



## Relationship Management by Indian Corporate through Blogs

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### ABSTRACT

*Blogs offer a unique channel for a corporation to directly communicate with its publics in an intimate way that resembles interpersonal communication, while reaching out to the mass audience. A corporate blog might be defined as a web site where an organization publishes and manages content to attain its goals. Corporate blogs are considered by some practitioners and scholars as a potentially effective and efficient tool for building and maintaining relationships between a corporation and its publics. The present research is undertaken to study how Indian corporations use blogs by identifying features of corporate blogs corresponding to established relationship maintenance strategies and analyzing whether and how such features are used. Findings indicated that Indian corporate are not utilizing corporate blogs in big number. Positivity and openness strategy are adopted effectively by these corporate in their blogs.*

**Keywords :** Corporate Blogs, Relationship Management, Indian Corporate

### Introduction

Need of communication has lead to many innovations and continuous technological improvements. Social Media came in existence, for the fulfillment of networking need. Alongside came many tools on social media which brought people closer. One such tool is Blog, blogs offer a unique channel for a corporation to directly communicate with its publics in an intimate way that resembles interpersonal communication, while reaching out to the mass audience. As many practitioners suggest, a corporate blog might be defined as a web site where an organization publishes and manages content to attain its goals (Lee, Hwang and Lee, 2006). Smudde (2005) described corporate blogs as "a hybrid of the personal blog. These blogs are fairly new and feature the insights, assessments, commentary, and other discourse devoted to a single company."

Organizations form relationships with publics because publics have resources that organizations need to fulfill their values-driven goals. Today's internet technologies are bringing rapid change to organizational communication and PR. Research has shown that use of the World Wide Web among communication professionals has increased in the last few years, improving productivity and efficiency, two-way communication, research, and issues communication thereby enhancing management role enactment and perceived decision-making power (Porter and Sallot, 2003). New web-based services were originally used by corporations to interact with existing customers, maintain a corporate image, improve internal communications, and reach out to new markets and audiences. Corporate blogs are considered by some practitioners and scholars as a potentially effective and efficient tool for building and maintaining relationships between a corporation and its publics.

### Literature Review

One of the emerging issues regarding corporate blogs is whether and to what extent a corporation can control the content of blogs while pursuing open dialogues with publics (Lee et al., 2006). Kelleher and Miller (2006) suggested that blogs could provide a company with a chance to communicate with its customers in a humanized voice and to show the company's characters to the public. Sweetser and Metzgar (2007) opined that corporate blogs could improve the relation-

ship between a corporation and its publics during a crisis, by conveying conversational human voices. Henrikki et al (2009) stated, "In the blogs, social aspects were seen as a main motivating factor in customer use of virtual worlds. To enhance social interactions, companies should have representatives at their locations. Representatives should be the avatars of real people to increase the sociality of interaction." Porter et al (2009) examined the perception and adoption of blogs among public relations practitioners and how blog use relates to roles and status. The authors concluded that while blog use was similar to national audiences, practitioners were maintaining mostly personal blogs and using blogs professionally at low levels. Furthermore, women lagged behind men in the strategic use of blogs. Finally, cluster analysis challenged Porter and Sallot's roles typology, reverting to the previous manager-technician dichotomy. Yan and Brooke (2010) opined that practitioners and academics are buzzing about the impact of the blogosphere on public relations practices. Emerging evidence indicates that strategically managing blog-mediated public relations may be especially critical for crisis managers. In their study they proposed a new conceptual model to help public relations professionals navigate the evolving blogosphere: the blog mediated crisis communication model. This model helps crisis managers monitor the blogosphere and respond, when appropriate, to influential bloggers.

Cho and Huh (2010) suggested that a growing number of major corporations in the USA have adopted blogs as a corporate communication tool and the popularity of topic-oriented blogs appears to have increased over time. While corporate blogs tend to apply various relationship maintenance strategies, the application of such strategies tends to be concentrated on a certain type of strategies.

No previous research has examined corporate blogs as relationship management tool in Indian context. The present research is taken up to understand how corporate blogs can be used as a relationship management tool, for this purpose, first it is examined how Indian corporations actually use blogs by identifying features of corporate blogs corresponding to established relationship maintenance strategies and analyzing whether and how such features are used.

## Methodology

The objective of the present study is to find out the key characteristic of the blogs utilized by corporate. The study further aims at studying the extent to which corporate employ Stafford and Canary's (1991) relationship maintenance strategies and what specific strategies are most frequently used?

Top 100 companies listed on the Business Today were considered for the present study. Official websites of companies were visited from where relevant data was collected and the companies using corporate blogs were identified. Blogs by media organizations and un-official blogs were excluded. After the elimination of these blogs, a total of 5 blogs were found in year 2012. Content analysis Technique of Qualitative Research is used for the analysis of these blogs.

The coding scheme has been developed on relationship maintenance strategies proposed by Stafford and Canary (1991). The analysis of blogs was done on the basis of positivity, openness, social networking and sharing tasks strategies. Positivity refers to features used to enable the ease of use for user. Positivity has been measured by presence of different user-friendly navigation tools and interactivity features. In addition, various multi-media features were counted as well, because such features can be considered to represent a corporation's efforts to make user interaction more enjoyable and entertaining. Openness refers to the features that enable two way communications between blog author and user. It has been measured by the presence of two-way communication features such as comment and trackback functions. Social networking, defined as networking with common friends and affiliations, was measured by presence of blog roll and the number of links on it. Sharing tasks was measured by the frequency of postings in blogs. The frequency of blog posting influences the users' perception of how well the blog author is performing expected tasks.

## Results

### Key characteristics of corporate blogs

The data revealed that only five corporate out of top 100 listed in "Business Today" are using corporate blogs. Out of these 1 is a Government organization, whereas 4 are private sector corporate. To understand the key characteristics of corporate blogs, an analysis of industry type, author characteristics, and blog topics were done. An analysis by industry type depicts that 3 (60%) blogs were operated by service sector corporate, 1 (20%) was operated by automobile whereas the last 1 (20%) was owned by manufacturing company. A further analysis into service sector depicted a very surprising picture, all the blogs were owned by IT companies.

All the 5 blogs are multi vocal which means the blogs are written by different representatives of the organization according to the topic. This can be interpreted here that companies use authors to write the blog according to the topic as they are multi vocal. 4 (80%) corporate are having multiple number of blogs, accept the government company.

### Relationship maintenance strategies

Following the methodology of, Cho and Huh (2010), On the basis of positivity, openness, social networking and sharing tasks strategies, the analysis of stafford and canary's relationship maintenance strategies was done.

Positivity	Frequency	Percentage
RSS	5	100
Monthly Archive	4	80
Hyper text within posts	2	40
Category	4	80
Podcast	4	80
Video clip	4	80

Table 1 (The sample base is 5)

Positivity: Table 1 shows that corporate are adopting navi-

gational features on their blogs which are user friendly, RSS tool was the most popular, used by all, followed by monthly archive, category, podcast and video clip used by 80% of corporate. Cho and huh (2010) reported most corporate blogs provided a number of different user-friendly navigational features. The RSS syndication tool was the most popular feature.

Openness	Frequency	Percentage
Comment	5	100
Trackback	4	80

Table 2 (The sample base is 5)

Openness: All the blogs in the study were multiple blogs, leaving comments in the blog site was the only way for visitors to share their thoughts and feelings with a corporate blogger and to carry out two-way communication (Cho and Huh, 2010). All the blogs i.e. 5 (100%) provided comment function and 4 (80%) of them had trackback function (Table 2). This indicates that blogs in the study enable two way communications between blog author and user.

Social Networking	Frequency	Percentage
Blogroll	3	60

Table 3 (The sample base is 5)

Social networking: 60% i.e. 3 blogs had blogroll function on their blogs (Table 3). It indicates that corporate blogs in India are although putting efforts that facilitate better social networking, but their main focus is on internal connectivity.

Sharing Tasks	Frequency	Percentage
Frequency of postings		
More than twice a day	0	0
Approximately once a day	1	20
Two to three times a week	2	40
Once a week	1	20
More than one month	1	20

Table 4 (The sample base is 5)

Sharing tasks: The data shows that only 3 (60%) blogs are updated two to three times a week or more often (Table 4). It is important that blogs are updated frequently, as most regular users visit blogs to read updated postings and to leave responses and therefore, the frequency of blog posting is likely to influence the users' perception of how well the blog author is performing expected tasks, and can be a good indicator of the corporate bloggers' taking responsibility in maintaining their relationships with blog visitors.

## Conclusions and Implications

Corporate blogs provide a great opportunity to portray an image of the organization, due to the increasing number of internet audience in India. Owing to the unique characteristics suitable for both interpersonal and mass communication, corporate blogs are considered by some practitioners and scholars as a potentially effective and efficient tool for building and maintaining relationships between a corporation and its publics (Hill, 2004; Kelleher and Miller, 2006; Smudde, 2005). At the same time, the unique characteristics of blogs such as reduced – or a lack of – corporate control over the communication and messages have also generated much concerns and skepticism among others (Cox et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2006).

The present research shows that Indian corporate are not utilizing corporate blogs in big number. Out of entire sample only 5% of sample is using corporate blog. In India trend of corporate blog is not yet very popular as compared to USA, Cho and Huh (2010) quoted in the study that a total of 31 companies had corporate blogs in 2006 and the number increased to 59 in 2008. Indian Corporate are not using blogs, the reason could be, lack of awareness among mass about

blogs and their importance and usage.

All the Corporate using blogs in India are going for multi vocal practicing. They are harnessing the expertise of their top management and employees to write on various topics as per their specialty and skill area. This assist companies in the creation of topic oriented blogs, which can attract different segment of audience. The private companies in India are using multiple numbers of blogs; this shows that they do understand the power of this tool. They are realizing that it is becoming necessary to reach public where they are. They are being open and transparent with them. The corporate are practicing relationship management online also, but on the contrary government sector is not only behind in the usages of the blogs but its practices also.

Relationship maintenance strategies study reflected that corporate blogs have adopted positivity strategy very strongly. This indicates that they are concerned about the ease of use

for user. They have incorporated user friendly navigation tool, making the blogs appealing to the visitors. This could be a prominent relationship management tool for these corporate. Not only this, easy navigation will motivate blog readers to spend more time on blogs. This can be an opportunity to create awareness and persuade them towards the organization and its products. Openness strategy is also followed by Indian corporate blogs, they allow visitors to comment and most of them have trackback facility. This attracts visitors to write freely and they find it transparent organization, very important in competitive environment. But at the same time most of the blogs are not updated regularly, this could pose a problem for the corporate. The customer today is fast, the environment is dynamic. To attract the loyalties of this customer for long-run, it is necessary, that continuous communication is done. Corporate blogs can be a very reliable tool for relationship management with today's public, the internet audience.

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