case study documents. This element concerns annotating a clear bibliography of the documents used to conduct the research.
3. Narratives. While conducting the case study, it is advisable for the researcher to summarize the key information on the focal topic and merge the information into preliminary interpretations. These will support the researcher during the case study to stay on topic and to identify early indicators. Additionally, it may serve as a rationale in composing the case study report and helps readers to understand the sources of evidence.

3.4.3 Maintain chain of evidence

This principle emphasizes that a researcher should maintain a clear, step-by-step, structure of its research findings and conclusions. This chain of evidence needs to be 'tight' enough to ensure that the data, presented in the conclusion, are the same as the data, collected during the case study. This will further enhance the construct validity. In addition, a chain of evidence enables the reader to examine and understand the different phases of the evidentiary process of the case study. This enables external observers to trace the steps in both directions: from research questions towards conclusions and vice versa.

3.4.4 Data collection methods

The data collection methods applied to conduct the case studies are divided into two phases. The first phase aims to provide a foundation for the further research. The second phase is concerned with the collection of qualitative data. Therefore, the following data collection methods are used in order to conduct this study:

3.4.4.1 Documentation

Saunders et al. (2009) emphasizes that an analysis of documents helps the researcher to specify the primary data collection, since it enhances the researcher's understanding of the research problem. Documentation is mainly concerned with the collection of secondary data, through desk research (Yin, 2009). This first phase is concerned with the literature review in chapter 2, serving as a rationale in building a theoretical construct to design and conduct the case study. In addition, in preparation of the conducted interviews, documents have been collected to gather insights in the interviewees' occupations and fields of expertise. This enabled the researcher to ask relevant and more in-depth questions on an interviewee's knowledge and establish a more mutually collaborative conversation. The above-mentioned approach positively influences the research reliability (Saunders et al., 2009).

3.4.4.2 Direct observations

Since a case study is conducted in a natural setting, relevant behaviors or environmental conditions are viewed by direct observation. This data collection method is especially useful in obtaining additional information on the research topic and to enhance our understanding of the sources of evidence (Yin, 2009). Saunders et al. (2009) distinguishes 2 different types of direct observations, namely: participant observation and structured observation. Participant observation deals with the discovery of meanings that the interviewees attach to their actions. Structured observation is more concerned with the frequency with which those actions occur. During the interviews, participant observation has been used, since it is considered to be beneficial to the research questions and objectives. Saunders et al. (2009) elaborates on this as a practice where 'the researcher attempts to

participate fully in the lives and activities of subjects and thus to become a member of their group, company or community. This enables the researcher to share their experiences by not merely observing what is happening but also feeling it'. In order to gather new unforeseen insights and establish a more mutually collaborative conversation, this practice was applied during the interviews (participant as observer). Saunders et al. (2009) points out that this approach holds another advantage, namely that the interviewees are likely to adopt a perspective of analytic reflection within their field of expertise. Since corporate blogging still is a very lively phenomenon, continuous reflection is a very valuable element for anyone involved.

3.4.4.3 Interviews

Interviews are considered to be a critical source of evidence to successfully conduct case studies. Yin (2009), however, emphasizes that it is important to combine the interview method with other data collection methods, to cope with common problems such as bias, poor articulation, or recall problems. The qualitative data collection method that best fits the exploratory nature of this research is semi-structured interviews. The literature review offered, to some extent, a list of relevant themes to discuss. However, due to the complex nature of this research topic, the purpose of the interviews was also to establish a collaborative conversation in order to explore new unforeseen grounds and insights regarding the research topic. Saunders et al. (2009) emphasizes that due to the nature of questions and discussion of semi-structured interviews, audio-recording software would be feasible to apply. Therefore, all the interviews were audio-recorded, so that the researcher was able to focus entirely on the given answers and their intonation. In addition, all interviews were taken, face-to-face, through Skype. After the interview was conducted, the researcher immediately listened to the audio recording again and transcribed the interviews, in order to minimize bias or recall problems.

The following predefined list of themes was applied as a global guideline of the interview:

Figure 3.2: List Of Themes

Introduction

- Background information interviewer
- Background information interviewee
- Perspectives on Social Media

Research topic

- Definition
- Awareness & adoption among companies
- Classification
- Values
- Classification VS values
- Successfactors and best practices
- Future perspective

Again, the interviewee was able to discuss any events, concerns or beliefs regarding the research topic. Therefore additional themes may have been discussed during a particular interview.

3.5 Data analysis

3.5.1 Data analysis strategies

The data analysis is considered to be an important, but also very difficult, aspect of the case study (Yin, 2009). Many researchers have no notion of how the data needs to be analyzed and which indicators to look for. Therefore, it is essential to formulate an overall analytical strategy in which the units of analysis and the appropriate analytical strategies are clarified. Yin (2009) described four general strategies to analyze the case study data. These strategies are not mutually exclusive, and as such suitable to be combined. The strategy that will be used in this research is explained below.

3.5.1.1 Relying on theoretical proposition

The literature review from chapter two elaborates on the relevant units of analysis regarding the research topic. These units of analysis, presented as *the list of relevant themes*, provide further specifications for the data collection and data analysis.

3.5.2 Analytical techniques

In order to derive valuable insights and conclusions from the obtained data, the following analytical technique will be applied:

3.5.2.1 Pattern Matching

Pattern matching is considered to be the most desirable technique for researchers to analyze their data (Yin, 2009). Pattern matching enables the researcher to compare the patterns found with the predicted patterns from the initial theoretical propositions (Saunders et al., 2009; Yin, 2009). If the predicted pattern, based on the conceptual framework from the literature review, matches the pattern that has been found during the case study, the researcher has found an explanation regarding the defined research problem. Therefore, as pattern matching aims to identify specific patterns in the conceived data, this analytical technique contributes to the internal validity of the case study.

This analytical technique will be applied to analyze the empirical data from the semi-structured interviews and match these data with the predicted data from the literature review. If data from both sources correspond, they can be considered an explanation regarding the defined research problem.

4 Research findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses and discusses the qualitative data, gathered from the interviews. In advance of the qualitative data analysis, the interviewees who participated in this research will be introduced briefly. After this introduction the qualitative data will be analyzed and discussed per interviewee, based on the predefined theoretical propositions. After each theme, a short comprehensive conclusion will be formed of the different insights gathered from the interviews.

In addition, a full transcription of each interview can be found in appendix 9.

4.1.1 Introduction interviewees

Based on the insights and experiences gained from the literature study, a nonprobability sample of 5 experts in the field was identified and selected. The following is a brief introduction of the interviewees.

4.1.1.1 Mark van der Wolf

Mark van der Wolf has many years of experience regarding the field of external communication and public relations for several companies. His duties included: consultancy work on Social Media and thought-leadership, with particular emphasis on corporate blogging. He considers blogging one of the leading Social Media tools with a low awareness and adoption rate. In 2007, he wrote an extensive paper upon corporate blogging and the value it can create for companies. Currently, he is Manager External Communications at one of the largest health insurers in the Netherlands, VGZ.

4.1.1.2 Joris van Meel

Joris van Meel is a communication strategist and gives workshops for companies on online communication and Social Media strategy. He is specialized in Social Media as a whole, but primarily focuses on corporate blogging. Currently, he works as a freelance corporate blogging consultant and works as a communication consultant at a Dutch communications agency, Ravestein & Zwart.

4.1.1.3 Freek Janssen

Freek Jansen is currently working as content director at Lewis PR, a global communications consultancy. He is a business consultant in media relations, Social Media, corporate blogging and free publicity, in particular in business-to-business. Besides his work for Lewis PR, he is also the PR and communication executive at Hotel con Corazon in Nicaragua, and an avid blogger on the marketing platform MarketingFacts.

4.1.1.4 Paul Gillin

Paul Gillin comes from the United States and is recognized worldwide as one of the thought leaders on the Social Media phenomenon. Since 2005, he is a popular consultant for marketers and business executives with regard to their Social Media strategy. He has also appeared as a Social Media expert commentator for CNN, PBS, Fox News, MSNBC and many other local television outlets, and has been quoted or interviewed for hundreds of news and radio reports by The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, NPR and the BBC. Furthermore, he writes a monthly column for BtoB magazine and is an active blogger on various blogs. On top of that he has written three books on the Social Media phenomenon: *The New Influencers*, *Secrets of Social Media Marketing* and his new book *Social Marketing to the Business Customer*.

4.1.1.5 Debbie Weil

Debbie Weil comes from the United States and can best be described as an international speaker, author, veteran blogger, marketing strategist and web pioneer. She has been named as one of the Most Influential Women in Technology, by Fast Company, in 2010. She is an expert in the field of Social Media, but focuses particularly on the corporate blogging phenomenon. As a speaker she has inspired, informed and enthused executives and marketers throughout the U.S., Canada, the U.K., Europe, Australia, the Middle East and China. She has been interviewed and quoted frequently by The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, USA Today, Washington Post, Newsday, Fortune, BusinessWeek and numerous other publications. She also published her own book called *The Corporate Blogging Book* in 2006, and published an updated version in 2010.

4.2 Interview themes

As mentioned in chapter three, the interviews are conducted in a somewhat semi-structured manner. This means that prior to the interview, a list of themes is defined, which was derived from the literature study, to be discussed during the interviews. The themes that are directly related to the empirical part of the defined research topic will be analyzed and discussed in this chapter. These are:

Figure 4.1: List Of Relevant Themes

Research topic: corporate blogging

- Definition
- Awareness & adoption among companies
- Classification
- Values
- Classification VS values
- Successfactors and best practices
- Future perspective

Again, a full transcription of the interviews can be found in appendix 9.

4.3 Analysis semi-structured interviews

In this chapter the results regarding corporate blogging will be analyzed and discussed per interviewee, using the defined list of themes as framework.

4.3.1 Definition corporate blogging

4.3.1.1 Findings

4.3.1.1.1 Mark van der Wolf

Wolf argues that it is hard to nail down an exact definition of corporate blogging, because the term refers both to a type of online publication, as well as to the underlying publishing platform. He emphasizes that these different principles originate from the opinion-driven and social nature of the blogosphere, where different personal backgrounds are represented. Wolf, therefore, rather emphasizes some key elements of corporate blogging, namely: an external publishing platform, informative nature, and discussion- and opinion-driven.

4.3.1.1.2 Joris van Meel

Van Meel defines corporate blogging as *a sender-oriented publishing platform for companies, that supports a clear and transparent corporate goal*. He clearly emphasizes the distinction between the company (the writer/sender) and the consumer (the audience, receiver), whereby interaction and discussion between both parties is perfectly possible, but the emphasis is on the sender.

4.3.1.1.3 Freek Janssen

Jansen defines corporate blogging as *the backbone (content hub) of every corporate Social Media strategy*. He argues that a corporate blog is an ideal platform for companies to discuss any information in-depth, upon which other Social Media tools can be deployed in order to serve the corporate blog. In addition, he identifies corporate blogging as sender-orientated platform, but also claims in-depth interaction possibilities with customers.

4.3.1.1.4 Paul Gillin

Gillin emphasizes that corporate blogging is an ever evolving phenomenon. He defines corporate blogging nowadays as *a publishing medium that enables considerable flexibility to explore topics in depth through a moderated discussion*. Gillin points out the distinction between the sender and the receiver, where the author simply owns the conversation. Gillin emphasizes that to a certain extent, the audience has the possibility to jump into the discussion, based on the author's willingness to offer that possibility. In this respect, Gillin argues that the applicability of a corporate blog as an interacting platform is also closely related to the topic and the applied voice on the blog. Engaging or controversial blog posts, for instance, invite people to interact more quickly.

4.3.1.1.5 Debbie Weil

Weil considers corporate blogging as 'content marketing'. She defines corporate blogging as *a transparent channel of communication or publication for companies*. She emphasizes that corporate blogging is becoming a more direct publication tool than a real interaction tool. In addition, Weil argues that, in contrast to other Social Media tools, blogs allow a higher degree of controllability, since corporate blogs are often hosted by the company itself.

4.3.1.2 Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said that the interviewees have more or less corresponding views on the defining characteristics of corporate blogging, such as a long-form, real-time and transparent publishing platform. In particular, the interviewees emphasized that a corporate blog should be applied and serve as a backbone for the company's Social Media presence, where companies can elaborate in-depth on relevant topics. Furthermore, it is notable that most of the interviewees regard corporate blogging as a sender-oriented publishing platform, where interaction and discussion between the sender and the audience is perfectly possible, but is based on the willingness of the sender to provide that possibility.

4.3.2 Awareness and adoption corporate blogging

4.3.2.1 Findings

4.3.2.1.1 Mark van der Wolf

Wolf argues that companies nowadays are increasingly aware of the applicability of the blogging tool as a corporate publishing platform. However, he argues that there is still a lack of awareness of the best practices of corporate blogging and the true value that a company could reap through a

corporate blog, especially nowadays, when companies tend to focus more on the financial values of their business activities rather than the more intangible values that a blog could deliver.

4.3.2.1.2 Joris van Meel

Van Meel argues that there are many untapped opportunities for companies regarding to corporate blogging. Companies often start blogging unprepared, and fail to define a preconceived plan of approach. In addition, Van Meel argues that many managers still experience the transparent and authentic nature of Social Media as a whole as threatening, rather than an opportunity to interact.

Van Meel argues that nowadays, these aspects still cause the avoidance or improper use of the corporate blogs.

4.3.2.1.3 Freek Janssen

Janssen emphasizes that many companies still find it threatening to enter the blogosphere and, therefore, seek excuses to avoid it. Many managers often label blogging as “too time-consuming”. This avoidance is strengthened by the fact that many managers are insufficiently aware of the potential value of a corporate blog for the company. As a Social Media consultant, Janssen argues that it is always essential to inform managers about the principles of corporate blogging and its potential for the company. On the other hand, Janssen argues that companies that nowadays already actively participate in the Social Media are becoming more aware of the importance of a corporate blog as an “informational backbone” for their Social Media strategy.

4.3.2.1.4 Paul Gillin

Gillin emphasizes that in a recent research by B2B magazine (2011) the 500 marketers surveyed, identified corporate blogging as the number-one Social Media tool. From that, he derives that many companies have the blogging tool in their sights. Especially now that the whole “hype” around corporate blogging has vanished, companies are more capable to estimate the real value of corporate blogging. Additionally, he argues that overall, SMEs are less aware of the true potential of a corporate blog. As a result they have a lower adoption rate as opposed to larger enterprises.

4.3.2.1.5 Debbie Weil

Weil emphasizes that corporate blogging is currently in the “phase of awareness”. The hype surrounding corporate blogging vanished, forcing marketers to analyze and identify the real value of corporate blogging. Weil argues that as a result, nowadays, a corporate blog is better targeted and deployed. This results in a gradual comeback for corporate blogging. However, Weil argues that only very few corporate blogs really live up to its value. Only few companies identify, in advance, how they want to measure the ROI of their corporate blog. Because of this ignorance, companies are often unable to assess the success of their corporate blog, making it hard to justify its sustainability over time. In addition, she claims that nowadays, many companies still are locked in their traditional mindset and, therefore, avoid corporate blogging. Weil emphasizes that there is still much progress to be made.

4.3.2.2 Conclusion

Around 2007, corporate blogging was a real hype, causing a high adoption rate, but a low rate of awareness of its potential value. Now that the hype has vanished, companies are becoming more aware of the true essence and value of corporate blogging. This pleads for an increasing awareness and adoption rate of corporate blogging. However, various interviewees argue that much progress

remains to be made with regard to the awareness and adoption rate of corporate blogging. Nowadays, many companies remain locked in their traditional mindset, causing an aversion to the transparent and authentic nature of corporate blogging. But multiple interviewees argued that only few blogs are considered to really live up to the proper value that a corporate blog could have for a company. Furthermore, Gillin argued that compared to larger companies, SMEs in particular are less aware of the potential value of corporate blogging.

All in all it can be concluded that although the hype around corporate blogging vanished and companies are becoming more aware of the true potential of corporate blogging, much ignorance remains regarding the precise value that a company could reap from corporate blogging. This emphasizes that even now, corporate blogging still holds many untapped opportunities for companies. As a result, more extensive research on this subject is feasible, in order to enhance the awareness and adoption rate of corporate blogging.

4.3.3 Classification corporate blog genres

4.3.3.1 Findings

4.3.3.1.1 Mark van der Wolf

Internal blogging

Since Wolf typifies blogs as an external publishing platform, internal blogging does not really fit his definition. Nevertheless, in some instances he acknowledges the existence of internal blogs. An example he mentioned was an internal blog at VGZ, the company he currently works for. The goal of this internal blog was to shorten communication lines between the CEOs and employees, upon which the CEOs could discuss company-related topics with the employees. However, this was considered to be too time-consuming for CEOs to maintain. They therefore decided to terminate the blog.

Based on his definition of corporate blogging, Wolf distinguishes 6 corporate blogs with 2 different dimensions: their focus and their authors. He divides the dimension *focus* into company-driven, subject-driven and vendor-neutral, and he divides the dimension *authors* into one-person and multiple-persons. This results in the following classification:

Figure 4.2: Blog Classification Model

Author Focus	One person	Multiple persons
Company driven	CEO blog	Company blog
Subject driven	Expert blog	Topic blog
Vendor neutral	Guru blog	Industry blog

Source: Wolf (2007)

CEO blog

The CEO blog is a company-driven blog, maintained by the CEO of a company.

Company blog

The company blog is a company-driven blog, maintained by employees with various backgrounds.

Expert blog

An expert blog is a subject-driven blog, maintained by an expert in a certain field, who elaborates on his or her knowledge.

Topic blog

A topic blog is a subject-driven blog, maintained by multiple employees who have an affinity with the subject.

Guru blog

The guru blog is an expert blog that is not branded by a company. Wolf argues that these might emerge when an expert wants to start blogging and a company does not yet have its own corporate blogging space.

Industry blog

This type of blog is much like a topic blog, in that it is written by multiple people that possess certain expertise regarding a certain subject. The authors could include employees from multiple companies. Famous examples are FrankWatching and Marketing Facts.

However, it has to be mentioned that nowadays, Mark van der Wolf encounters fewer corporate blogs that are maintained by one single person. He considers blogs maintained by multiple persons to have been proven the most successful over the years.

4.3.3.1.2 Joris van Meel

Van Meel classifies corporate blogs, based on the topic and goal of a corporate blog. He distinguishes the following genres:

CEO blog

A blog that is written by a company's CEO. Van Meel argues that a CEO-blog provides an ideal opportunity to inform employees, as well as stakeholders and customers, of his or her occupations.

Customer service blog

A blog maintained by the technical support staff, where customers can get real-time product support on commonly encountered problems.

Expert blog / Thought leadership blog

A blog, maintained by the thought-leaders within a company. Van Meel argues that this type of blog is an ideal opportunity for knowledge-intensive companies to elaborate on their expertise, in-depth.

Topic blog

A blog often maintained by multiple employees and focused on a certain company-related subject, in a creative manner. The topic can be almost anything, as long as it has some relation with the company's activities. Van Meel argues that this is really up to the company's own creativity.

4.3.3.1.3 Freek Janssen

Janssen classifies corporate blogs based on its goal and targeted audience. Companies need to overthink, beforehand, what goal they pursue with their corporate blog and how this corresponds

with their Social Media identity as a whole. Subsequently, companies should give further substance to their corporate blog. Based on this dimension, Janssen identified the following corporate blogs:

Internal blogs

Apart from the fact that Janssen argues that a corporate blog should fit an external Social Media strategy, he also acknowledges the use of internal blogs as long as there is a clear distinction between the sender and the receiver. Janssen argues that internal blogs could be used for internal communication among employees, in order to support them in their work. However, Janssen considers internal platforms that allow every participant to start topics to be more community-oriented.

Expert blog / Thought leadership blog

This is a corporate blogging genre that Janssen frequently applies for his clients. Janssen argues that knowledge-intensive companies in particular can greatly benefit from their expertise by providing the blogosphere with unique knowledge through their corporate blog, and gain thought-leadership. Janssen argues that this blogging genre is considered to be especially suitable for business-to-business companies, since these markets often hold a higher demand for expertise.

Customer service blog

A sender-oriented blog maintained by the support staff, focused on the commonly encountered problems, where the consumer can find tips and manuals to circumvent commonly encountered problems.

Topic blog

Any topic that is company-related can be discussed on a topic blog, but here, the presence of a predefined “blogging plan” is of great importance to clarify the topic, purpose and the targeted audience of the blog for all parties involved. Furthermore, Janssen argues that a topic blog is generally less in-depth than an Expert blog. Therefore, a topic blog is especially well-suited for business-to-consumer companies, where the emphasis is more on the establishment of a positive customer experience.

4.3.3.1.4 Paul Gillin

Gillin argues that nowadays, blogs with multiple authors are more successful than blogs with a single author. He gives several reasons for this observed trend. Firstly, many companies find blogging very time-consuming. By maintaining a blog with multiple people, less time is demanded from each individual. Secondly, he emphasizes that multiple author blogs reflect different points of view, making the blog more interesting to read. Gillin argues that his classification, published in his book *Secrets of Social Media Marketing*, still is adequate, more or less, today. This classification primarily relies on the corporate blog author.

Internal blogs

Gillin argues that nowadays, internal blogs are used in particular to support employees throughout the company in their work activities. For instance, internal blogs can serve as an ideal tool to provide up-to-date client information to the sales department, such as client activity, client relations and client interests. This enables salesmen to apply more efficient sales practices.

CEO blog

If applied correctly, a CEO-blog can be an ideal platform for a CEO to provide company and personal insights, and enter a real-time conversation with all kinds of constituent.

Executive blog

An executive blog concerns a personal blogging space on a company website, maintained by a senior manager or executive. It is, as such, a good way for a company to showcase its management team's talent and elaborate on their expertise, from multiple dimensions.

Group blog

Gillin argues that this blogging genre in particular is a popular approach, nowadays. A group blog is maintained by multiple authors, who in most cases blog on a scheduled and rotating basis. This ensures varied content and demands less time from an individual. Gillin, however, emphasizes that the presence of clear guidelines is essential, elaborating on the blogs' goals, editorial profile and desired voice, in order to avoid misunderstandings.

Company blog platform

This genre is considered a blogging platform where multiple employees have their own blogging space on the company-branded website. This allows employees to get into direct touch with consumers and to elaborate on their own profession.

Topical blog

A topical blog is a platform focused on one certain topic that is interesting for employees and consumers. The topical blog is maintained by multiple employees, and the focus is on the establishment of a mutually collaborative conversation that generates product insights for de consumer, and customer feedback for the employees. Gillin points out that a customer service blog, for instance, could be considered a type of topical blogging.

Advocacy blog

An advocacy blog is used when a company wants express its point of view on legal issues or public policies. Gillin argues that the opinion-driven and controversial nature of an advocacy blog often positively affects the amount of interaction.

Promotional blog

Gillin emphasizes that corporate blogs are increasingly used to promote products in a transparent, informal and informative manner. Since blogs have great potential in the search engines, targeted keyword optimization could be very beneficial to search engine visibility, resulting in more visitors and, consequently, a higher lead generation activity.

4.3.3.1.5 Debbie Weil

Weil points out that there are many different ways to apply a corporate blog, as long it is of value and engaging for the audience to read. The classification that Weil suggests is based on the goal that a company wants to pursue with their blog. She, therefore, argues that a company should have a clear determination on this, before they launch the corporate blog. Based on this dimension, Weil classified the following genres of corporate blogging:

Internal blogs

Internal blogs can be used as a knowledge management tool to disseminate information in a company. She also emphasized that an internal CEO's blog could be very useful in bigger companies, to shorten communication lines and make the employees feel more appreciated by and connected to the company.

CEO blog

This can be a useful tool to broadcast the message that a company wants to convey to both employees and consumers. It gives a CEO a human voice and can, therefore, serve as an ideal icebreaker for all parties involved, where customers, potential partners and/or media can get a handle on the CEO's personal values and occupations.

Thought leader

Weil considers thought-leadership to be one of the most suitable ways to use a corporate blog. This enables knowledge-intensive companies, such as consultants or entrepreneurs, to discuss a focused topic in-depth and become a thought-leader within their industry.

Public relations

Weil argues that corporate blogging can be a good way to provide a blend of customer service and useful information for customers. The goal here is for a company to get into direct contact with customers and create an ongoing conversation about the features and functionality of their products and services, in an open and honest way. Weil emphasizes that this is a good opportunity to build confidence among prospects and customers, and to further strengthen the customer loyalty.

Marketing

Weil argues that corporate blogging nowadays is increasingly used for branding, promoting products or even creating a viral. Weil argues that the interactive, real-time and searchable nature of blogs is well-suited to serve as a powerful and cost-efficient tool to add to a company's marketing communication mix.

4.3.3.2 Conclusion

In order to design a consistent corporate blog classification model based on the conducted interviews, it is important to first note that most interviewees used different dimensions to build their classification model upon. The blog genres in some classification models tend to overlap to some extent. Gillin, for instance, acknowledged that the group blog and topical blog, emerging from his classification, contain some overlap. In order to design a legitimate corporate blog classification model, it is important to have a clear understanding of the applied dimensions for building the classification. A further important criterion is that the final classification model provides a clear distinction between the different corporate blog genres, but includes the different blog genres that were mentioned during the interviews.

Based on the abovementioned requirements, the classification model of Wolf was applied as a rationale for further development. This resulted in the following classification model. How this model contains the different blog genres that were mentioned during the interviews, can be found in appendix 10.

Note that the "vendor neutral" perspective has been left out, since this perspective elaborates on blogs that do not originate from the company itself.

Figure 4.3: Corporate Blog Classification Model

Author Focus	One Author	Multiple Authors
Company driven	Employee blog	Company blog
Subject driven	Expert blog	Topic blog

The 4 classified corporate blog genres are further described below.

1. Employee blog. An internal or external blog that is written and maintained by a single employee. Popular types are the executive blog or CEO-blog. Employee blogs are especially suitable to capitalize on someone’s expertise within the company’s field of activities. Since corporate blogs are often maintained by employees that are hierarchically at some distance from colleagues and customers, an employee blog is considered to be an ideal opportunity for those employees to personally enter a transparent and real-time conversation with all kinds of constituents and gather unfiltered feedback from different parties.
2. Expert blog. An external blog that is written and maintained by a single employee. An expert blog is an ideal publishing platform for an expert to show off his or her wealth of knowledge on a given topic. By providing unique knowledge to the blogosphere, one could gain thought leadership on a certain subject and people will be more inclined to visit the blog.
3. Company blog. An internal or external blog that is written by multiple authors, often from various backgrounds. Company blogs tend to allow a high variety of central topics, but are company-driven in a sense that the topics emerge directly from the company’s activities such as products, services, vision and strategy. Therefore, Company blogs are considered to be a good opportunity for outsiders to get a good sense of the company. Genres of company blogs include: Customer Service blogs, Advocacy blogs and Promotional blogs.
4. Topic blog. An external blog that goes one step further than a Company blog. Aside from merely focusing on company driven topics, a Topical blog strives to provide a complete source of information, tips and news concerning a certain subject, product or industry. In that sense, topic blogs are more subject-driven.

4.3.4 Obtainable values corporate blogging

During the interviews, the interviewees mentioned a wide variety of values a company could reap through corporate blogging. In order to provide some structure, these values will be discussed according to the different organizational areas, using the framework from chapter 2.3.4.2.

4.3.4.1 Findings

4.3.4.1.1 Mark van der Wolf

Human resource management

Since blogs are controllable, it allows internal blogging for companies which can be a very useful tool for internal collaboration and mutual knowledge sharing among employees.

Additionally, Wolf argues that trusting employees to blog and allowing them to enter a discussion with customers or a CEO may be beneficial to staff morale.

Furthermore, Wolf states that a corporate blog can be an ideal platform to reach out to new recruits, who otherwise might have been out of reach through the traditional media.

Customer relationship management

Wolf argues that a corporate blog is an ideal platform for a company to elaborate in-depth on complex topics and to discuss facts and opinions with customers. This way, companies are able to gather customer insights and further engage their customers, which will strengthen the mutual bond between the company and its customers.

In addition, Wolf argues that the feedback and insights from customers could serve as an input for the creation of a customer service blog, elaborating on the solutions for common issues and experienced problems. Wolf argues that this may result in an interactive knowledge-intensive community, where customers help each other with encountered problems via the corporate blog. This will further strengthen the bond between the customers and the company.

Public relations

Wolf argues that, due to the sender-oriented, long-form and interconnecting nature of the blogosphere, a company could enhance their coverage and share of voice. Wolf explains that this, for instance, could be a good way as well to create public support in favor of or against upcoming legalization of industry standards. Especially in emerging countries, this is an opportunity that often cannot be reached through the traditional media.

In addition, Wolf argues that the traditional media are becoming more focused on sensation, rather than on telling an authentic and objective story. Therefore, companies should seek new ways to communicate their message. Wolf emphasizes that corporate blogging could be a good tool for companies to differentiate from its competitors, as well as the traditional media, and communicate an authentic and objective message.

In this way, the social interactive nature of the blogosphere could be a good opportunity for companies to stay connected with existing relations or to meet new people.

Research and development

Wolf argues that the opinion-driven nature of blogs makes it a good platform to gather customer insights. Companies could obtain intelligence in customer preferences, to be used as an input to enhance company products or services. Providing the right tools to customers could even lead to a co-creative culture.

Marketing

Wolf emphasizes that the open and topic-driven nature of blogging can be beneficial to a company's social identity and branding.

Furthermore, Wolf argues that the blogosphere is a good opportunity to generate coverage that is on the message, and thus enhance market awareness of the company's statements and opinions. Providing valuable and frequently updated content will also positively affect the search engine visibility, resulting in more visitors on the blog.

Sales

As Wolf has pointed out during the interview, corporate blogging increases the coverage, market awareness and the company's reputation. These factors may positively affect the amount of generated leads.

Furthermore, Wolf argues that corporate blogs may help the salesmen to stay on topic and to elaborate on the company's vision, products and services. This may positively affect the sales efficiency.

4.3.4.1.2 Joris van Meel

Human resource management

Van Meel argues that external corporate blogs can be a good platform for internal knowledge sharing among employees. Van Meel emphasizes that blogging employees not only inform the public of their occupations and activities, but also their colleagues. This helps colleagues to keep abreast of each other's activities, ideally through RSS notifications, enabling employees to collaborate more effectively.

Furthermore, Van Meel argues that corporate blogging is a good way to expose the employees' talent to the public, but also to colleagues, which may be beneficial to the morale among employees.

In addition, Van Meel argues that corporate blogging helps bloggers and employees to develop in their own field, because forces them to think over their own expertise and extensively elaborate it and discuss it with the public. This helps to stay on topic and to identify new developments and trends in the market.

Customer relationship management

Van Meel argues that corporate blogging can be a good tool to establish a real-time and transparent dialog with both existing customers and prospects. This helps to further engage with the public. In addition, Van Meel emphasizes that the real-time and informative nature of blogs also offer the ability to provide real-time product support to customers on common encountered problems. This even helps companies to identify early warnings and stay ahead of negative virals.

Public relations

Van Meel states that corporate blogging could be extremely beneficial to knowledge-intensive companies in positioning themselves as a thought leader, within their field. This enhances the coverage on their desired topic and establishes brand awareness within their field. As such, it is considered a good networking-tool, too, for companies to maintain and to expand their network with.

In addition, Van Meel argues that consumers are nowadays increasingly avoiding the traditional media. Therefore, corporate blogging is considered to be a critical communication platform for companies to reach consumers, communicate an authentic story, create a trustworthy image and humanize the company.

Research and development

Van Meel emphasizes that corporate blogging could be used to establish a real-time dialog with the customers. This enables companies to monitor their markets and gather valuable customer feedback, which can serve as an input to develop and improve their products and services.

Marketing

Van Meel argues that the authentic and social nature of blogs, as well as the ability to establish an online identity and obtain thought leadership, could be very beneficial to company's reputation. Therefore, corporate blogging is also relevant for personal and corporate branding. Furthermore Van Meel emphasizes that corporate blogging positively affects the search engine optimization. Therefore a company's blog and website often enjoy a higher search engine visibility. This enables a company to reach out to prospects and establish an increasing amount of visitors on the websites.

Sales

Van Meel points out that corporate blogging is an ideal way to connect with prospects and communicate on the company's products and services, resulting in more efficient sales practices and a higher sales rate.

4.3.4.1.3 Freek Janssen

Human resource management

Janssen argues that the informative nature of blogs, might be a good knowledge source to support internal communication and collaboration among employees. This way a blog can support employees in their work activities.

Customer relationship management

Janssen argues that blogs, especially topic blogs, can be very meaningful to entering into a dialog, further engaging customers and enhancing customer loyalty. In addition, Janssen argues that the informative and real-time nature of blogs offer a good platform for companies to identify frequently asked questions or common encountered problems by customers and elaborate on them through a solution-focused blog.

Public relations

Janssen emphasizes that the long-form nature of blogs are especially well-suited for technology companies, that possess a wealth of knowledge. By applying this knowledge in a corporate blog, a company could position themselves as a thought-leader within their field.

Furthermore, Janssen argues that corporate blogging offers some indirect values, in particular when a company offers valuable content on their blog. Others might pick up on this and recommend the company, resulting in an expanding network. However, Janssen considers this to be difficult to measure.

Janssen argues that the traditional media are becoming less effective now. It is, therefore, essential that companies seek new innovative ways to maintain their public relations.

Research and development

Janssen argues that a corporate blog could deliver customer feedback and enable the company to tap on the customers' creativity. This intelligence can serve as input for the development of new products or features.

Marketing

As Janssen already pointed out, corporate blogging is a good platform to further engage customers in an interactive way. This is beneficial to the company's reputation and goodwill. Janssen argues that corporate blogs often score well in search engines, due to their interconnecting nature and rich content, allowing them reach out to certain niches and prospects. Consequently this way companies can attract more visitors on their blog and website.

Janssen further explains that companies could, for instance, start a contest concerning their product and tap creative ideas from their customers. By allowing customers to vote on each other's ideas, a company is able to further engage their customers and might even create a viral over time. Lewis, for instance, established a blog for their client Adobe. On this blog Adobe asks its customers to use their design software to edit a photo in the most funny or remarkable way. With the submissions, a contest was held in which customers could vote for each other's creations. This is a good way to tap the creativity from customers and further strengthen the mutual bond, in an interactive way.

Sales

Since blogs often score well in search engines, corporate blogging can lead to an increasing amount of visitors on the company's blog and website. Janssen argues that this may indirectly lead to an increasing amount of sales, although this is considered to be difficult to substantiate.

4.3.4.1.4 Paul Gillin

Human resource management

Gillin emphasizes that corporate blogs could be ideal as an internal knowledge tool for employees to turn to while conducting their work. For instance, this could provide the employee with up-to-date client information, which allows a more focused interaction with the customer.

Customer relationship management

Gillin emphasizes that blogs are an ideal way for companies to talk directly to their customers, in a personal manner. That way, the long-form nature of blogs invites the establishment of a more thoughtful and longer discussion between the consumer and a company, as opposed to short-form social tools. This allows companies to further engage with customers and enhance customer loyalty. In addition, these aspects allow companies to establish a knowledge-intensive platform on common encountered product problems. These days, gathering real-time product feedback might well be a critical competence for companies in order to identify failures and act quickly if necessary.

Public relations

Gillin argues that blogs are the best way for companies to discuss complex topics in-depth. He emphasizes that blogs are a suitable platform for companies to effectively elaborate on new products, operational processes and the company's expertise. Therefore, blogs are the best social tool to establish thought-leadership. This is particularly meaningful for business-to-business, because companies often demand to do business with the leaders in their field. In addition, Gillin argues that the personal nature of blogs is a good opportunity to humanize the company towards the public.

Gillin further argues that the opinion-driven and interconnecting nature of blogs also could be beneficial for creating public support for certain company points of view, or interests.

Furthermore, Gillin emphasizes the importance of companies to use Social Media tools, such as blogs, in order to stay connected with their stakeholders, since most people have turned away from the traditional media.

Research and development

Gillin argues that, depending on the topic and the voice of a corporate blog, a blog can be a useful tool to gauge valuable extensive customer insights and feedback for the development of new products or features. Gillin points out, however, that co-creative practices would be better suited at a community-driven platform, than at a blog platform, which is more sender-oriented.

Marketing

Gillin argues that corporate blogging is a good way to reach out to the public, or a certain niche, and to instantly elaborate on any desired topic. The interconnecting and real-time nature of blogs allow companies to easily generate coverage on their topic. In addition, Gillin argues that, although it is difficult to measure the impact of blogging on metrics such as leads and sales, a side-effect of corporate blogging might be a higher search engine visibility. Search engines often prefer blogs, because of their rich content, interactive and interconnecting nature. Gillin emphasizes that consumers' research process nowadays begins with an online search engine. Therefore, good rankings in search engines can be very beneficial. Gillin points out that some companies, for instance Indium and online marketer Hubspot, actively apply long-tail keyword optimization on their blogs to raise awareness and reach prospects through search engines, even internationally.

Sales

Gillin acknowledges the value of corporate blogging for market awareness and its ability to reach prospects, and consequently argues that corporate blogging might lead to a higher lead generation activity. Nevertheless, Gillin points out that the direct effect of blogs on leads and sales are difficult to substantiate.

4.3.4.1.5 Debbie Weil

Human resource management

Weil emphasizes that corporate blogging has several values regarding the human resources of a company. Trusting the employees to blog, openly and honestly, to the public is a good way to expose internal expertise and talents. In addition, Weil argues that internal corporate blogs could be ideally applied to shorten communication lines and make the employees feel more appreciated by and connected to the company. Weil argues that these aspects often positively affects the employees' morale. Furthermore, Weil emphasizes that corporate blogs can be beneficial to the recruitment of new employees, as these new recruits can get an impression of the company before they apply and, therefore, are more likely to fit in.

In addition, Weil argues that the informational nature of blogs could be applied as a knowledge management tool to disseminate information within a company.

Customer relationship management

Weil argues that blogs are often topic-driven and as such a good tool to get focused feedback and insights from customers. Furthermore, a company's blog shows willingness to participate in a transparent and authentic conversation, which can further humanize the company and strengthen the relationship between the customers and the company.

Public relations

Weil emphasizes that one of the greatest but unforeseen values of corporate blogging is its ability to become a real-time publisher, without any interference of the traditional media. Weil says that a blogging platform is pre-eminently suited for knowledge-intensive companies who want to authentically discuss their field of expertise in-depth with their audience, and become a thought-leader. This will also positively affect the company's coverage, because of the interconnecting nature that blogs possess.

Furthermore, Weil argues that authentic, transparent and personal dialogs on corporate blogs also will humanize the company in the eyes of the public. In addition, Weil considers corporate blogging to be a still innovative way to communicate with consumers. As such, it can be a good tool to differentiate one from direct competitors.

Research and development

Weil argues that the customer feedback and insights, obtained through the corporate blog, could be applied as a market research tool to identify customer needs and trends. This can serve as valuable insight for research and for developing new features and products.

Marketing

Weil acknowledges that blogs possess many elements to get a good ranking in search engines. Therefore, a blog could be beneficial to the search engine visibility and brand awareness, resulting in more visits to the corporate blog and website. Thus, Weil emphasizes that blogging could also be a good way to reach out to certain desired niches, which is often hard to manage through the traditional media.

Additionally, Weil argues that a corporate blog enables a company to take its social responsibility and communicate authentically and openly, which positively influences the corporate reputation.

Sales

Weil argues that the positive influence a blog has on various marketing practices may result in an increasing sales activity. However, Weil argues that this is often hard to trace back.

4.3.4.2 Conclusion

The interviewees elaborated on a great variation of corporate blog values. In order to create a comprehensive overview of the values, it is important to first provide a clear understanding of the various variables mentioned and on the dimensions these variables originate from. A distinction has been made between the following dimensions:

- Defining blog characteristics
- Enabling business competences
- Obtainable business values

These dimensions will be discussed in order to provide a good understanding of this complex subject.

4.3.4.2.1 Defining blog characteristics and business competences

The following enumeration elaborates on the different characteristics of blogs and the corresponding enabling business competences for companies.

Figure 4.4: Corporate Blog Nature & Competence Model

Blog nature	➔	Business competence
Web 2.0 medium		Differentiate from competitors & traditional media
Publishing platform		Internal or external communication
Sender-oriented		Become a publisher
Real-time		Instant publishing
Long-form		Content intensive
Social		
Personal driven		Humanization / short communication lines
Interaction		2-way dialogs with stakeholders
Open & Transparent		Authentic messaging channel
Interconnection		Wide coverage
Topic driven		Focused communication
Controllable		
Self-hostable & Moderation		Own the platform, content & conversation

4.3.4.2.2 Values corporate blogging

The above-mentioned blog characteristics and business competences results enable a wide variety of values for companies. These values will be discussed below per organizational functional area.

Human resource management

Collaboration among employees

The real-time, controllable, interactive and long-form nature of blogs allow employees to establish a knowledge-intensive content hub. This way, employees can share knowledge, internally or externally, and inform colleagues on current work activities.

Staff morale

Trusting employees to expose their talents to the public on a company blog and to enter a real-time and personal dialog with stakeholders may positively affect staff morale.

New recruits

Since a blog offers a company their own publishing platform, it is a good practice to differentiate from competitors and bypass the traditional media. This way a company can reach out to new recruits, who may have been unreachable through the traditional media, and simultaneously inform them of the company's ideals, products, services and process.

Personal development

By trusting and allowing employees to blog, the long-form, topic-driven and interactive nature of blogs enables them to elaborate on their knowledge, gather extensive feedback, and enter a meaningful discussion regarding their field of expertise with the public. This helps employees to stay on topic and identify emerging market needs and trends.

Customer relationship management

Further engage with customers

Blogs enable companies to further engage their customers in multiple ways. The real-time, social, long-form and topic-driven nature of blogs enable companies to establish a knowledge-intensive content hub and enter into more meaningful conversations with customers. This allows companies to gather focused customer insights, which can be applied in order to optimize their interaction practices with customers.

Customer service

By gathering customer insights and feedback, companies can determine frequently asked questions or common encountered problems. This enables a company to establish an extensive, solution-focused knowledgebase and provide immediate support to customers. In addition, it might serve as a damage control solution, since the company will be able to deal with problems quickly, before the problems reach the critical mass.

Enhance customer loyalty

By taking a company's social responsibility and participating personally in transparent, authentic, more meaningful and real-time conversations, a company can further strengthen the bond with and enhance the loyalty of their customers.

Public relations

Public content hub

As has been mentioned, a blog provides a company with a long-form platform for instant publishing, without any interference of the traditional media. It is, therefore, a good opportunity to establish an up-to-date and authentic corporate content hub, for the public to access and use any information they want.

Effective communication

Just as the traditional media are considered to become less effective, a corporate blog is an effective communication channel to differentiate from the traditional media and competitors.

Reputation

The blog characteristics could be beneficial to a company's public reputation in many ways. One of the most frequently mentioned values that a company could reap through corporate blogging is to establish a reputation of thought leadership. The long-form and topic-driven nature of blogs offers an

ideal platform to elaborate on the company's expertise and gain thought leadership within their field.

Furthermore, the social nature of blogs allows a company to humanize itself and to spread authentic messages, which result in a more trustworthy image.

In addition, the long-form and interactive nature of blogs allow companies to elaborate on their own company's products, ideals, rationale, vision and processes. Therefore, a corporate blog can be a good way to ground and distribute a company's public reputation.

Media coverage

Since a blog is a good tool to provide a comprehensive overview of a company's rationale and expertise, the transparent and interconnecting nature of blogs enables other blogs or online media outlets to easily refer to a corporate blog and (re)use its available content. This way, companies easily can create a share of voice and expand their coverage.

Create support

A corporate blog can be a good tool to bypass traditional media and generate a share of voice. Additionally, the long-form and interactive nature of blogs allows companies to discuss complex topics in-depth. These aspects make a corporate blog a good platform to create support for certain corporate interests, for instance in favor or against upcoming legalizations or industry standards.

Networking

The social and long-form nature of blogs enables companies to maintain and expand their network, in a personal and authentic manner. It has been argued as well that, since most people turned away from traditional media, it is becoming increasingly important for companies to seek communication channels other than traditional media, to remain in touch with their stakeholders.

Research and Development

Gather inputs for research and development

The topic-driven, real-time, long-form and interactive nature that blogs possess makes the blogosphere pre-eminently suitable to serve as a market research tool. Real-time dialogs with customers and prospects enable companies to gather valuable customer insights and identify market demands and trends. In extreme cases, it might even be possible to establish a co-creative approach with customers, allowing them to participate actively in the research and development process. Although it has to be pointed out that co-creative practices would be better suited at a community-driven platform, than at a blog platform, which is more sender-oriented.

Marketing

Messaging

The interconnecting nature of blogs facilitates the share of voice and as a result, blogs are considered to be an ideal tool to create coverage on the message. Additionally, providing engaging content might even lead to a viral.

Social identity and branding

The social nature of blogs enables companies to participate in personal and authentic conversations, and easily spread their desired message. Showing the willingness to participate in these conversations may establish a more incorruptible and trustworthy image. In addition, the topic-

driven and long-form nature of blogs provide an ideal platform to establish a content hub around the company's expertise, and create an identity of thought leadership. Corporate blogging is, therefore, considered to be a very effective way to shape a social identity and brand the company's products or services.

Search engine visibility

The long-form, interconnecting and interactive nature of blogs positively influences the search engine visibility as it anticipates some of the defining aspects of search engine optimization.

Reach niches

Since corporate blogging allows a company to bypass the traditional media and generate a good search engine visibility, it can be an ideal platform to reach out to certain niches that were previously out of reach or very costly to reach through the traditional media.

Market awareness

As corporate blogging helps a company to generate coverage on the message and to increase the search engine visibility, it positively affects the market awareness.

Reach prospects

A greater extent of market awareness may positively affect the company's ability to reach prospects.

More visitors

A greater extent of search engine visibility and market awareness may result in more visitors to the corporate blog and website.

Sales

Sales Efficiency

Allowing employees to blog enables them to communicate on the company's products and services and to stay on topic. Consequently, employees are better aware of the emerging developments within their field. These aspects may result in more efficient sales practices and the identification of new sales opportunities.

In addition, the reputation and market awareness that a company could gain through corporate blogging might have a convincing effect in the customer's decision making process, resulting in more efficient sales practices.

Furthermore, since corporate blogging allows a company to bypass the traditional media, more efficient sales practices can be applied.

Sales & leads

Consequently, the values that a company could reap, from a marketing perspective, might result in a higher number of sales & leads, even though that is still considered to be hard to substantiate.

4.3.4.2.3 Corporate blogging value contribution

The initial model below provides an overview of the enabling business competences of corporate blogging and the organization's functional areas they contribute to primarily. These insights have been acquired during the interviews and further elaborated on and computed in Appendix 11.

Figure 4.5: Corporate Blog Value Model

Business competence	Highest value degree
Differentiate from competitors & traditional media	Public relations
Internal or external communication	Human resource management
Become a publisher	Public relations
Instant publishing	Customer relationship management Research & Development
Content intensive	Customer relationship management Research & Development
Humanization / short communication lines	Customer relationship management
2-way dialogs with stakeholders	Research & Development
Authentic messaging channel	Public relations
Wide coverage	Sales
Focused communication	Research & Development
Own the platform, content & conversation	Human resource management

4.3.5 Best practices and success factors corporate blogging

4.3.5.1 Findings

4.3.5.1.1 Mark van der Wolf

Wolf argues that in the Netherlands, corporate blogging became a hype around 2007. Many companies were afraid to miss the boat, so they just started blogging, without thinking it through and without a comprehensive plan of approach. Wolf emphasizes that this caused many corporate blogs to disappear over the years. Wolf argues that a plan of approach should at least discuss what voice to use, what goals to aim for, who is responsible for maintaining the blog and which topics in the company's field are to be discussed. Companies should be aware as well that blogging is a time-consuming activity and that it might take a while, sometimes years, before the blog is really picked up by the audience. In order for a corporate blog to succeed, companies should acknowledge and adopt these aspects.

Furthermore, Wolf argues that a corporate blog could be especially beneficial to a company when it operates in a fast-moving market, since there will be a wide variety of topics to discuss. Wolf also argues that in order to be successful, the content of a corporate blog should be either informative or funny. In addition, Wolf points out that SMEs in particular could greatly benefit from corporate blogs, since they are closer to the market and often possess a wealth of knowledge, ideal to write engaging blog posts.

4.3.5.1.2 Joris van Meel

Van Meel emphasizes that companies should become more aware of the organizational requirements to successfully enter a social and personal dialog with customers. He points out that companies must be willing to be open and transparent, and willing to trust their employees to talk directly to the public. A company will also need a clear plan of approach, elaborating on the goal, the topics of interest, the added value of their blog, the ROI metrics and the authors. Van Meel emphasizes as well that it is essential for companies to ask themselves what organizational resources are required in order to adhere to the predefined plan of approach. Van Meel explains that sometimes it might, for instance, be feasible for employees to work on their writing skills before they start publishing blog posts. In addition, Van Meel points out that a company's social identity strongly depends on the employees. The chosen strategy for the blog should therefore fit the company's employees in order to succeed.

Furthermore, Van Meel provided some tips to write engaging content:

1. Learn by just doing it. Making a mistake is only human.
2. Focus on one topic. It has to be clear what the blog is about.
3. Do not make your blog posts too long. Around 500 words would be enough.
4. Write targeted content, maybe even indiscriminate. This might trigger a reaction more easily and keeps your blog post short.
5. Provide helpful hints and use bullets. Short lists and tips often make blog posts more interesting to read.
6. Write for search. Choosing a hot topic and applying popular keywords in the blog post can positively affect the positioning in Google, and therefore attract more visitors to your blog.

Van Meel argues that a corporate blog must reflect the company as a whole. He, therefore, considers it to be easier for SMEs to blog. They are more focused than larger companies, which makes it easier to adapt, create a voice and find an interesting topic. Larger companies with multiple divisions might have a harder time to establish the right reflection of their company through their corporate blog. On the other hand, Van Meel argues that larger companies might more easily find an audience for their blog, since they often have a wider target group to relate to.

Finally, Van Meel emphasizes that the value of corporate blogging lies in the real-time and personal dialog between individuals. As nowadays, this is an increasingly important communication competence for companies, there should be no difference in applicability for business-to-business companies as opposed to business-to-consumer companies.

4.3.5.1.3 Freek Janssen

Janssen argues that corporate blogging is especially suitable for knowledge-intensive companies, since such companies often produce products or services that are more technical and expensive. As a result, customers often want to read some in-depth information on the company's expertise, prior to making a purchase. Janssen argues that this causes corporate blogging to be more suitable for business-to-business goods and less suitable for business-to-consumer goods, where the focus is more on creating a positive brand experience.

Furthermore, Janssen emphasizes that companies need to be aware of the fact that corporate blogging is a time-consuming activity. Blogging is for the long-term and requires frequent updates in

order to establish a vast group of readers. It is, therefore, advisable to have more than 1 author on a corporate blog, which will be less demanding for the individual. Janssen also argues that a good way to ease the pressure on the regular authors and provide some unique insights on a blog, is inviting guest writers to write about their experiences and expertise on the focal topic. In addition, these aspects advocate for the presence of a predefined blogging plan, where the focal topic, authors and goal of the corporate blog is clearly elaborated.

In contrast to other opinions, Janssen points out that a corporate blog post does not necessarily need to be written by the company itself. Lewis, the company he works for, offers ghostwriters for companies who do not have the time or writing skills to maintain a corporate blog on their own. In these cases, the expertise and content comes from the company, but the blog post itself is written by Lewis. Janssen argues that this is an ideal solution for delivering substantive and skillful-written content, since both parties do what they do best.

Furthermore, Janssen, from his experiences, finds that larger companies are more willing and have more resources to create and maintain a corporate blog. They also have a larger variety of topics to discuss on their corporate blog. However, Janssen argues that blogging is an inexpensive channel to communicate expertise, and as such it can also be a valuable communication platform for SMEs.

4.3.5.1.4 Paul Gillin

Gillin points out that the ease with which a corporate blog can be started, has been a pitfall for many companies. Gillin argues that corporate blogging is a long-form publication platform, and that, therefore, structure is needed. This advocates the use of a comprehensive plan of approach, elaborating on the bigger goal of the blog, the editorial profile, the audience, the topic, the metrics to measure ROI, the voice, and possible policies and ethics to keep in mind. Gillin emphasizes that such a plan of approach helps a company to avoid internal misunderstandings, make necessary choices and to become aware of the resources required to maintain the blog and to measure the value of the blog.

Gillin argues that blogging is especially suitable for SMEs, since they often possess a wealth of expertise and are close to the market. Therefore, SMEs often are well aware of the topics of interest and the voice that is applied within their field. Furthermore, blogging is a low-cost publishing platform, which can seriously cut the spending on PR and advertising for SMEs.

Additionally, Gillin points out that many companies see the traditional market as their market and are unaware of the emerging international markets. Gillin argues that this ignorance occurs with SMEs in particular, which is very unfortunate, because a blog is a great opportunity for companies to reach an international public and to establish an international business.

Furthermore, Gillin states that thought leadership is particularly beneficial to business-to-business companies, since there is often a great need for detailed information, and companies often demand to do business with the leaders in their field. Nevertheless, Gillin argues that nowadays, a real-time dialog with customers and the establishment of an online social identity is a beneficial competence for any company.

4.3.5.1.5 Debbie Weil

Weil emphasizes that before they engage, companies should be aware of the required mindset to successfully act in the Social Media, and really believe in open, authentic and real-time communication. Weil also emphasizes that corporate blogging requires patience and commitment. She argues that nowadays, few companies fully live up to the ethics of corporate blogging, such as being authentic and open, providing regularly updates, writing high-quality and engaging content, and applying mutual linking on the blog if relevant. Weil strongly recommends that the short-form social tools, such as Twitter and Facebook, should be applied in support of the corporate blog, rather than act as separate social communication channels. Weil argues that ideally, these short-form tools could be applied as a promotion tool for the corporate blog, by alerting people when a new blog post is published.

In addition, Weil argues that a plan of approach is strongly advisable, before a company starts up a blog. This plan of approach should elaborate on the goal, the authors, the audience, the focal topic and the blogging ethics and policies. Furthermore, Weil argues that companies must ask themselves what value they want to add to the blogosphere, through their blog. She pointed out that having multiple authors from different backgrounds will provide more varied and interesting content on a corporate blog. Nevertheless, Weil emphasizes that a plan of approach should only serve as guidance, rather than a set of restrictions. Blogging is about spontaneity, rather than planning.

In addition, Weil argues that in general, corporate blogs are especially suitable for knowledge-intensive companies, since these companies can pre-eminently exploit the long-form nature of blogs. Weil also considers corporate blogs to be more suitable for SMEs, since these companies can adapt more easily and are closer to the market. It can also be suitable for larger companies, however, she emphasizes that the larger companies in particular still struggle with adjusting their mindset to the new media.

4.3.5.2 Conclusion

In order to draw a comprehensive conclusion, a clear distinction has been made between the success factors mentioned and the best practices for corporate blogging. These are further elaborated below.

4.3.5.2.1 Success factors corporate blogging

Generally, the interviewees consider corporate blogging to be more suitable for SMEs, since they are closer to the market and as such often are better aware of relevant topics and the voice to use. SMEs often possess the necessary expertise to write engaging blog posts. In addition, since SMEs often have a lower budget, blogging could serve as a low-cost publishing platform for SMEs, which can seriously cut their spending on PR and advertising. However, Van Meel and Janssen point out that a larger company could generate an audience more easily, since it has a wider target group than SMEs. Furthermore, Wolf argues that the presence of a fast-moving market could have a positive influence on the success of a corporate blog, since fast-moving markets often provide a wide variety of topics to discuss. In addition, Gillin and Janssen argue that thought leadership, widely considered as one of the greatest values of corporate blogging, is particularly beneficial to business-to-business companies, since there is often a high demand for detailed information. Nevertheless, Gillin, among others, argues that a social identity and a real-time dialog with customers should be a beneficial competence for any kind of company. Therefore, corporate blogging is considered to be applicable to both business-to-business and business-to-consumer companies.

4.3.5.2.2 Best practices corporate blogging

All interviewees emphasized on the importance of a comprehensive plan of approach before a company launches its own blog. In the absence of such a plan, a corporate blog is doomed to fail. However, Weil argues that corporate blogging is also about spontaneity. Therefore, a plan of approach should offer guidance, rather than act as a set of restrictions. The interviewees elaborated on the following elements that should be included in a plan of approach:

1. The goal of the blog;
2. The authors of the blog (who is responsible);
3. The topics that are being discussed and the added value that the blog should deliver to the blogosphere;
4. The metrics that are applied in order to determine the blogs' ROI;
5. The corporate blog policies and ethics;
6. The organizational competencies and resources that are required and the way these are compiled.

Additionally, it has been argued that companies must be aware of, and willing to adjust to, the blog ethics in order to successfully engage the blogosphere. The interviewees elaborated on the following elements:

1. Be transparent;
2. Apply a real-time communication;
3. Be authentic;
4. Write engaging blog posts;
5. Refer to other relevant blogs or websites;
6. Don't rush it, have patience and be committed;
7. Update the blog regularly;
8. Allow multiple authors to blog. Invite a guest author. This provides more varied blog posts, making the blog more interesting to read.

In addition, Van Meel provided a clear list, supported by multiple interviewees, of tips in order to write engaging content. These are elaborated below:

1. Learn by just doing it. Making a mistake is human.
2. Focus on one topic. It has to be clear what the blog is about.
3. Do not make your blog posts too long. Around 500 words would be enough.
4. Write targeted content, maybe even indiscriminate. This might trigger a reaction more easily and keeps your blog post short.
5. Provide helpful hints and use bullets. Short lists and tips makes blog posts often more interesting to read.
6. Write for search. Choosing a hot topic and applying popular keywords in the blog post can positively affect the positioning in Google, and therefore attract more visitors to your blog.

4.3.6 Future corporate blogging

4.3.6.1 Findings

4.3.6.1.1 Mark van der Wolf

Wolf finds it hard to predict the future of corporate blogging. However, Wolf acknowledges the demise of the traditional media and consequently the need for companies to seek other ways to spread their message. A blog is pre-eminently a good platform for companies to do so and therefore, he foresees that companies increasingly will pick up on this in the future.

4.3.6.1.2 Joris van Meel

Van Meel argues that blogs are definitely not a hype, but here to stay. However, many companies started to blog from that “hype-thought”, being afraid to miss the boat. Now that companies find out that blogging is not just a hype, they are becoming more aware of what a blog really is and how they can use the full potential of it. Van Meel, therefore, predicts that it will become an increasingly important publishing platform for companies in the future.

4.3.6.1.3 Freek Janssen

Janssen argues that because other short-form Social Media tools, such as Twitter and Facebook, are more popular nowadays, companies start to realize that corporate blogging is a critical platform to further elaborate on certain topics. He emphasizes that a corporate blog should serve as content hub of every corporate social strategy and argues that companies are becoming increasingly aware of that.

4.3.6.1.4 Paul Gillin

Gillin argues that although the hype vanished, corporate blogging nowadays is growing in popularity, since companies are becoming more aware of the do's and don'ts and start using it to its full potential. Gillin emphasizes that the real value of Social Media is in the combination of the different social tools. He argues that, for instance, a blog could be pre-eminently used to discuss a complex topic in-depth, whereas the short-form social tools could be ideally applied to promote that blog post. Therefore Gillin foresees that blogging will stay a number one Social Media tool for companies in the future.

4.3.6.1.5 Debbie Weil

Weil expects that in the future, corporate blogs will become the new corporate websites. She rather thinks of it as ‘social corporate websites’, which incorporates all the different social tools and features. She further argues that content marketing, and the establishment of a real-time and personal dialog with stakeholders, will remain an important competence for companies. Therefore, Weil argues that blogs will stay a critical element of the company's social identity in the future.

4.3.6.2 Conclusion

Although recent studies contradict each other on the popularity and future of corporate blogging, the interviewees unanimously agree that corporate blogging will stay an important Social Media tool for companies in the future. The great value of corporate blogs is the possibility to become a publisher and discuss complex topics in-depth, without any interference of the traditional media, whereas most other Social Media tools are only short-form oriented. Therefore, the interviewees widely consider a corporate blog to be the essential backbone of every corporate Social Media strategy. Now that the hype around corporate blogging has vanished, companies are increasingly

aware of this unique and critical value of corporate blogging. Therefore, it is argued that corporate blogs will remain an important social tool and will even gain popularity in the future.

5 Conclusion & Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The objective of this research was to enhance our understanding of the complexity of the blogosphere phenomenon and the way in which companies can engage the blogosphere to their benefit. Firstly, in order to achieve this objective, a literature study was performed to survey the prevalent theories and clarify the blogosphere phenomenon and its origination. This literature study served as a theoretical lens for the empirical part of the study. Secondly, an empirical case study was conducted to research the prevalent theories on and gather new insights into the research topic. In this chapter the conclusions and recommendations for further research into the research topic will be discussed.

5.2 Conclusion

The exploratory nature of this research found three dimensions that describe the corporate blogging phenomenon in more detail. These dimensions are the natures of the blog, the enabling business competences and the obtainable values. An initial model of the main findings of this research is presented below. It provides an overview of the enabling business competences of corporate blogging and the organization’s functional areas they contribute to primarily. These insights have been acquired during the interviews and further elaborated on and computed in Appendix 11.

Figure 5.1: Comprehensive Corporate Blog Value Model

Blog nature	Business competence	Highest impact area
Web 2.0 medium	Differentiate from competitors & traditional media	PR
Publishing platform	Internal or external communication	HRM
Sender-oriented	Become a publisher	PR
Real-time	Instant publishing	CRM, R&D
Long-form	Content intensive	CRM, R&D
Social		
Personal driven	Humanization / short communication lines	CRM
Interaction	2-way dialogs with stakeholders	R&D
Open & Transparent	Authentic messaging channel	PR
Interconnection	Wide coverage	Sales
Topic driven	Focused communication	R&D
Controllable		
Self-hostable & Moderation	Own the platform, content & conversation	HRM

The above model shows the organization's various functional areas that primarily benefit from corporate blogging. The compilation of the model will be discussed in this chapter.

The primary research question concerns the precise values that a company could reap through corporate blogging. This research established that there are many different ways in which a company can benefit from a corporate blog. To be able to elaborate on the precise values of corporate blogging, the research topic needs to be clarified more.

A blog is considered to be an essential backbone (content hub) of a corporate Social Media strategy. The greatest value of blogs is their long-form nature, which allows companies to discuss complex topics in-depth. The leverage of this nature on the various obtainable values is presented in Appendix 11. The ability to discuss topics in-depth is considered to be an essential addition to short-form Social Media tools such as Twitter and Facebook. This in-depth nature also is considered to be beneficial to inviting a more meaningful conversation with the public, as opposed to the superficiality that short-form tools often produce. This study found that a tentative definition for a corporate blogging could be *a long-form and transparent publishing platform that enables considerable flexibility to explore topics through a moderated discussion*. However, the complexity of corporate blogging calls for the naming of its different defining natures. This study found the defining natures of corporate blogging to be:

5.2.1 Corporate blog natures

5.2.1.1 Web 2.0 medium

Blogs still provide an innovative communication platform for companies. It is, therefore, a good way to differentiate from competitors. Consequently, blogs are considered to be a good publishing platform to spread an authentic message without any interference of traditional media.

5.2.1.2 Publishing platform

Above all, it is a publishing platform that can be applied for internal and external corporate communication practices.

5.2.1.3 Sender-oriented

The emphasis is on the sender. There is a clear distinction between the author and the audience. This allows a company to become a publisher itself.

5.2.1.4 Real-time

A corporate blog is an instant publishing and communication platform.

5.2.1.5 Long-form

One of the most important natures, as opposed to other Social Media tools, is that it is pre-eminently well-suited to establish a corporate content hub and elaborate on complex topics, in-depth.

5.2.1.6 Personal

An important aspect of corporate blogging is personal, one-on-one dialogs. This enables a company to further humanize and to apply short communication lines.

5.2.1.7 Interactive

Although corporate blogging is considered to be sender-oriented, in-depth interaction and discussion between parties is perfectly possible.

5.2.1.8 Open & transparent

Corporate blogging provides an open and transparent communication platform, which results in an authentic voice.

5.2.1.9 Interconnection

Blogs in particular have an interconnecting nature. Therefore, a company could easily create coverage on the message.

5.2.1.10 Topic-driven

Because of their long-form nature, corporate blogs are often very focused on a certain topic, in order to communicate a clear purpose and to reach its targeted audience.

5.2.1.11 Controllable

Since blogs have a sender-oriented nature, they have the possibility to moderate conversations that occur on the blog. That way, a company can host a blog. These aspects result in a relatively higher control rate, where the company simply owns the platform and the conversations, as opposed to other Social Media tools.

5.2.2 Classification corporate blog genres

In order to further clarify the corporate blogging phenomenon, this research found many different classifications of corporate blogs, based on various dimensions. Based on these different classifications, a new comprehensive corporate blog classification model has been constructed, which offers a clear distinction between the different blog genres. The proposed classification model is built upon two different dimensions, namely the corporate blogs' topic and the number of authors. The distinction between one or more authors should be clear. For the dimension *topic* a distinction has been made between *company-driven* and *subject-driven*. Company-driven originates directly from the company itself, such as the company's products, services, vision or strategy, whereas subject-driven originates from a certain subject and strives to establish a complete source of knowledge on that subject.

This resulted in the following classification model:

Figure 5.2: Corporate Blog Classification Model

Author Focus	One Author	Multiple Authors
Company driven	Employee blog	Company blog
Subject driven	Expert blog	Topic blog

The proposed corporate blog genres are further elaborated below:

5.2.2.1 Employee blog

This blog genre is maintained by a single employee, focused on a company-driven topic, and can be used for both internal and external communication. Popular types are a CEO-blog and an executive

blog. These blog types are applied in particular to capitalize on someone's expertise, on humanization, and on short communication lines.

5.2.2.2 Expert blog

This blog genre is maintained by a single employee, focused on a subject-driven topic, and is used for external communication. This is an ideal platform for an expert to elaborate on his expertise on a certain subject.

5.2.2.3 Company blog

This blog genre is maintained by multiple employees, focused on a company-driven topic, and is used for both internal and external communication. A company blog could be a good instrument for customers to get a comprehensive sense of the company.

5.2.2.4 Topic blog

This blog genre is maintained by multiple employees, focused on a subject-driven topic, and is used for external communication.

5.2.3 Obtainable values corporate blogging

Based on the above-mentioned natures and business competences, the values that a company could reap are numerous. Below the found values are elaborated on, per organizational functional area.

5.2.3.1 Human resource management

Corporate blogging offers several opportunities with regard to human and resource management. First of all, it might serve as an internal communication platform for employees to mutually share knowledge. Secondly, allowing employees to participate in the open and transparent nature of blogs might positively affect their morale. Thirdly, since blogs offer a differentiated communication channel, they can be an effective way to reach and inform new recruits that are out of reach using the traditional media. Fourthly, allowing employees to discuss their own expertise on a corporate blog helps them to stay on topic and to develop within their own field of expertise.

5.2.3.2 Customer relationship management

The long-form, interactive and personal nature of blogs allows companies to establish a more meaningful conversation with customers and gather valuable customer insights. This allows a company to engage with their customers and to apply more effective interaction practices. In that process, the customer feedback might serve as a rationale to provide customer support, through a corporate blog, on common encountered problems. These aspects positively affect the bond and the customers' loyalty. In addition, the calculation model in Appendix 11 found that primarily CRM benefit from corporate blogging.

5.2.3.3 Public Relations

A corporate blog allows a company to become a publisher and provides an authentic and objective message instantly, without any interference of the traditional media. This is considered to become an increasingly important communication practice, since the traditional media are becoming less effective. Furthermore, the ability to bypass the traditional media is an ideal opportunity for companies to effectively maintain their network, in a personal manner, and lobby for certain controversial topics. Additionally, the interactive and transparent nature of blogs enables other blogs to easily refer to a corporate blog and (re)use its content, which positively affects the share of voice.

In addition, the long-form and authentic nature of blogs allow companies to effectively establish thought leadership and a trustworthy reputation with its public.

5.2.3.4 Research and development

Ideally, blogs can serve as a market research tool, gathering extensive customer insights and product feedback. These insights can provide valuable information on market needs and demands for researching and developing new products or features. The open and transparent nature of blogs might even establish a more co-creative approach by allowing the customer to participate actively in the research and development process. Although it has to be marked that co-creation practices are generally considered to be more suitable for a community-driven platform, as opposed to a blog platform, which is more sender-oriented.

5.2.3.5 Marketing

The blogosphere can support the company's marketing practices in several ways. First of all, the interconnecting nature of blogs facilitates the share of voice and coverage of the company's marketing message. Secondly, the long-form, authentic and personal nature of the blogosphere can support the creation of thought leadership and a trustworthy reputation, and helps to brand the company's products. Thirdly, the long-form and interconnecting nature of blogs help to enhance the company's search engine visibility. All these aspects combined encourage a higher market awareness, the ability to reach niches, reach prospects and the acquisition of more visitors on a company's blog and website.

5.2.3.6 Sales

It may be clear that the above-mentioned marketing practices may be very beneficial to lead generation activity. However, this relation is considered to be difficult to prove. In addition, allowing employees to discuss their expertise with the public, helps them to stay on topic and identify emerging developments within their own field. This way, employees might identify new sales opportunities, resulting in more efficient sales practices. Furthermore, the reputation and market awareness that a company could obtain through corporate blogging might have a convincing effect on the customers' decision-making process.

5.2.4 Success factors corporate blogging

The factors for the success of corporate blogging are elaborated on further down. However, it is important to note that any absence of a success factor should not keep a company from establishing a corporate blog. If a company is determined to really live up to the ethics and values of corporate blogging, it can always be of value for a company. Three different success factors for corporate blogging have been found.

Firstly, this research found that corporate blogging is considered to be especially suitable for SMEs, since they often possess a certain amount of expertise and are close to the market. Therefore, SMEs are able to provide valuable content and are often more aware of the applied voice within their market, as opposed to larger companies. Since SMEs often have little financial recourses, blogs are an ideal low-cost publishing solution, that can seriously cut the spending on PR and advertising. On the other hand, larger companies can often generate an audience for their blog more easily since they have a wider target group, as opposed to SMEs.

Secondly, the presence of a fast-moving market can be beneficial to the success of a corporate blog, since it often provides a wide variety of topics to discuss on a corporate blog, making it more engaging to read.

Thirdly, corporate blogging is considered to be particularly suitable for business-to-business companies, since these markets often require a higher amount of detailed information and companies often demand to do business with industry leaders.

5.2.5 Best practices corporate blogging

This research found three different types of best practices. A practice that is considered to have been a pitfall for many corporate blogs is the presence of a comprehensive plan of approach. This plan of approach should serve as guidance for the establishment and maintenance of the corporate blog.

Elements that should be covered in this plan of approach are:

1. The goal of the blog;
2. The authors and the responsible of the blog;
3. The value that the blog is going to add to the blogosphere / the topics to discuss;
4. The metrics to determine the blogs' ROI;
5. Blog policies and ethics;
6. The required competences and resources of the company in order to be able to live up to this predefined plan of approach.

Secondly, in order to succeed, companies must be aware of the ethics of the blogosphere and be willing to adapt. Elements of relevance are:

1. Be transparent;
2. Apply a real-time communication;
3. Be authentic;
4. Write engaging/valuable blog posts;
5. Refer to other relevant blogs or websites;
6. Don't rush it, have patience and be committed;
7. Update the blog regularly;
8. Allow multiple authors to blog or even invite a guest author. This provides more varied blog posts, making the blog more interesting to read.

Thirdly, the following guidelines have been found for writing qualitative and engaging blog posts:

1. Learn by just doing it. Making a mistake is human.
2. Focus on one topic. Be clear about the focus of the blog.
3. Do not make blog posts too long. Around 500 words is considered as a desirable maximum.
4. Write targeted content, maybe even indiscriminate. This might trigger a reaction more easily and keeps a blog post short, instead of putting everything in perspective.
5. Provide helpful hints and make use of bullets. Short lists and helpful hints often make blog posts more engaging to read.
6. Write for search. Choosing a hot topic and applying popular keywords in the blog post can positively affect the positioning in Google, and therefore attract more visitors to your blog.

5.2.6 Awareness and adoption rate corporate blogging

As has been mentioned, there are many values that a company could reap through corporate blogging, though the awareness and adoption rate is still relatively low compared to other Social Media tools. Corporate blogging was a hype around 2007, but the absence of a comprehensive plan of approach caused many corporate blogs to disappear over the years. This research further found that because of the vanished hype surrounding corporate blogging, company's start to assess the true use and value of blogs better. However, still only very few companies really live up to the true value and ethics of corporate blogging. It has been widely found that companies nowadays are still insufficiently aware of the required mind-set and organizational resources for a corporate blog to succeed. Much ignorance still remains of the precise values that a blog could deliver for a company. SMEs in particular seem to lack awareness of this subject, often due to a shortage of resources such as time and financial resources. Therefore, it may be concluded that many untapped opportunities for companies with regard to corporate blogging still remain today.

5.2.7 Future corporate blogging

Based on the findings of this research, corporate blogging is expected to remain an important Social Media tool, or even grow in popularity over the years. This research identified corporate blogging to be the essential backbone of every company's Social Media strategy, as it allows companies to establish a content hub where complex topics can be discussed in-depth, without any interference of the traditional media. Especially now that the hype has vanished, companies are becoming more aware of these corporate blog values, which is expected to lead to an even higher adoption rate in the future.

5.3 Discussion

This section will discuss and analyze the dissimilarities found between the literature study and findings from the empirical study. The most notable contradictions between the studies will be highlighted and analyzed, in order to get to an explanation.

Due to the complexity of the research topic, the first intention of the empirical study was to get a greater understanding of the 'corporate blogging' phenomenon. This part was concerned with the definition of corporate blogging, which already resulted in one of the most noteworthy contradictions between the literature study and the empirical study. During the literature review it was found that corporate blogging is considered to be an interactive and two-way communication medium. However, the empirical study found that corporate blogging should be considered more of a sender-oriented platform, where interaction between the author and the audience is perfectly possible, but the emphasis is on the sender. Although these are not mutually exclusive, the contradiction does provide a whole different perspective on the essential value of corporate blogging, where it should be considered more as a publishing platform, rather than community-oriented platform. Especially now that people are turning away from the traditional media, this could be a very beneficial communication platform for companies.

The literature and empirical study found that it was hard to design a comprehensive corporate blog classification model due to the many different dimensions that were applied by other researchers. Some tend to focus on one single dimension, others used multiple dimensions, whereas yet others did not mention the applied dimension at all. In order to design a comprehensive and mutually exclusive corporate blog model, it is necessary to further unravel the different applied perspectives to their exact origin. This resulted in a two-dimensional, innovative classification model for 4

different corporate blog genres. However, the constancy of this model in practice might be an interesting subject for further research.

The values that originated from the literature study were largely consistent with the values that were found in the empirical study. However, some different designations may have been used. The values from the literature study that really diverged from those found in the empirical study were concerned with the community aspect. The empirical study found that communities exhibit a more equal ratio between the sender and the reader, whereas blogs are considered to be more sender-oriented. Therefore, when the goal is community-building, the empirical study found that other Social Media tools, such as forums or content communities, are more applicable.

Prior to the empirical study it was considered to be interesting to research the obtainable values per different blogging genre. Although some blog genres seem to be especially well-suited for a certain value, the empirical study found a new and more consistent classification model, in which such linkages are difficult or even undesirable to underpin. The precise enabling business competences and its obtainable business values are rather determined by the further exploitation of the corporate blog, than it is subsidiary to the specific blog genre.

Some success factors and best practices that were identified in the literature study have not been found during the empirical study. Since this topic really was applied as an addition to the general understanding on the research topic, the absence of these variables in the empirical study do not suggest any contradiction to the literature study. Rather, it represents a good ground for further research.

5.4 Implications for theory

Social Media nowadays play an increasingly important role, for both customers and companies, to communicate with the outside world. Especially now that the traditional media becomes less effective, more companies start to use Social Media tools to communicate with their customers. Companies seem to prefer the short-form tools, such as Twitter and Facebook, whereas the blog tool seems to have fallen on hard times. A frequently heard reason for this is that it is considered to be “too time-consuming”. The underlying cause of this perception is that there is a great lack of understanding of the blogging phenomenon as a corporate publishing platform, and the precise values it could offer a company. Therefore, this study aims to raise the awareness around the real use and value of corporate blogging, as it contributes to the body of knowledge and understanding upon the corporate blogging phenomenon.

Firstly, this study elaborates on the different defining characteristics that blogs possess. These insights, among other things, have been used as a rationale to build a corporate blogging classification model that identifies and provides a further understanding upon the different corporate blog genres. Furthermore, this study elaborates on how the different corporate blog characteristics enable certain organizational competences. From this insight, the various values that a company could obtain through corporate blogging are discussed per organizational functional area.

This study found that corporate blogging could be beneficial throughout the company. One of the most remarkable foundations of this study is that a corporate blog is even considered to be an essential backbone for any corporate Social Media strategy, because it provides an opportunity for a company to discuss topics in-depth. However, this does not imply that companies should just start

blogging. A good plan of approach and proper compliance to the blog ethics are required, in order for a blog to succeed. Blogging is a valuable business practice for the long-term and as such, requires patience and commitment.

In addition, this study found that corporate blogging will remain a prominent competence for companies in the future. Therefore, further academic research regarding this subject could deliver a great contribution to the general understanding of this topic and the urge by companies to apply it as a business practice.

5.5 Limitations

As has been mentioned in chapter 3, this research seeks analytical generalization, as the single Case Study research method and the primarily collection of qualitative data leave no room for statistical generalization. In addition, the blogosphere is closely related to the social landscape that it is in. Although Web 2.0 is a world-wide phenomenon and caused open and transparent communication channels, the culture differs per country. Therefore, the precise purpose that a blog could serve within a certain market may vary between countries. The literature study is based on research from multiple countries and the empirical part on Dutch and American citizens. Although the theoretical implications, as well as the empirical results, showed no huge dissimilarities, the results of this research cannot be generalized to other countries without caution. The complexity of this research topic furthermore caused the selection of only a small sample size. Although the research sample covered multiple nationalities, the above-mentioned aspects negatively influence the external validity of this research.

The exploratory research approach required by the complexity of the research topic led to the compilation of a three-dimensional classification model, that elaborates on the corporate blogging phenomenon. The dimensions found are the blogging nature, the enabling business competences and the obtainable values. These insights have been acquired during the interviews and further elaborated on and computed in Appendix 11. It is however important to note that this three-dimensional classification model is an initial model only. Therefore the found variables might need to be taken into consideration with regard to the internal validity.

In addition, the research found that often, a lack of statistical evidence for the direct relation between a corporate blog and certain obtainable values exists, that in some cases, providing such a statistical relation is even considered to be impossible. Therefore, assumptions from experts with regard to the blogging natures, enabling business competences and the obtainable values is the highest attainable for this research.

5.6 Further research

In order to enhance the understanding of the corporate blogging phenomenon, there are several topics that are interesting for further research.

This research proposed a comprehensive classification model based on the collected data. However, this classification model is still highly conceptual, as it only elaborates on four different corporate blog genres, whereas others elaborate on five to ten. Although the choice to only classify four different genres is well substantiated, it might be interesting to further research the consistency of the proposed classification model, with regard to the practice and the future perspective.

This research only partially dealt with the different success factors and best practices of corporate blogging. Therefore, these topics leave enough room for further investigation. Both are considered to be very meaningful subjects since they are closely related with the practice, as they elaborate on *when* and *how* to blog. Again, the establishment of statistical support with regard to the findings is considered to be the most challenging. During this research an extensive literature review of success factors and the best practices of corporate blogging has already been conducted. These can be founded, respectively, in appendix 7 and appendix 8.

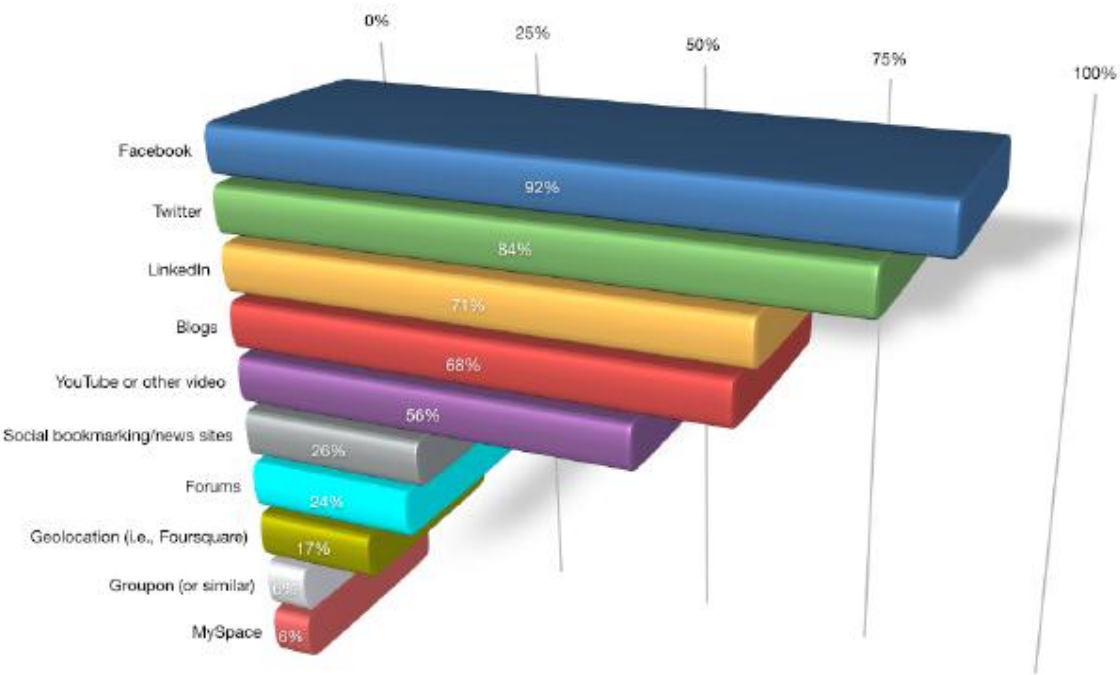
In addition, as this research found that the precise value of corporate blogging is especially determined by the further exploitation of the corporate blog, a meaningful topic for further research is to investigate how certain blog practices are related to the obtainable values and goal of a corporate blog. This way companies can exploit their corporate blog more focused.

Based on the literature review and the empirical findings, one of the most desired topics for further research is the examination and acquisition of statistical evidence on the correlation between a corporate blog and its obtainable values for companies. Further examination of the precise correlation between corporate blogging and sales is of particular interest. Although this is considered to be extremely difficult and sometimes even impossible, some recent literature already tried to overcome this gap. When the value of corporate blogs can be given more substance in the form of statistical proof, companies will be better able to determine the ROI on corporate blogging, which will be very beneficial to the awareness and adoption rate of corporate blogging as a business practice.

Furthermore, the findings of the empirical part of this research led to the proposal of a three-dimensional classification model is, intended to provide a comprehensive overview of the corporate blogging phenomenon and its potential value for companies. The development of this model and the search for statistical evidence on the correlation between the nature of blogging, the business competences and the obtainable values would constitute a great enrichment of the body of knowledge on the corporate blogging phenomenon.

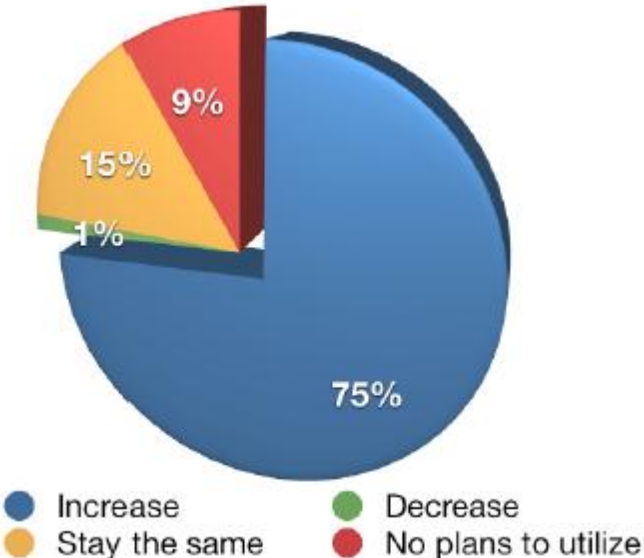
In all, this research found that corporate blogging could indeed be beneficial to the entire company and will remain a prominent competence for companies in the future. The above-mentioned topics for further research are important for the enhancement and understanding of this social medium, the corporate blogging phenomenon.

Appendix 1: Adoption Social Media applications



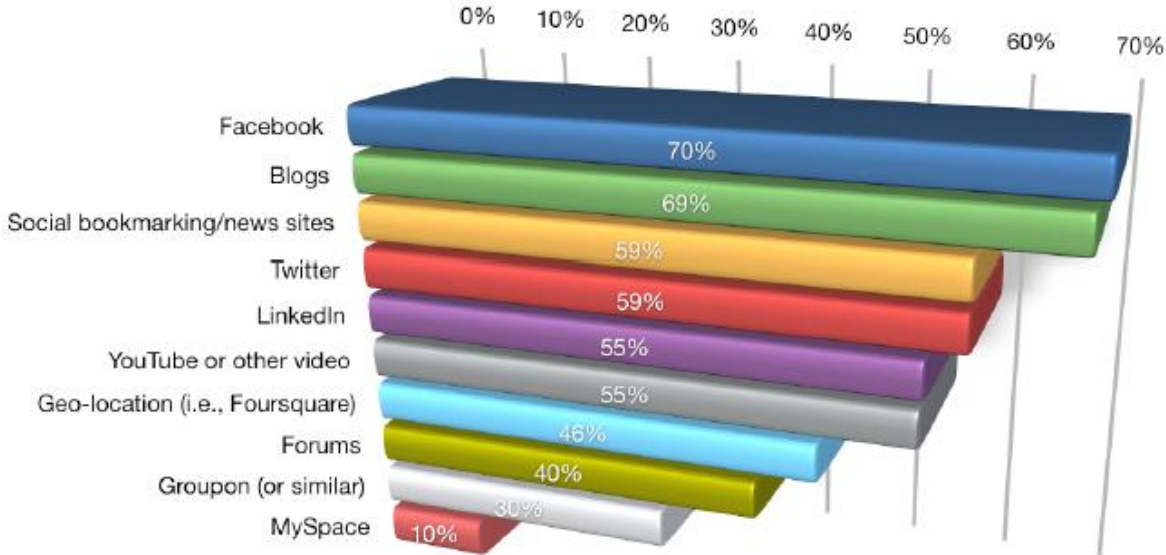
Source: Stelzner (2011)

Appendix 2: Blogging activities



Source: Stelzner (2011)

Appendix 3: Social Media tools that people want to learn more about

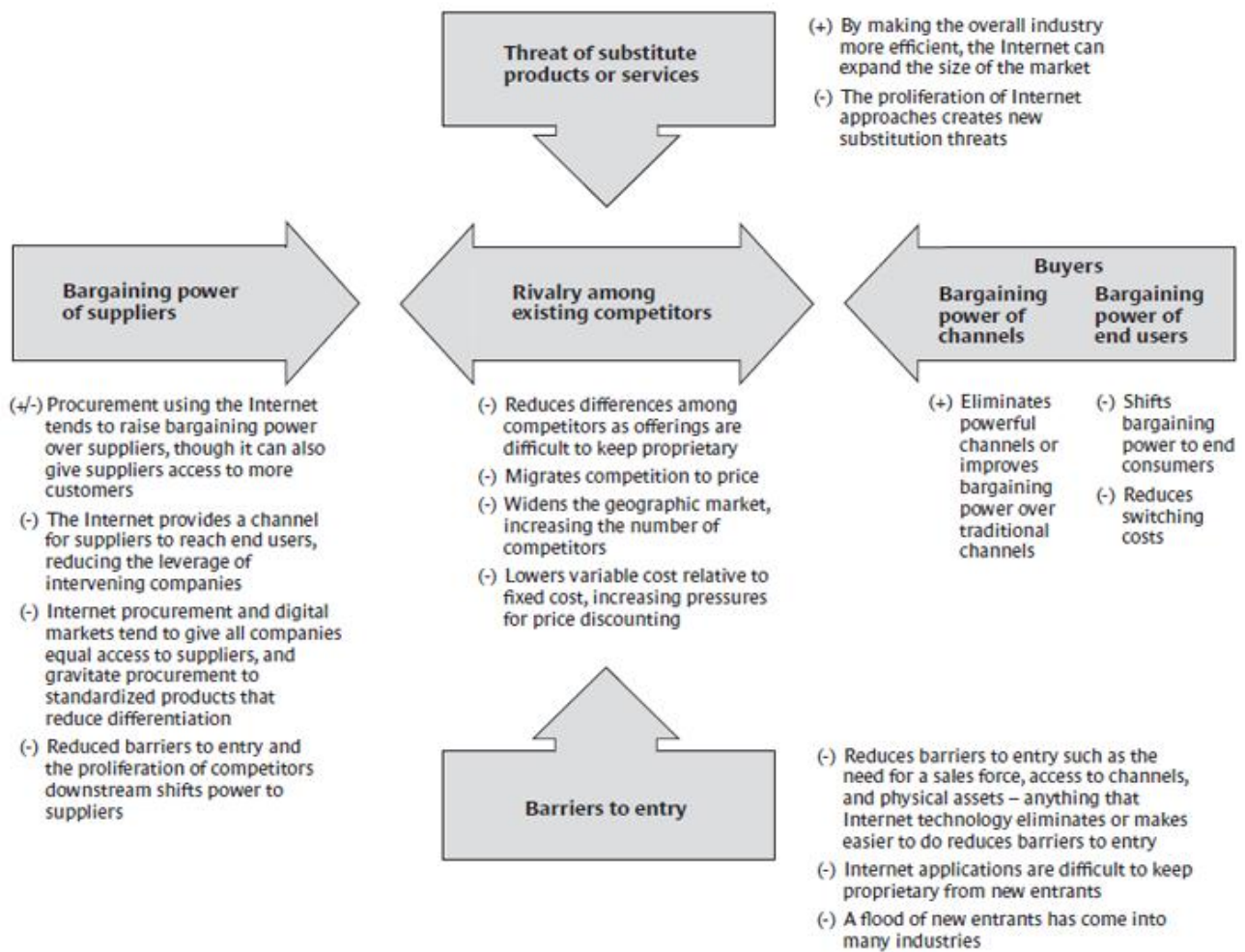


Source: Stelzner (2011)

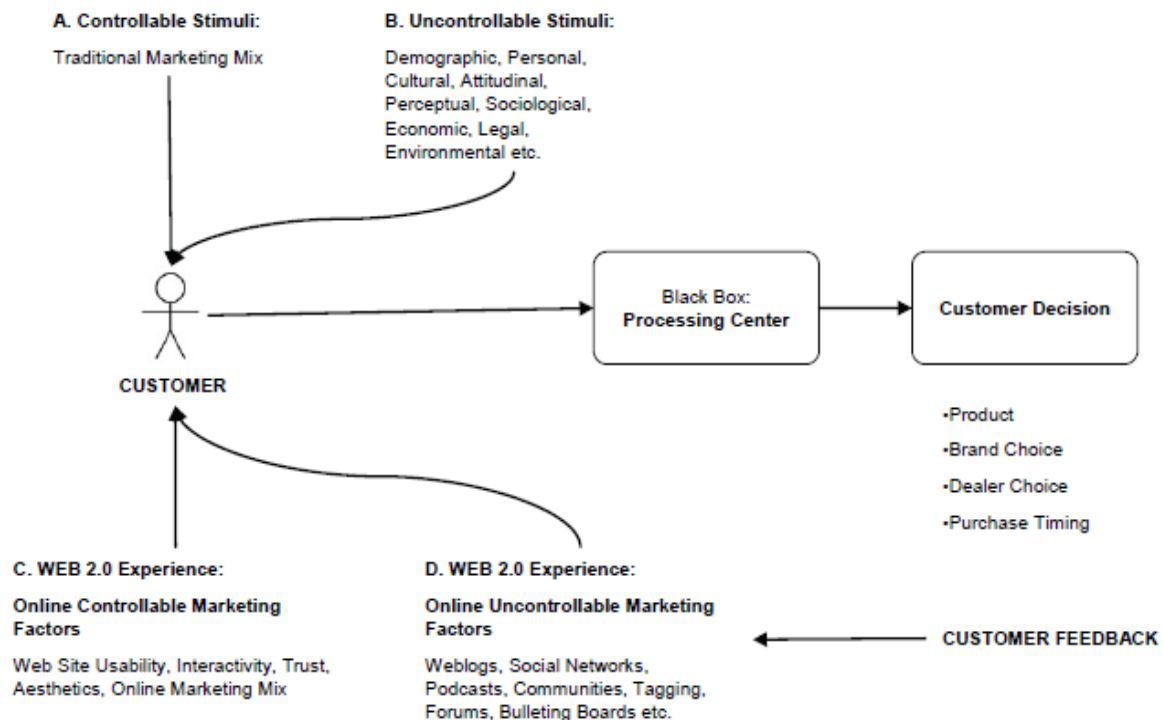
Appendix 4: Web 2.0 definitions

- Merholz (2005) said, *“The point of Web 2.0 isn't the features, it's the underlying philosophy of relinquishing control.”*
- Boyd (2005) stated *“Web2.0 is about glocalization, it is about making global information available to local social contexts and giving people the flexibility to find, organize, share and create information in a locally meaningful fashion that is globally accessible. Technology and experience are both critical factors in this process, but they themselves are not Web2.0. Web2.0 is a structural shift in information flow. It is not simply about global->local or 1->many; it is about a constantly shifting, multi-directional complex flow of information with the information evolving as it flows. It is about new network structures that emerge out of global and local structures.”*
- Davis (2005) refers to Web 2.0 as *“an attitude not a technology”*.
- O'Reilly and Musser redefined in 2006 the term Web 2.0 as *“a set of economic, social, and technology trends that collectively form the basis for the next generation of the Internet—a more mature, distinctive medium characterized by user participation, openness, and network effects”*.
- McLean (2007) defines Web 2.0 as *“the catch-all descriptor for what is essentially much more dynamic Internet computing”*.
- Nielsen (2006) considered four trends as defining elements for Web 2.0.
 - "Rich" Internet Applications (RIA), which is all about the experience brought from desktop to browser.
 - Community features, social networks and user generated content.
 - Mash ups, using other sites' services as a development platform.
 - Advertising as the main or only business model.
- Constantinides and Fountain (2008) define Web 2.0 as *“a collection of open-source, interactive and user-controlled online applications expanding the experiences, knowledge and market power of the users as participants in business and social processes. Web 2.0 applications support the creation of informal users' networks facilitating the flow of ideas and knowledge by allowing the efficient generation, dissemination, sharing and editing / refining of informational content”*
- Shuen (2008) emphasizes the interactivity of users: *“Web 2.0 is read-write”*.
- Mangold et al (2009) refer to Social Media as *“consumer-generated media”*.
- Adebajo et al (2010) define Web 2.0 throughout two different perspectives. One is elaborating on the social phenomena that is decentralizing authority, the other perspective elaborates on technological aspects, which determines Web 2.0 as a computing platform that serves end-users with applications to overcome isolated information silos.
- Kim et al (2010) defined Web 2.0 as *“websites that make it possible for people to form online communities and share user generated content”*.

Appendix 5: 5-forces model



Appendix 6: Customer's decision making process



Source: Constantinides and Fountain (2008)

In the figure above, the elements A and B represent the influencers in the conventional customer's decision-making process. These influencers are: the controllable stimuli, such as the traditional marketing mix (A) and the uncontrollable personal stimuli, including demographic, cultural, perceptual and economic stimuli (B). The emergence and adoption of the internet (Web 1.0) offered new practices for companies to interact with their customers, such as static company websites and e-mail marketing. These practices possess the controllable marketing factors (C) for marketers, like website usability, interactivity, trust, aesthetics and the online marketing mix. With the emergence of Web 2.0, marketers got confronted with uncontrollable marketing factors, such as blogs, social networks and communities, podcasts, tagging, forums and other social applications. In summary, the figure above illustrates the evolutionary process of the customer influencers, which can be divided into three stages. A and B illustrate stage one, where marketers are facing the traditional shopping environment. C illustrates stage two, where marketers encounter the controllable influencers in the, Web 1.0, environment and D illustrates stage three where uncontrollable influencers are present in the Web 2.0 environment.

Appendix 7: Success factors corporate blogging

Corporate blogging is a co-opting communication tool that has been used successfully by both large companies and SMEs. Nevertheless many authors emphasize that companies should not engage the blogosphere naïve and unstructured (Li et al., 2008; Gillin, 2009; Tanuri, 2009; Weil, 2010). Therefore this chapter aims to further elaborate on the barriers and the key enablers of corporate blogging. In addition, a comprehensive theoretical map of engagement can be found in Appendix 8.

Wolf (2007) proposed a classification of success factors, which will be used as a rationale to discuss this topic.

Figure 7.1: Success factors corporate blogging.



Source: Wolf (2007), Gillin (2009), Weil (2010)

7.1 Company

Transparent business practices (open and authentic) refer to the company's ability and willingness to provide internal information to the public (Edelman, 2005; Wolf, 2007; Gillin, 2009). Constantinides et al. (2008) argues that this is only feasible if a company offers satisfying products, is marketing-oriented and applies a solid web 1.0 legacy. This holds that, among social applications, corporate blogging is in the pinnacle of the marketing pyramid due to its open and authentic demands (Constantinides et al., 2008). Refer to appendix 12 for a further clarification on the marketing strategy Pyramid.

Leadership and innovation refers to the ability of a company to be innovative and provide unique knowledge to the blogosphere. If a company succeeds to provide innovative products or gain thought leadership within its market, people are more inclined to visit the blog (Wolf, 2007; Gillin, 2009).

Trusting employees to blog is an ideal opportunity for companies to provide insights, on multiple professions, towards consumers. This keeps the blog content varied and interesting. Nevertheless, if a company copes with confidential information, a CEO's blog might be suitable (Wolf, 2007; Weil, 2010).

Companies must acknowledge and accept that they are less in control over the communication paradigm like content, frequency and timing (Edelman, 2005; Wolf, 2007; Li et al., 2008; Gillin, 2009; Weil, 2010). Peer-to-peer conversations are evolving online and therefore, it is essential that a company is **committed** to talk with, rather than talking at, customers (Gillin, 2009; Mangold, 2009). Li et al. (2008) proposed a classification on the differences between traditional business processes as opposed to required business processes in a Web 2.0 environment. This equation can be found in appendix 13.

7.2 Market

When the marketplace is tumultuous, and **changes** rapidly, a corporate blog might be an ideal platform to provide some clarity about the company and its products. In addition, an evolving market provides enough topics to talk about, which enhances the probability to create a lively blogosphere (Wolf, 2007). Additionally, the **size** and the **diversity** of the market place also affect the variety of topics. However, it has been widely argued that the blogosphere also is an ideal opportunity to reach small niches (Gillin, 2009; Scott, 2010; Weil, 2010; Huang et al., 2011).

7.3 Audience

First of all it is important to determine if a company should even bother. This refers to the **blogging experience**, such as awareness and knowledge, of the audience. For instance, IT-related companies might enjoy a greater reach in the blogosphere than farmers (Wolf 2007).

A corporate blog can be highly effective to enhance the **attitude** of customers towards a certain product or towards the company itself. Especially if trust and loyalty is an important aspect in the customer decision-making process, a company could strongly benefit from corporate blogging (Wolf, 2007; Weil, 2010)

Information refers to the amount of information that customers need to make a purchasing decision. If a product has a long purchasing cycle, a corporate blog is an ideal platform to provide the desirable information to the customer (Weil, 2010).

7.4 Competitors

This refers to the amount of competition in the blogosphere that is vying for the customers' attention. The competition can be divided into the amount of direct **competitor blogs** and the amount of competition on a particular **topic**. The less competition is present, the greater the chance that a corporate blog succeeds and gains thought leadership (Wolf, 2007; Weil, 2010).

Additionally, when **biased** information is spread about a certain subject or a company, corporate blogs can be a valuable tool to counter this and elaborate on the company's point of view (wolf, 2007).

Appendix 8: Companies engaging the blogosphere

8.1 Passive approach

To join the conversation in the blogosphere, the first thing to do is listen in on what is being said, and find a way to pick up on the conversation and determine an appropriate voice. By ignoring this stage and jumping into the conversation unprepared, one would probably elicit a negative response. Therefore, it is essential for companies to start listening to what is being said and by whom. Since not every blogger has equal prevalence, it is important for companies to evaluate relevant bloggers on the influence they exert, in order to get a comprehensive view of the blogosphere (Hughes, 2006; Gillin, 2009; Weil, 2010). The main questions are “Which are relevant blogs and opinion leaders?”, “What is the expressed voice and sentiment on those blogs?”, “Are our consumers active on those blogs?”, “Do those blogs provide insights in our markets and/or products?” and “What can we learn from those blogs?” (O’Leary, 2011). Answers to those questions are, of course, very meaningful for companies and might serve as valuable input for product development. Recent literature provides some guidance in order to answer these questions (F. Li et al., 2011; Y. Li et al., 2011). Topics of interest are summarized below:

1. Search for relevant blogs or discussions

This can be accomplished by searching for relevant keywords in search engines or blog monitor services. From free tools such as Google Alerts and Google Insights, to commercial services such as Nielsen Buzz, Blog Scope, Collective Intellect, Buzz Capture, Tweet Citations and Technorati. Relevant keywords include company products, the company name, but also competitor names and their products or services (F. Li et al., 2011; O’Leary, 2011).

2. Identification of the “Hot blogs” and opinion leaders

Although a “best practice” has not been agreed upon yet, the following variables can be distinguished in order to determine popular blogs:

- Network-based factors. This variable concerns in and out-links of a blog, the amount of received citations, the amount of comments on blog posts (Y. Li et al., 2011; F. Li et al., 2011), the pagerank (F. Li et al., 2011) and the competition on the topic (Gillin, 2009). Additionally, F. Li et al. (2011) argue that the expertise of the commenter should also be taken into account. This could be measured as well, by the amount of blog posts written and the amount of comments made by the commenter.
- Content-based factors. This variable concerns the published content on a blog. Variables of interest are the amount of blog posts, the average length of blog posts, and the life time of the blog in the blogosphere (F. Li et al., 2011; Y. Li et al., 2011).
- Activity-based factors. This variable is concerned with the activity of the author. Relevant variables are the number of blog posts in the blogosphere and the number of written comments by the author (F. Li et al., 2011; Y. Li et al., 2011).

3. Capturing customers’ voice and expressed sentiment

Once the popular blogs and opinion leaders have been determined, the expressed sentiment is of great importance. This could be gauged, semi-automated, by applying sentiment databases such as HowNet Knowledge Database (Y. Li et al., 2011) or SentiWordNet (Ahuja et al., 2011). However,

these predefined databases leave room for bias: take for example the contradiction in the comment “Apple is awfully good!”. Therefore, O’Leary et al. (2011) and Ahuja et al. (2011) emphasize the possibility for people to tag sentiments to their own comments, positive or negative. This simplifies and improves the ability to gauge the expressed sentiment. A recent example of this practice is provided by Youtube, which tested out this feature enabling visitors to tag their own comments based on 6 different sentiments.

8.2 Active approach

Once a company has a comprehensive overview of the blogosphere, including popular blogs, opinion leaders and the topics being discussed, a next possible step is to actively approach the blogosphere. Although there is no clear guide for entering the blogosphere, some chronological phases can be distinguished. These will be enumerated below.

8.2.1 Create voice & Join the conversation

The creation of a distinctive voice depends on a mix of style, variety, media, personal style and attitude. An example of a distinctive voice can be found on the blog of Woot.com, namely: “We are so busy saving you money, that we cannot take the time to be nice”. Gillin (2009) further argues that it is very important to keep the foundations of the created voice consistent, so that the audience gets used to it and is able to recognize someone’s writing style.

Once the voice has been shaped, it is possible to use it actively in existing conversations by leaving comments in the blogosphere. Below, 6 critical points for engaging the blogosphere are elaborated:

1. Be active. In order to develop a sustainable relationship with customers and to build a conversation, it is important to be active and spontaneous. Once the customer finds out that information is dated, he or she will leave the conversation (Kaplan, 2009).
2. Be interesting and ask for response. In order to successfully engage with customers, it is important to be interesting (Gillin, 2009; Scott, 2010; Weil, 2010). Of course 'being interesting' is hard to define, however, Kaplan et al. (2009) proposed some kind of guidance to achieve this. The first step is to listen in on the conversations and analyze the topics, the voice being used, and what the audience might find valuable or enjoyable. The next step would be to develop content to fit the identified expectations. Once this content is published, the company should analyze the response and revamp its voice.
3. Be humble. Since it is all about conversations and collaborative intelligence, it is important to behave transparently and to be accessible for other point of views (Kaplan, 2009; Scott, 2010).
4. Be unprofessional. A blog is not written in traditional corporate speak. It is therefore important to use a personal and informal voice (Kaplan, 2009; Mangold et al., 2009; Scott, 2010). Elaborate personal experiences and do not be afraid to make mistakes. Stay polite and people may actually provide free advice on how to improve the company’s presence (Gillin, 2009; Weil, 2010).
5. Be honest and own the content. Never provide misleading information or try to trick people, because sooner or later someone will find out and the acquired reputation will be gone. It is, therefore, advisable to always leave a reference when external sources are used (Gillin, 2009; Kaplan, 2009; Weil, 2010).

6. Introduce yourself and leave a reference where people can find out more about the writer. This allows people to gain insight in the writers' personal background and motives (Scott, 2010; Weil, 2010).

The above-mentioned points provide some guidance for behavior in the blogosphere. It is, however, important that a company continuously seeks ways to improve its voice and presence, based on the obtained response and experiences.

8.2.2 Reach new influencers (marketing)

The next step in actively engaging the blogosphere is reaching out to the new influential voices. A rough plan of approach to effectively reach influencers and build a sustainable relationship (Gillin, 2009) is detailed below.

1. Be sure to have read some of the influencer's posts and to understand the intent of the posts. These insights will enable someone to provide relevant feedback on the existing topics (Mangold et al., 2009). This is really important, since influencers will only write about what interests them (Edelman, 2005).
2. Make the first contact a positive one. Even if you do not like everything the influencer has written, search for something you like and comment on that. However, always be honest in your comments.
3. Ask the influencer for advice. People like to look smart and feel important. Therefore, asking an influencer for advice is a fast way to establish a relationship.
4. Take the conversation offline. If a company is serious about building a relationship, you may offer the online influencer exclusive privileges by taking the conversation offline (Mangold et al., 2009). For example provide a product prototype and request a review.
5. Follow through. Traditional marketers tend to contact influencers only when they have something to sell. In that case the communication is not focused on building a relationship, but rather on making a transaction. As the blogosphere is all about conversations, it is important for marketers to keep track of the influencers' voice.
6. Give online influencers the same privileges and access as offline influencers, since online influencers are just another kind of media voice.

8.2.3 Create & implement its own (external) blog

Once a company is determined to create its own blog, the first thing to do would be to develop a comprehensive plan of approach. The plan of approach deals with the direction of engagement and elaborates on elements like focal topic, audience, goals, ethics and guidelines. Each of these elements of interest will be described.

Blog plan of approach

A: Goals, objectives and metrics

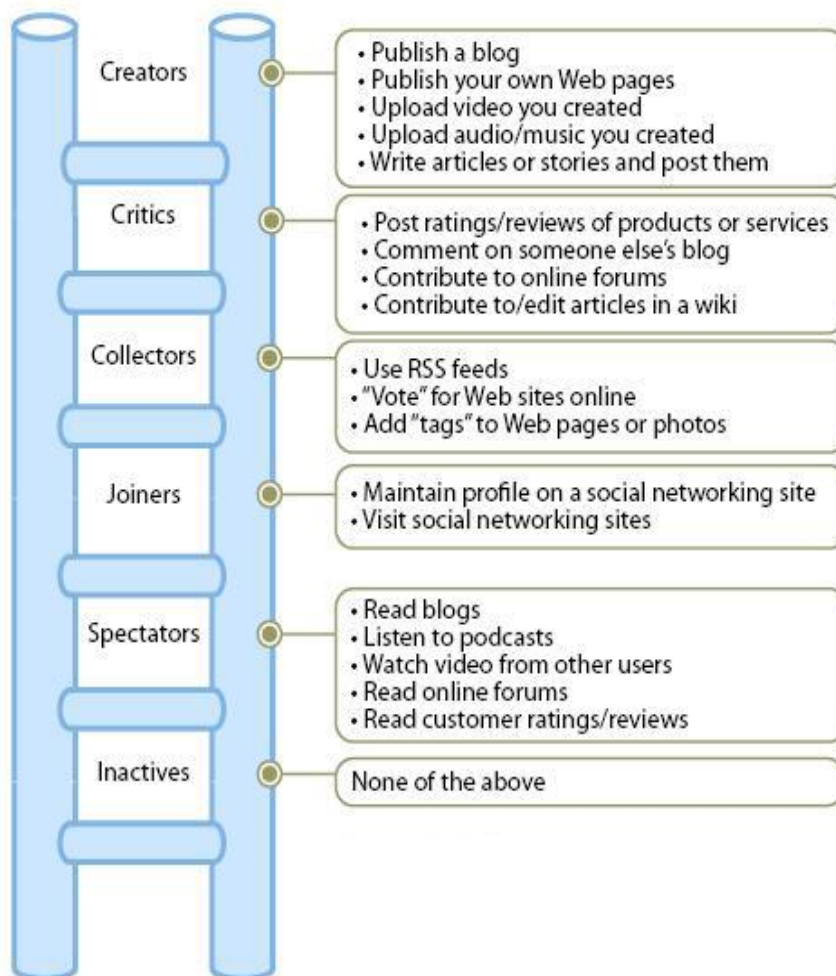
Every plan of approach starts with the question why the company wants to develop its own blog. This part elaborates on the motivation of the company to create its own blog and the goals that a company wants to achieve (Kent, 2008), and it helps to identify the objectives in order to accomplish the defined goals (Gillin, 2009; Weil, 2010). As already mentioned in chapter 2.3.4, blogs can obtain

several values. Besides the positive effects of blogging, such as humanizing the company and establishing a direct dialogue with customers, blogging may also serve very specific company goals. For example, these goals may include (1) enhancing customer relations, (2) customer insights, or (3) driving purchase intent. The objectives related to these goals may include (1) encouraging ongoing interaction with customers and media, (2) identifying common topics among discussions and (3) enhancing the customer engagement with the company's website. These objectives could, for instance, be narrowed down to the following blog metrics: (1) number of comments post, (2) sentiment of discussions and (3) number of leads or RSS subscriptions.

B: Identify audience

Once the goals and objectives are clear, the company should identify who they want to reach. To be able to write targeted content with a distinctive and passionate voice, the company should try to identify their blog audience as clearly as possible. These insights can be gathered by analyzing ongoing discussions on topics, expressed sentiments, applicable voice etc., which has already been acquired during the passive approach and the early stages of the active approach (Scott, 2010; Weil, 2010). Additionally, Li et al. (2008) made a classification that supports the identification of the audience in a Web 2.0 environment. This model can be found below:

Figure: Social Technographics Ladder.



Source: Li et al. (2008)

C: Focal topic

In order to stay interesting and gain influence in the blogosphere, choosing the right topic is very important (Li et al., 2008; Singh et al., 2008; Ahuja et al., 2011). Since the blogosphere offers new opportunities for niche markets, a specific topic may successfully be sustained in the blogosphere (Constantinides and Fountain, 2008). On the other hand, being too specific may also result in too few visitors. It is, therefore, very important to choose the right, distinctive, topic. This topic should represent the corporation's passion and expertise, and serve as a guideline in writing prominent content (Weil, 2010).

D: Code of ethics

If a company engages the blogosphere, it is important to be aware of the dos-and-don'ts. Otherwise a company might elicit a negative response. It is, therefore, meaningful to develop a code of ethics first. This code of ethics helps the blogger to play by the rules in the blogosphere. An example can be found below (Gillin, 2009; Weil, 2010):

- I will tell the truth;
- I will not delete any comment unless it contains spam or they are off-topic;
- I will respond to comments or emails;
- I will always talk respectfully;
- I will admit mistakes and try to correct them immediately;
- I will not delete any of my posts.

E: Blog policy

In order to protect the company in the blogosphere, a blog policy should be compiled. The blog policy covers what employees can and cannot say for legal or company reasons (Li et al., 2009). Since blogging is all about transparency and authenticity, the challenge here is to not discourage employees to blog or limit their voice, but to educate them on the legal risks of blogging to protect the company interests. Weil (2010) emphasized blog policies from two different perspectives.

From a company point of view:

- Identify what topics are on and off limit;
- Clarify whether employees are allowed to blog on company time;
- Clarify whether employees should include a disclaimer when blogging.

From an employee point of view:

- Use common sense;
- Question yourself whether you would like to see the blog post in the newspaper. If not, you should not publish it on the blog;
- Be aware that trashing your employer or leaking confidential information might get you fired.

An example of a blog policy may look like this:

- Do not accuse your colleagues or discuss their behavior publically;
- Do not blog anything dishonorable;

- You are allowed to blog on company time;
- Do not blog anything confidential;
- Do not pick fights;
- Try to get attention in the blogosphere by citing other bloggers.

F: Disclaimer

Adding a disclaimer to an employee's blog post is considered a 'best practice' for corporate blogging. The disclaimer primarily states that the words of the blogger do not represent the company's point of view. Additionally, the disclaimer acknowledges that the blogger is an employee of the company and is allowed to blog. A disclaimer might look like this (Weil, 2010): "The posts that are published on my blog, are expressed in my own words and do not represent my employer's point of view. Therefore, nothing published on my blog should be considered official".

G: Editorial process

The editorial process is concerned with who writes what and, if necessary, who reviews the posts. Such an editorial process might be especially helpful when more than 1 author blogs on multiple subjects. In such a case, the editorial process will provide a comprehensive overview of who is doing what. Nevertheless, authors also argue that this process should be very lightweight since a blogger should be able to act fast if necessary (Li et al., 2008; Jerving, 2009; Weil, 2010; Granholm et al., 2011).

H: Rehearsal

Many authors emphasize the importance to first rehearse internally, before starting to blog publicly (Li et al., 2008; Singh et al., 2008; Gillin, 2009; Jerving, 2009; Scott, 2010; Weil, 2010). This enables companies to experiment with the topic, the writing and voice, the editorial process and so forth. By letting others review some of the experimental blog posts, the blogger could gain new insights into further improving the writing.

Blog design

Not much has been written about the best practices for a blog design. Nevertheless, authors do agree that the design of a corporate blog should differ just a little from the conventional website. This way, the audience can easily recognize that both sites are related, but do not have the same purpose (Scott, 2010; Weil, 2010). Weil (2010) classified 5 key design features for corporate blogs. They are:

1. Proactively promote having people sign up for the newsletter. This should be somewhere on the top of the page (Scott, 2010). Additionally, it is important to use an engaging description. Something like "Subscribe to our blog posts" will not do the trick. A more engaging approach might sound like "Like what you are reading? Subscribe and you will not miss a thing!"
2. Although many blog designs use the right-hand column for navigation, Weil (2010) argues that people are more used to left-hand navigation. Therefore, blogs should make use of the left-hand column for navigation.
3. RSS subscriptions are widely considered a prominent metric to determine the popularity of a blog (Gillin, 2009; Kaushik, 2010; Scott, 2010; Weil, 2010). Therefore, it is important that the RSS subscription button is positioned at a prominent place in the blog design (Scott, 2010).

Additionally, some people might not know what RSS is. It is therefore advisable to also provide a link to an RSS information page. Subscription buttons to My Yahoo! or My Google are also recommended.

4. Since blogs display published posts in a reverse-chronological order, the most recent posts will show up on top. This could mean that popular blog posts will be lost from sight. It is therefore recommended to create a widget that displays the most popular blog posts. This way, new visitors are able to easily find and read the best posts that a blog has to offer (Scott, 2010).
5. Lead people to the most desired action, hereinafter MDA, such as ordering a certain product. This can be done by displaying the MDA at each blog post or in a side column. It is also possible to display MDAs next to relevant blog posts (Scott, 2010).

Blog content

Bloggers should only write about topics that they are passionate about. Only then can a blogger succeed in writing distinctively and supply interesting content for the audience. Moreover, writing engaging content is closely related to the bloggers' voice. Below some essential considerations on creating distinctive content are mentioned:

1. Choose the right topic and find your voice. These competences provide guidance for the blogger to stay on topic and write with a distinctive voice (Edelman, 2005; Gillin, 2009).
2. Make use of an "about me" page, where readers can find a biography of the author, the author's passion for the topic and a photo. This allows the audience to identify with the author and makes them feel more connected (Scott, 2010; Weil, 2010).
3. Invite a conversation. By asking readers for their feedback or perspectives on published content, a dialogue with the reader can be established and the blogger may receive valuable insights to improve his/her writing (Gillin, 2009; Weil, 2010).
4. Do not make blog posts too long. Some authors emphasize a maximum of 500 words per blog post (Gillin, 2009), while others argue that it is not really critical, as long as it is interesting and informative (Weil, 2010).
5. Always leave a reference when external sources are used (Edelman, 2005; Gillin, 2009). Probably, the source will notice this reference and read the published blog post. This may result in a new valuable conversation and relationship (Scott, 2010; Weil, 2010).
6. Readers are often more loyal to blog posts with lots of white space, snappy subheads, bullet points, short paragraphs and a mix of text, images and video (Weil, 2010).
7. Using popular keywords in the post title will positively affect ranking in search engines (Scott, 2010; Weil, 2010).
8. Try to blog frequently. Blogging a few times a week is ideal for the readers' retention and the ranking in search engines (Gillin, 2009; Scott, 2010; Weil, 2010).
9. Take risks, for instance by blogging about controversial issues. This will attract the attention of the reader and encourage him/her to comment at the same time (Edelman, 2005; Gillin, 2009; Scott, 2010; Weil, 2010)

Blog marketing

In order to promote a corporate blog, multiple practices are applicable. First of all a company should include a reciprocal link between the conventional website and the corporate blog. Secondly, as the

blogger already has some connections in the blogosphere, mentioning the corporate blog to influential influencers or in existing conversations will enhance the awareness in the blogosphere (Gillin, 2009; Scott, 2010; Weil, 2010). Below some additional marketing practices are further elaborated.

A: Subscribe RSS

RSS allows people to create their own personalized news feed and, as such, avoid spam. This enables a blogger to automatically notify its RSS subscribers when a new item is published. One could imagine the number of RSS subscribers to be meaningful metric in order to measure the success of a blog. It is, therefore, very important to promote the RSS feed of a blog. This can be done on the blog itself, but also by signing up for the RSS feed on services such as Bloglines, NewsIsFree, Feedster and Google toolbar.

B: Use tags

Tags are a way to classify and organize blog posts (Scott, 2010). They allow the reader to easily browse different topics based on allocated tags. Blogs also often have a “tag cloud”, which presents the most popular tags that readers searched for or that are allocated to blog posts. This provides a quick overview for the reader and the blogger on popular search terms and topics. Additionally, bookmarking sites, such as del.icio.us, enable visitors to save and share favorite websites with peer visitors and classify these websites through allocated tags. Tags also positively affect the search engine ranking (Weil, 2010). These days in particular, Google pays ever more attention to the tags that are allocated to a certain blog post.

C: Commenting

When blog posts attract many comments and real-time conversations start to develop, ever more people will become aware of the blog post. Not only because of “word-of-mouth”, but also due to the positive effects a lively blog has on search engines (Scott, 2010; Weil, 2010).

D: Viral marketing

It is considered to be very difficult to determine the best practices for creating viral content. Some success factors, however, can be distinguished (Gillin, 2009):

1. The product or service has to be good. No marketing campaign can overcome bad quality of the product it is selling. A viral campaign is an interaction of the campaign itself and the actual product it is selling (Gillin, 2009; Tanuri, 2009).
2. In order to engage the customer, the marketing campaign must be humorous, innovative or intriguing (Edelman, 2005; Singh et al., 2008). For instance, a company could upload a very mysterious video teaser to initially get the attention of the public. This might cause the video to go viral. Once the company has the attention of the public, it may reveal the actual (marketing) message (Gillin, 2009).
3. Never push it. The public decides whether a campaign goes viral or not. Once people believe that a company is trying to manipulate them, the campaign is doomed to fail (Gillin, 2009).
4. Reward people for contributing, but do it with great care. A good example of rewarding people is to provide exclusive features, such as insights of peer users. People like to be part

of a success, and providing such statistics may encourage them to spread the word further (Gillin, 2009).

5. Let it go. Once the campaign goes viral, it is out of the corporation's control. The public decides how the campaign will develop and how others will experience it. This might seem scary, but it is the only way to do it (Gillin, 2009).
6. Use the medium. By contacting relevant influencers and providing them with early head-ups on the campaign, they might pick up on the idea and spread the word. Their contribution may support the campaign, helping it to go viral (Gillin, 2009; Tanuri, 2009).

E: SEO

As mentioned before, lively blogs often score very well in search engines. Bloggers can fulfill their search engine optimization (SEO) even more by using the right keywords in their titles, blog post and tags. It is also important to use SEO-friendly URLs and provide an SEO-friendly source code. However, these competences have already been taken care of in most of the leading blogging software. Additionally, Gillin (2009) elaborates on some pillars for search engine optimization.

1. Write for search. This concerns the use of the right keywords in the title, message and tags (Gillin, 2009; Chun, 2011).
2. Update often. As already mentioned before, frequently updated blogs positively affect the ranking in search engines (Gillin, 2009; Weil, 2010).
3. Provide a sitemap. A sitemap contains an overview of all the pages and posts that a blog contains. By uploading a sitemap to a search engine, all the pages and posts that a blog has to offer will be indexed automatically in the search engine database (Gillin, 2009).
4. Make use of tags. As already mentioned before, these days tags become increasingly more important for a good ranking in the search engines (Gillin, 2009).
5. Exchange links with industry-related blogs and always refer to external sources whenever these are used. Search engines evaluate a website based upon the incoming and outgoing links. A blog with a "healthy" ratio of inbound and outbound referrers is considered to be prominent. (Gillin, 2009; Scott, 2010; Weil, 2010)
6. Cross-link with the conventional company's website (Gillin, 2009; Weil, 2010; Chun, 2011; Huang, 2011).
7. Syndicate new blog posts everywhere, for example by using RSS (Gillin, 2009).
8. Make use of bookmarking sites (Gillin, 2009).

ROI blog

Several authors emphasize on the difficulty to determine the ROI for blogging, hereinafter ROB (Gillin, 2009; Weil, 2010). Many fail to mention the ROB at all (Edelman, 2005; Karger et al., 2005; Kent, 2008; Mayfield, 2008; Singh et al., 2008; Mangold et al., 2009). Others only provide a general description of how a company could measure the return on blogging or the possible success factors there could be (Scott, 2010; Weil, 2010). Some authors tried to provide more guidance by proposing a spreadsheet in order to determine the costs and benefits of blogging (Li et al., 2008; Jerving, 2009). Although such a spreadsheet provides clearer insights in determining the actual costs and benefits, it does not include micro-metrics, nor does it provide a comprehensive overview of the blog's performance.

Kaushik (2010) proposed an in-depth framework, which encompasses both of the above mentioned metrics, in order to determine the return on blogging (ROB). This framework is illustrated below.

Figure: ROB.

	Blog Success Metrics	Diary	Personal blog	Business blog
1	Raw author contribution		✓	✓
2	Audience growth	✓	✓	✓
3	Conversation rate		✓	✓
4	Citations / Ripple Index			✓
5	Cost	✓	✓	✓
6	Benefit			✓

Source: Kaushik (2010)

As can be derived from the figure above, all the Blog Success Metrics are applicable for business blogs. These metrics will be discussed in more detail (Kaushik, 2010):

A: Raw author contribution

This metric concerns with the question, “Do I deserve to be successful?” and is about measuring the contribution of the blogger to the world. The Raw Author Contribution entails two metrics:

1. Posts per month = # posts / # of month blogging
2. Content created = # of words in a post / # of post

B: Holistic audience growth

This metric deals with the question, “Is anyone reading my content?” In order to answer this question, a blogger could use micro-metrics such as visitors, page views or other web-tracking metrics, but also macro-metrics such as RSS subscribers. As mentioned before, the number of RSS subscribers to a blog is considered to be an important indicator in determining how loyal the readers are and how successful the blog is (Gillin, 2009; Kaushik, 2010; Weil, 2010).

C: Conversation rate

Kaushik (2010) argues that blogs are the most social application type of all Social Media applications, since blogs offer a dialogue rather than a monologue. The Conversation Rate metric deals with the question whether a conversation is taking place or not. This additionally elaborates on whether the blogger is publishing engaging content for its readers. The Conversation Rate can be calculated as follows:

$$\text{Conversation Rate} = \# \text{ of visitor comments (including trackbacks)} / \# \text{ of posts}$$

D: Citations and Ripple Index

This metric is concerned with the impact of the blog posts on other blogs or social platforms. The question this metric deals with is, whether people are talking about you beyond your own blog. This includes references on other social platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. In order to collect these

data, several tools are available: free tools such as Google Alerts and Google Insights, but also commercial services such as Nielsen Buzz, Blog Scope, Collective Intellect, Buzz Capture, Tweet Citations and Technorati. In addition, it is also possible to manually search for external references, for example by searching for inbound links or relevant keywords in the search engines (Kaushik, 2010).

E: Cost of blogging

In order to measure this metric, three different components are distinguished (Kaushik, 2010).

1. Technology. Technology includes the costs of the domain name, the hosting and the software used to blog.
2. Time. This is the time spent on blogging, multiplied by the hourly rate of the author.
3. Opportunity Costs. If someone would not blog, he or she would have time left for other initiatives or work-related activities. These costs regard the values that one could gain by conducting other activities instead of blogging.

F: Values of blogging

The values of blogging can be calculated based on four different values (Kaushik, 2010).

1. Comparative Value. This is the value of the blog itself. This value is computed on variables such as inbound links, number of visitors, number of posts and feed subscribers, and compared to the blogosphere as a whole. Several free tools are available to calculate the comparative value, such as Blogcalculator.com. This value, however, is only a rough estimate.
2. Direct Value. This metric is concerned with the generation of real money through the blog, for instance by selling advertising space or by generating leads.
3. Non-traditional Value. As the traditional marketing is losing ground, other social approaches are necessary to engage with customers and establish a conversation. In doing so, companies deliver some kind of value, without directly asking for anything in return. By engaging and empowering customers on the basis of honesty and trust, companies might create brand advocates. These advocates are able to amplify the positive word-of-mouth, which allows companies to cut back on their customer acquisition costs. The reduction of these acquisition costs represents the potential value of this metric.
4. Unquantifiable Value. This metric concerns the personal ROB for the blogger. Since the blogger provides the content for the blog, it is the happiness and devotion of the blogger in particular that determine the success of the blog. This may arise from intrinsic motivation such as a form of “therapy”, but also extrinsic motivation, such as received comments, emails and compliments.

Appendix 9: Transcription interviews

Only accessible in the confidential version.

Appendix 10: Proposed classification & mentioned genres

Employee	Company	Expert	Topic
- CEO	- Company	- Expert	- Topic
- Internal	- Customer service	- Expert/Thought leadership	- Expert/Thought leadership
-Executive	- Expert/Thought leadership	- Promotional / marketing	- Group
-Company platform	- Topic		- Promotional / marketing
	- Internal		
	- Group		
	- Advocacy		
	- Promotional / marketing		
	- Public relations		

Appendix 11: Business competences & values

(Full calculation model attached in Excel format on CD-ROM.)

HRM

Values Business Competences					Contribution degree	Average contribution	Relative contribution
	Collaboration employees	Staff moral	New recruits	Personal development			
Differentiation			+		1	0,25	14,48%
Internal / External communication			+		1	0,25	60,00%
Become a publisher				+	1	0,25	16,54%
Instant publishing	+	+			2	0,50	15,79%
Content intensive	+			+	2	0,50	12,35%
Humanization		+			1	0,25	17,95%
2-way dialogs	+			+	2	0,50	16,28%
Authenticity		+			1	0,25	17,95%
Wide coverage					0	0,00	0,00%
Focused communication				+	1	0,25	6,93%
Own platform & moderate conversation	+				1	0,25	100,00%

Totals

4

3

2

4

Relative contribution per functional area

14,36%

= NOT MENTIONED

+ = MENTIONED RELATION

CRM

Values Business Competences	Further engaging	Customer service	Customer loyalty	Contribution degree	Average contribution	Relative contribution
Differentiation				0	0,00	0,00%
Internal / External communication				0	0,00	0,00%
Become a publisher		+		1	0,33	22,05%
Instant publishing	+	+	+	3	1,00	31,58%
Content intensive	+	+	+	3	1,00	24,71%
Humanization	+		+	2	0,67	47,86%
2-way dialogs	+	+		2	0,67	21,71%
Authenticity			+	1	0,33	23,93%
Wide coverage				0	0,00	0,00%
Focused communication	+	+		2	0,67	18,48%
Own platform & moderate conversation				0	0,00	0,00%

Totals

5

5

4

Relative contribution per functional area

20,62%

= NOT MENTIONED

+ = MENTIONED RELATION

PR

Business Competences \ Values	Public content hub	Effective communication	Reputation	Media coverage	Create support	Networking	Contribution degree	Average contribution	Relative contribution
Differentiation	+	+	+		+	+	5	0,83	48,28%
Internal / External communication	+						1	0,17	40,00%
Become a publisher	+			+	+		3	0,50	33,07%
Instant publishing	+						1	0,17	5,26%
Content intensive	+		+	+	+	+	5	0,83	20,59%
Humanization			+			+	2	0,33	23,93%
2-way dialogs			+		+		2	0,33	10,85%
Authenticity	+		+	+		+	4	0,67	47,86%
Wide coverage				+	+		2	0,33	16,28%
Focused communication			+		+		2	0,33	9,24%
Own platform & moderate conversation							0	0,00	0,00%

Totals

6

1

6

4

6

4

Relative contribution per functional area

19,88%

= NOT MENTIONED

+ = MENTIONED RELATION

RD

Values Business Competences	Inputs for R&D	Contribution degree	Average contribution	Relative contribution
Differentiation		0	0,00	0,00%
Internal / External communication		0	0,00	0,00%
Become a publisher		0	0,00	0,00%
Instant publishing	+	1	1,00	31,58%
Content intensive	+	1	1,00	24,71%
Humanization		0	0,00	0,00%
2-way dialogs	+	1	1,00	32,56%
Authenticity		0	0,00	0,00%
Wide coverage		0	0,00	0,00%
Focused communication	+	1	1,00	27,72%
Own platform & moderate conversation		0	0,00	0,00%

Totals

4

Relative contribution per functional area

17,67%

= NOT MENTIONED

+ = MENTIONED RELATION

Marketing

Values Business Competences	Messaging	Social identity & branding	Search engine visibility	Reach niches	Market awareness	Reach prospects	More visitors	Contribution degree	Average contribution	Relative contribution
Differentiation				+				1	0,14	8,28%
Internal / External communication								0	0,00	0,00%
Become a publisher	+			+		+		3	0,43	28,35%
Instant publishing								0	0,00	0,00%
Content intensive		+	+		+	+	+	5	0,71	17,65%
Humanization		+						1	0,14	10,26%
2-way dialogs			+		+	+	+	4	0,57	18,60%
Authenticity		+						1	0,14	10,26%
Wide coverage	+		+		+	+	+	5	0,71	34,88%
Focused communication	+	+		+	+	+	+	6	0,86	23,76%
Own platform & moderate conversation								0	0,00	0,00%

Totals

3

4

3

3

4

5

4

Relative contribution per functional area

16,41%

= NOT MENTIONED

+ = MENTIONED RELATION

Sales

Values Business Competences			Contribution degree	Average contribution	Relative contribution
	Sales efficiency	Lead generation			
Differentiation	+		1	0,50	28,97%
Internal / External communication			0	0,00	0,00%
Become a publisher			0	0,00	0,00%
Instant publishing		+	1	0,50	15,79%
Content intensive			0	0,00	0,00%
Humanization			0	0,00	0,00%
2-way dialogs			0	0,00	0,00%
Authenticity			0	0,00	0,00%
Wide coverage	+	+	2	1,00	48,84%
Focused communication	+		1	0,50	13,86%
Own platform & moderate conversation			0	0,00	0,00%

Totals

3

2

Relative contribution per functional area

= NOT MENTIONED

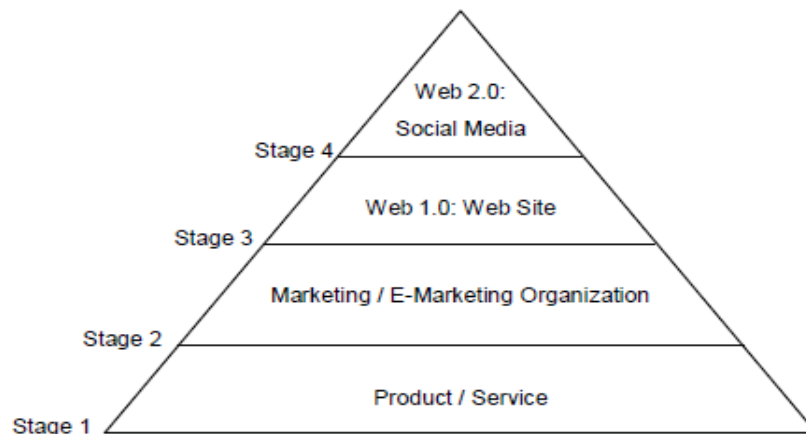
+ = MENTIONED RELATION

11,05%

Nature Value Contribution

		Total value	Relative value contribution
Natures	Business competences		
Web 2.0 medium	Differentiation	8	8,99%
Publishing platform	Internal / External communication	2	2,25%
Sender oriented	Become a publisher	8	8,99%
Real-time	Instant publishing	8	8,99%
Long form	Content intensive	16	17,98%
Personal	Humanization	6	6,74%
Interactive	2-way dialogs	11	12,36%
Open & transparent	Authenticity	7	7,87%
Interconnection	Wide coverage	9	10,11%
Topic-driven	Focused communication	13	14,61%
Controllable	Own platform & moderate conversation	1	1,12%
Totals	Totals	89	100%

Appendix 12: Position of Web 2.0 in the marketing pyramid.



Source: Constantinides et al. (2008)

12.1 Web 2.0 in the marketing pyramid

The first step of engaging Web 2.0 as a marketing tool is to understand the different stages and the position of Web 2.0 within the marketing pyramid. Therefore these different stages will be elaborated below.

Stage 1: Product and service

The core principle of every company is its products and services. These products and services should reflect the company's vision, strategy and customer expectations. Since Web 2.0 is all about transparency, communication and honesty, it is nowadays particularly important for a company to deliver the expected value to its environment. Failing to do so could be devastating for a company in the Web 2.0 environment (Constantinides et al., 2008; Gillin, 2009; Granholm et al., 2011).

Stage 2: The marketing organization

The next stage in the marketing pyramid denotes the creation of a market-oriented company that support, both traditional and online marketing activities. Due to intense competition it is important for a company to focus on market needs, in order to effectively reach its customers and gain competitive advantage (Constantinides et al., 2008).

Stage 3: Web 1.0 legacy

Due to the growing usage of the internet and the increasing expectations of online visitors, it is vital for companies to deliver a superb online experience (Constantinides et al., 2008; BBC, 2010). Failing to do so might seriously damage the product and brand reputation. Companies should therefore understand the necessity of a user-friendly and well-designed website. In order to comply with that, companies should first decide what role the website must play within the overall marketing strategy. In general, there are several roles that a company's website can fulfill: informational, promotional, relational, educational or transactional (Constantinides et al., 2008).

Stage 4: Web 2.0

In order to successfully engage Web 2.0 applications as a marketing tool, it is important for companies to understand that Web 2.0 builds upon the foundations of Web 1.0 practices (O'Reilly, 2007; Berners-Lee, 2010). Therefore companies should first make sure to offer the best possible Web 1.0 experience to its customers, before applying Web 2.0 into their marketing strategy (Constantinides et al., 2008).

Appendix 13: Required Web 2.0 business processes.

You already have this business function	Now you can pursue this groundswell objective	How things are different in the groundswell
Research	Listening	Ongoing monitoring of your customers' conversations with each other , instead of occasional surveys and focus groups.
Marketing	Talking	Participating in and stimulating two-way conversations your customers have with each other , not just outbound communications to your customers.
Sales	Energizing	Making it possible for your enthusiastic customers to help sell each other
Support	Supporting	Enabling your customers to support each other
Development	Embracing	Helping your customers work with each other to come up with ideas to improve your products and services

Source: Li et al. (2008)

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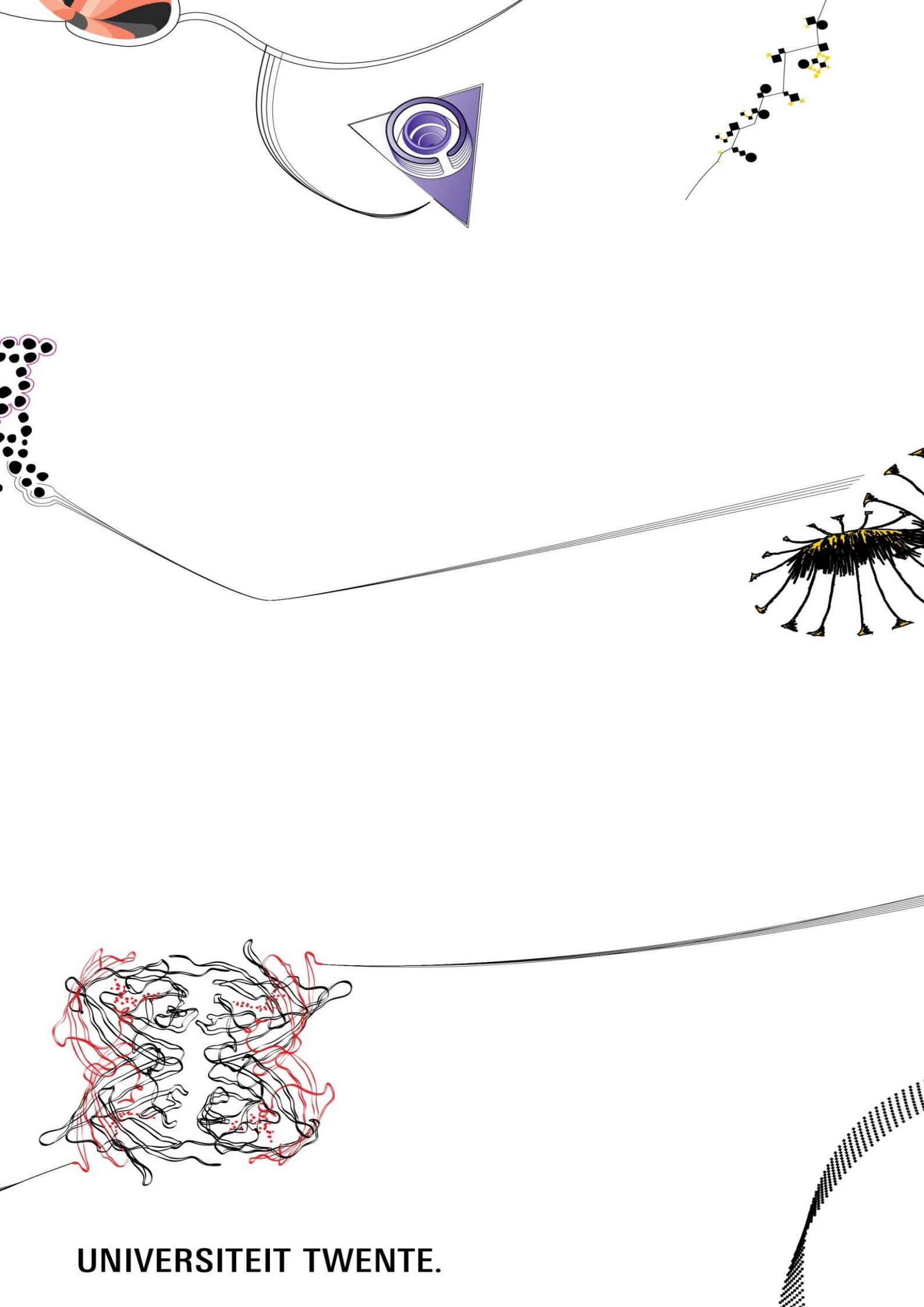
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