Summer 6-15-2016

BLOGS IN A CHANGING SOCIAL MEDIA ENVIRONMENT: PERSPECTIVES ON THE FUTURE OF BLOGGING IN SCANDINAVIA

Noora Pinjamaa
Aalto University, noora.pinjamaa@aalto.fi

Coye Cheshire
UC Berkeley School of Information, coye@berkeley.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://aisel.aisnet.org/ecis2016_rp

BLOGS IN A CHANGING SOCIAL MEDIA ENVIRONMENT: PERSPECTIVES ON THE FUTURE OF BLOGGING IN SCANDINAVIA

Complete Research

Noora Pinjamaa, Aalto University School of Business, Finland, noora.pinjamaa@aalto.fi

Coye Cheshire, UC Berkeley School of Information, California, coye@berkeley.edu

Abstract

In this paper, we investigate the change in the online landscape of blogging in the Scandinavian context through a mixed methods approach. The literature on blogs has emphasized the necessity of learning about why and how people blog as it can help us understand how information is created and shared online (Chau & Xu, 2012). Despite the rich literature on blogs, few studies have addressed the change in the landscape and in the paths of blogger participation. To gain a broader view on the perceptions of the future of blogging, we draw on findings from a focus group interview and in-depth one-on-one interviews with long-term bloggers as well as a blog reader survey. By organizing our findings with Schmidt's (2007) analytical framework, our research furthers knowledge on how the changes in external expectations such as commercial entities and blog communities affect the rules and relations of bloggers. We argue that the growth and shifting landscape of blogging as core type of technology-mediated social participation system carries the potential to dramatically change the practice of online personal sharing and online communities of practice among bloggers.

Keywords: blogs, blogging practices, online communities, social media

1   Introduction

Developed in the 1990s, blogs remain a pioneering and enduring social and technical innovation of the so-called web 2.0 era. In its early growth period, blogging technology promised users the ability to simultaneously produce and consume content, e.g. to become *prosumers* (Toffler, 1980). This consumer empowerment would decrease the need to rely on content from professional institutions, such as media companies. However with the appearance of competing social media and sharing technologies such as Facebook and Twitter, users shifted to other mediums (Bernoff & Li, 2010) stealing the limelight from blogs and what they once represented. Especially young generations are less interested in blogs and more interested in other social networks (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). Some even claim that the premise of blogging as the key enabler of information sharing within and across communities of prosumers did not take place (Kottke, 2013).

Due to the socio-technical nature of blogs, scientists from various disciplines such as information systems (Rohit Aggarwal & Singh, 2013; Vaast, Davidson, & Mattson, 2013), computer science (Kim, Zheng, & Gupta, 2011) and media (Siles, 2011) have been studying people's motivation for blogging (B. Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004) and the way bloggers interact, create networks, and share knowledge online. For researchers, blogs provide a perspective into the culture and communal nature of the Internet. Learning about why and how people blog is important because it can help us understand how information is created and shared online (Chau & Xu, 2012). To practitioners, blog communities can help improve customer engagement (Porter, Donthu, MacElroy, & Wydra, 2011), create word-of-mouth (Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki, & Wilner, 2010; Lee & Youn, 2009; Quinton & Harridge-March, 2010), provide insightful data, and improve a brand's trustworthiness (Porter et al., 2011). Despite the rich literature on blogs, few studies examine the perspectives of bloggers and readers regarding the ever-changing landscape of blogging (with the exception of Y. Li, 2014), and changes in the paths of participation of bloggers within a particular society.

In this research, we examine attitudes about changing blogging practices in Scandinavia – a context in which blogs have been growing in popularity ever since the beginning of the 21st century. We focus on practiced, active bloggers: those who have been blogging for several years and have managed to build loyal, stable or growing communities, and have in some cases become professional bloggers for a corporation (R Aggarwal, Gopal, Sankaranarayanan, & Singh, 2012; Orzan, Macovei, Orzan, & Iconaru, 2013) or entrepreneurs whose main revenue is based on the blog's success (Pihl & Sandstrom, 2013). In addition, we examine the attitudes and perceptions of blog readers. Using a mixed methods approach, we address the following research questions:

RQ 1) How have bloggers' roles changed over time?

RQ 2) How have bloggers adapted to the changing landscape of blogging?

RQ 3) What are the perceptions of the future of blogging (for bloggers and readers)?

In order to understand the changes that bloggers experienced over the past few years and how they interpret them, we conducted a focus group interview with 13 bloggers, including in-depth one-on-one interviews with 10 bloggers. To gain a broader view on the perceptions of the future of blogging, we also conducted a blog reader survey. By inductively and deductively analyzing our data we provide a rich description from the perspective of bloggers who have been active for close to 4 years or more. We will then discuss our findings through Schmidt's framework of blogging practices (Schmidt, 2007).

2   Related Literature

2.1   Blogs as enablers of self-expression

Weblogs or just blogs are essentially websites, best known for their reverse chronological posts and personal, diary-like characteristics (B. Nardi et al., 2004). The first blogs in the 1990s were often plain text,

electronic bulletin boards, connected to other blogs with hyperlinks. Blogs enable storing information in blog archives and easy information transfer through blog communities (Alavi & Leidner, 2001). For over a decade users have had a choice of various easy-to-use blog software platforms, which have in turn empowered users and given anyone with an Internet access a democratized, social form of self-expression. As more people started blogging around the world, the amount of web links grew forming social networks of blogs and online communities, ultimately creating the blogosphere. In these communities people often express their own personal ideas, find information from others, and build relationships (Quinton & Harridge-March, 2010).

Bloggers use different interaction forms such as audio and video clips as well as images in addition to text with the purpose of increasing the level of interaction between message sender and receiver (Chang, Chang, Hsu, & Chen, 2007). With user-generated-media, people are often driven by their needs of self-expression and self-actualization (Shao, 2009). A blog is updated and administered by a blogger who, together with its readers and other bloggers, construct virtual communities of practice. Bloggers are relying on the technology to create blog posts that share stories, link to things, share knowledge, and to get their voice heard by others. The act of blogging is also defined as consisting of *blogging episodes* (Schmidt, 2007), which are outlined by rules, relations and code (e.g., blog software), which together serve as structural elements for a blog post.

Blogs have especially been studied in social sciences with the purpose of understanding the psychological characteristics of popular bloggers (Baumer, Sueyoshi, & Tomlinson, 2008; Guadagno, Okdie, & Eno, 2008), also called an A-list blog (Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005). Blogs have become an electronic medium by which individuals, both famous and fairly unknown, are able to communicate their thoughts and opinions to the wider public. Especially during events such as the Arab spring and the war in Iraq, social media such as blogs provided a means for argumentation and even to some extent, a substitute for traditional media (Straubhaar, LaRose, & Davenport, 2013; Tremayne, 2008). This flexibility and accessibility has helped make blogs a popular choice for public discourse during major events (Wattal, Schuff, Mandviwalla, & Williams, 2010).

With a variety of easy-to-use software available, the threshold to start blogging remains low. Users do not consider themselves as constrained by computer systems (Shao, 2009). Instead, blogs empower people by providing a democratic, user-generated medium (Kenix, 2009). Prior research shows that it is as likely for blogs to be created by a blogger as by an audience (Nardi et al., 2004). People may, for example, convince their friend to start a blog or an existing blog may have such an effective feedback system that the blogger creates posts on request (Dewan & Ramaprasad, 2014; B. A. Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Swartz, 2004; Rishika, Kumar, Janakiraman, & Bezawada, 2013). Further, blogs enable two important types of interaction, user-to-content and user-to-user interaction (Shao, 2009). In user-to-content interaction one interacts with the content by for example bookmarking an article for later use or by sharing the content with their peers. In user-to-user interaction one uses the blog as a two-way communications platform.

The intensity with which one contributes to blog discussions varies extensively. Bloggers are identified as early adopters (F. Li & Du, 2011) and opinion leaders (Shoham & Ruvio, 2008; Summers, 1972). They have been shown to be motivated by gratification (Sepp, Liljander, & Gummerus, 2011), and a willingness to experience and share their experiences (Guadagno et al., 2008). One's willingness to share knowledge and personal information is highly affected by their perception of trust (Chai, Das, & Rao, 2011; Hsu & Lin, 2008), and in order to share knowledge a blogger needs to trust their network as well as the blogging platform that they are using (Chai et al., 2011; Preece & Shneiderman, 2009).

While bloggers are often the focus of blog studies and related research, the blog readers are a critical part of understanding the successes and failures of blogs. Less than a third of a blog's readers are active discussants—the silent, observant majority are characterized as lurkers (Shao, 2009). Readers of blogs seek enjoyment in various forms such as community membership (Sepp et al., 2011), entertainment and inspiration – similarly to consuming magazines (Baumer et al., 2008) and have been described as opinion seekers (Xun & Reynolds, 2010).

2.2   Evolution and consumption of blogs vis-à-vis other 2.0 technologies

According to Nielsen's 2014 report, social media consumption on platforms such as Blogger (blogger.com) is still increasing (Nielsen, 2014). Blogger and Wordpress are two popular examples of blogging software, the code that essentially either allows for or limits certain uses for bloggers (Schmidt, 2007). Despite increases in the popularity of blogging, especially younger generations are switching to other social media (Lenhart et al., 2010). Social platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter have changed the prominence of blog communities and made shared-interest groups less blog-centered (Kozinets et al., 2010). This has in turn diminished the ability of blogs to retain audiences over time (ibid).

In 2014, the most popular choice of social media was Facebook, which took an average share of 6 hours and 24 minutes of an individual's time per month (Nielsen, 2014). Only one blogging platform (Blogger) made it into the comparison, with an average of 17 minutes spent on the platform per month. When compared to the monthly time spent on social media with a smartphone's browser, Blogger had a share of 6 minutes whilst Facebook had 40 minutes and Twitter 11 minutes.

As people use different social media, they often engage in channel blending in which several interactions and contents are merged into one discussion from various channels (Isaacs et al., 2012). These communication channels can be different social media platforms, but they can also be e-mail, instant messages, or even offline discussions (Isaacs et al., 2012; B. A. Nardi et al., 2004). The selection of a particular media depends on various factors, such as social rules and behavioral patterns (Watson-Manheim & Bélanger, 2007). Although some studies demonstrate that users engage in channel switching and blending behavior when consuming media, there is a lack of studies that address the way in which personal blogs (and specifically bloggers) deal with the multiplicity of social media platforms.

Based on the current state of personal blog websites, we have reason to believe that bloggers incorporate various social media channels into their blogging behaviors and communication strategies. In a study of tech bloggers, researchers found that some bloggers feel overwhelmed by other social media sites and tools, while some find the sites substituting their blog (Vaast et al., 2013). Technorati's report also agrees on the growing importance of other social media outlets. The report states that over a third of bloggers measure their blogs' success by looking at the number of people sharing their content on other social media sites (Technorati, 2011). Furthermore, 94% of bloggers use social media to drive traffic to their blogs (Crestodina, 2014).

3   Research Methodology

In this research our intent is to provide a grounded understanding of current blogging practices in the Scandinavian context by analyzing how those who have been blogging for several years see their blogging process today, how their blogging has evolved over time and how they have been integrating social media channels to their blogs. We want to understand how bloggers experientially see blogging in the past, present and future. With a mixed methods approach, we include two different populations in this paper. We employ a qualitative approach (focus group and in-depth interviews) of Scandinavian bloggers to address our primary research questions. In addition, we use quantitative survey results to provide a supplemental understanding of opinions and attitudes about the future of blogging from the perspective of Scandinavian blog readers.

3.1   Qualitative methods

Qualitative approaches are extensively implemented by IS researchers as a way to gain deep insight into complex and mutable phenomena (Myers & Newman, 2007). In this research, we want to learn about bloggers opinions and interpretations of blogging practices in the face of an ever-changing social media landscape. Based on the initial empirical background information we gained from the complementary survey of blog readers, we developed our interview guide to better understand the perspective of experienced, active bloggers. The study employs semi-structured interview data to provide an in-depth description of how bloggers experience the evolution of blogs and the role of other social media (e.g., web 2.0) technologies. We used an inductive interpretive approach to learn from the transcribed interview and

focus group data, perpetually recording and discussing interview impressions, and observing emerging themes from the data with consistency and rigor (Walsham, 2006). In our analysis we also used elements from grounded theory as we created a coding procedure (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Both authors conducted open coding of relevant themes to increase agreement and accuracy of the results.

The qualitative, interview data consists of a focus group interview with 13 bloggers (see table 2 below) which was followed a year later with one-on-one phone interviews with 10 of the focus group participants. For the focus group interview, the interviewed bloggers were contacted by a Finnish customer insights agency. The agency contacted bloggers representing various blog categories, with the 13 bloggers in this study accepting the interview request. We acknowledge that there is a wide range of other blog categories such as those with a scientific and political focus, but we did not have the opportunity to purposively select participants. The length of the focus group interview was 120 minutes and the average length of the semi-structured phone interviews was 15 minutes. The targeted sample of this research focuses on active bloggers, ranging from 3.5 to 6 years of blogging experience. Importantly, these bloggers all experienced the process of competing against other emerging (and leading) social media technologies as well as with other blogs.

Blogger	Blog Category	Time blogger has been blogging (years)
Blogger 1	Fitness	6
Blogger 2	Design/ lifestyle	4.5
Blogger 3	Beauty	5
Blogger 4	Design/ lifestyle	5
Blogger 5	Fitness	3
Blogger 6	Maternity	3.5
Blogger 7	Beauty	3.5
Blogger 8	Beauty/ lifestyle	4
Blogger 9	Design/ lifestyle	5
Blogger 10	Teens/ Fashion/ lifestyle	6
Blogger 11	Design/ lifestyle	5
Blogger 12	Maternity/ lifestyle	6
Blogger 13	Fitness/ lifestyle	4

Table 2. Description of interviewed bloggers

3.2   Quantitative method

To supplement our primary qualitative analysis, we analyze data from an online-based survey conducted in Finland by a Nordic research panel (Valid N = 722 respondents). The professional panel provided a sample with heterogeneous socio-demographic characteristics (such as income level, age, residence). The panel was responsible for creating and hosting the web-based survey instrument. The company's panel provided us with the appropriate population as their repository covers Finnish citizens from all over Finland, from various age groups.

All of the survey respondents were blog readers. The survey consisted of a total of 33 questions, some open-ended, some multiple-choice with 1-4 and 1-5 Likert-scale responses. The questions were divided into four main themes: reading blogs, blogs and media consumption, the commercialization of blogs and the

future of blogs. From the questions of the first theme we could for example find that the respondents' reasons for following blogs are similar to prior research according to which information, inspiration and entertainment motivate blog readers (Baumer et al., 2008).

In this research we specifically focus on the questions related to the perceptions on the future of blogging (RQ 3). The table 1 below provides descriptive averages from the survey regarding the respondents' age and gender.

Gender	80% female		20% male	
Age	15% 15-19 -year olds	35% 20-34 -year olds	35% 35-49 -year olds	15% 50-65-year olds

Table 1. Descriptive statistics from the survey (N=722)

4 Findings

4.1 How has the bloggers' role changed over time?

Prior research shows that blogging is often motivated by utilitarian and hedonic gratification (Liao, To, & Chuang-Chun, 2013; Sepp et al., 2011). Our discussion with the bloggers displays three key aspects that they consider rewarding: readership, feedback and social interaction. One of the biggest changes that bloggers observe is the expectations of readers in terms of both (1) content and (2) the amount of editing and effort put into each and every blog post. When the interviewees first began blogging, they prepared their blog postings as online personal diaries. These personal posts would represent a type of self-expression consisting of text that was not necessarily carefully crafted for social approval:

> *"...there [in the blog] were silly stories which I could not anymore even keep as public because there is so much private content"* –Blogger 12.

> *"...at the beginning I was anonymous and I didn't want to show my own pictures."* –Blogger 5.

As the respondents reflected on their changing perception of the blogger role over time, they described a shift away from being *personal* and introspective, in favor of an increasing sense that blogging was becoming a more *professional* outlet for commentary, discussion and debate. Especially during the past two years (2013-2015), many of these bloggers noted an appreciable increase in commercialization and professionalization of most blogs:

> *"The professional touch has replaced the diary-likeness." "At least it has become a more serious, or not serous but more expert-like, maybe a little more magazine-like. Not so much 'blabla' -text with emoticons and alike. I'm more thinking about the content and that the sentences make sense."* –Blogger 7

> *"There are more people who blog for a living"* –Blogger 10

> *"Blogs will be even more professional…"* –Blogger 4

> *"Blogs have definitely transformed from social media to media!" "There is also increasing pressure to be more professional."* –Blogger 6

> *"Blogs have really professionalized"* –Blogger 12

One common issue that the bloggers noted was the surge in content curation over the past few years, and in particular, an increase in reader expectations. On the one hand, reader expectations are known to motivate bloggers to pursue writing (B. Nardi et al., 2004). However, reader expectations can be overwhelming. Prior research has found that readers do not approve for the blogger to be inconsistent in his or her rhythm of publishing posts (Baumer et al., 2008). The level of expectations and pressure for quality content materializes especially with popular bloggers with large followings. The more popular the blog, the more

that is expected of the blogger (Baumer et al., 2008). Once bloggers manage to find a way to meet users' expectations, they can then focus on growing the size of the audience.

One blogger captured the essence of the shift from sporadic, personal writings to heavily curated material on a tight schedule:

> *"At the beginning it was basically just like scribbling and writing down my thoughts two three times per week. And now, pretty much just during this year I've been publishing about every day and all my posts, texts are carefully thought and planned."* –Blogger 1.

In addition to providing more content to users on a regular schedule, bloggers in our study noted that they must also adopt new channels to reach their audience. Through their own descriptions, we find that social media technologies act as supplementary, supporting channels for the bloggers:

> *"So I publish it [blog post] and then I link it to Facebook. Then it depends, sometimes I put it [Facebook link] right after publishing, sometimes I wait a couple of hours, and then I share a link to Facebook 'go and check out this post' and then actually the same thing with Instagram."* – Blogger 7.

> *"...on the day that I publish the text I then share it on Facebook and then I put a picture or two related to the post on Instagram."* –Blogger 1.

> *"When I have published that post, then I might advertise it in these social media like "go and check this post out". I have been thinking that I should come up with other ways but that's how it has been."* –Blogger 7

> *"In addition to Facebook I of course have Instagram. And now I also have Youtube, which I've just begun. I currently only have one video there. I don't think I've got anything else. I don't use Pinterest or Twitter, otherwise it would already be too much. Facebook and Instagram go pretty much hand in hand when you can just click and publish on Facebook as well."* –Blogger 8

Despite investing significant time in other social media platforms, the bloggers in our study agree that the blog still remains the core of their online expression activity. Indeed, prior research finds that while one medium might be dominant in a users' online participation, it is often supported by complementary media (Watson-Manheim & Bélanger, 2007). As one blogger explained, her desire to set up accounts on other social media platforms was driven by a perception that they would primarily be in service of her blog:

> *Yeah, the blog is number one. I wouldn't have an account in those channels if it weren't for the blog. Then I would just be as a private person."* –Blogger 5

> *"But only then [when the blog post is published] I get to the point of other social media. Then, usually on the day that I publish the text I then share it on Facebook and then I put a picture or two related to the post on Instagram and then some mention of the text."* –Blogger 1

4.2   How have bloggers adapted to the changing landscape of blogging?

One key aspect of blogging practices that is sometimes taken for granted is the code, e.g. blogging software (Schmidt, 2007). The two most common software platforms are blog script packages such as Wordpress and blog services such as Blogger.com (Schmidt, 2007). When asked whether there had been any adaptations or changes in their coding practices as bloggers, some respondents mentioned a migration from Blogger to Wordpress, while some have preferred staying with Blogger. For Blogger 4, the Wordpress software makes blogging easier – she is able to adapt to changing design requirements by using ready-made designs. However several of the bloggers' quotes below suggest that sometimes the choice of software is based on the employer's software preference. From our focus group, more than half have started to blog professionally. These professional bloggers are blogging most commonly for a media company, which has a blog portal usually including other blogs and/or magazine brands.

> *"I used to use Blogger when I started. And now Costume [a digital Finnish magazine] has Wordpress."* –Blogger 7

> *"No no [not using Blogger anymore], two years ago I moved to Fit Fashion [a blog portal], which is on Wordpress."* –Blogger 1

> *"I've used Blogger since the very beginning. I haven't changed because you know, when you've started with something, why change if it works and is easy to use? And I don't really have any special nerd skills. "*–Blogger 2

> *"First it was on Blogger, nowadays its on Wordpress…When I was still using Blogger I was googling for help. Nowadays [on Wordpress] there are those ready-made themes, which you can just buy online."* –Blogger 4

> *"I've had Blogger from the very beginning"* –Blogger 11

As the bloggers invest more time and resources into writing their blog posts for larger audiences, the sense of commerciality also appears to increase. Consistent with our earlier observations about the shift from more personal to more professional blogging schedules, our respondents noted a clear shift towards commercialism in their content and what their audience expects from them:

> *"I guess the biggest difference is the commerciality. At the beginning it was purely a hobby and now it's a job. Not a fully sustaining one, but still a perfect source of income. There's more commercial content, because at the beginning there was none."* –Blogger 5

> *"They're [blog posts] not anymore written without [commercial] consideration, which I guess also affects how the amount of visitors has doubled during the past year. I cannot even compare it to the first days, months, no idea how many times it has grown since."* –Blogger 1

We also noted that some of the bloggers in our study perceived a real tension between commercial interests and motivations, versus the more intrinsic motivations that inspired them to blog in the first place. Of course, based on prior research it is natural to assume that bloggers would combine personal and commercial content as a way to pay some of the bills and keep the blog alive (Pihl & Sandstrom, 2013). Despite the availability of various supporting technologies and the financial benefits of commercial content, some of the bloggers find the growing expectations of blogging communities overwhelming:

> *"- I've gotten really critical towards my own stories – and at first I used to put pretty much anything there. And now I realize this thing about myself that if I don't find the story mind-blowing and if it doesn't have a lot of novelty value – then I just don't put anything."* –Blogger 11.

> *"At the moment I'm in a situation in which I have got a lot of [commercial] collaboration and I've even gotten work also outside the blog… this spring I have kind of looked back and decided not to do any sponsoring collaborations on the blog anymore. I will only update the blog when I feel like doing it. So in a way I have taken a step back"* –Blogger 2

4.3   What are the perceptions of the future of blogging?

As the expectations of blogging evolve along with the increasing pull towards commercialization, the bloggers in our study indicated trouble adjusting and 'keeping up' as they look toward the future. When asked about the future of blogging from their own perspectives, many interviewees indicated that they felt overwhelmed. Some interviewees related their sense of fading excitement about the future of blogging:

> "*There is no need for more, and I couldn't really do more*". –Blogger 8

> "*I don't think there will be more of anything...my excitement about the whole blogging phenomenon has worn down.*" –Blogger 9

> *"I think it [blogging] is going to decrease. I myself have been thinking for a long time whether it makes any sense."* –Blogger 11

> *I haven't really seen how for example having your own page for the blog [on other social media] would be like the most important marketing channel in the world, but somehow I should still develop those channels.* –Blogger 7

> *"In the future it will be even more difficult to get into the spotlight because there will be so many blogs and so much pressure."* –Blogger 6

> *"I agree with Blogger 6. One has to either be really talented or really beautiful :D in order for the blogger to be popular in the future."* –Blogger 2

Our interviewees noted that it used to be common for bloggers to not only link between one another but also to comment actively to others' posts. Bloggers expect a reciprocal relationship between other bloggers. For example, they are keenly aware that reading other bloggers' posts gets them comments in return (B. Nardi et al., 2004). This type of reciprocal sharing and commenting behavior has previously been defined as the core of blog communities (Kumar, Novak, Raghavan, & Tomkins, 2004). If a blogger can rely or even trust another blogger to respond to him or her, they will also be more active in communicating (Chai et al., 2011). However our findings suggest that as the requirements of successful, active blogging increase, and the amount of other social media technologies vie for users' attention, the interpersonal interaction between bloggers is decreasing. As one of our respondents explained:

> *"[We] would comment a lot to each other's posts and support each other and so on. But now no one from those old circles really comments to each other. And we're not as active in following [other's blogs] even though everyone blogs."* –Blogger 11

However, some bloggers such as beauty bloggers seem to have found a new way of communicating with and finding other bloggers. These bloggers are rather using a closed Facebook group.

> *"Today I find more bloggers through our Facebook-group. When I begun I would find them through the blogrolls of the other blogs that I followed… …We have a group for bloggers…. there [Facebook group] we talk about anything and everything. It is more for communicating about products, events or anything."* –Blogger 3

Based on the interviews we learn that bloggers see the future of blogs as even more saturated, with new challengers and formats such as video blogs (vlogs) taking a larger share of the spotlight.

> *"I think that things such as Instagram and video blogs will be taking some of the blogs' share."* –Blogger 3

> *"Increasingly companies are starting to use Instagram accounts because it is an especially easy way to follow a company. I'm guessing that Instagram is coming and Facebook is fading."* –Blogger 12

> *"I think that Instagram has created some competition there. Several others have also said that they don't get as many comments as they used to."* –Blogger 2

Despite the overwhelming sense that blogs are becoming more commercialized and challenging to manage in a way that will attract a significant audience over time, the bloggers in our study still consider blogs to be a popular format. For example, two bloggers who have been actively blogging for several years felt that, despite the many changes, blogs are still an important replacement for older forms of print media:

> *"I think that blogs will continue to grow and partially replace magazines..."* –Blogger 6

> *"Blogs will rule over magazines and they will become an even more prominent marketing channel"* –Blogger 13

> *"The number and quality of blogs will increase. In any case, the development has been that blogs have grown and grown as a media and I don't see that slowing down."* –Blogger 3

With the competition strengthening, bloggers forecast blogging to become a more professionalized form of content creation, in which success will require great talent and effort. Furthermore, in just the past few

years most of the bloggers indicate an increase in commercialization and professionalization of blogs as they look to the future of the medium:

>*"In the future only a part will survive, the competition is hard and the effort shows"* –Blogger 1

>*"Blogs will be even more professional"* –Blogger 4

>*"The professional touch has replaced the diary-likeness."* –Blogger 7

>*"There are more people who blog for a living"* –Blogger 10

4.4   Reader perceptions about the future of blogs

To compare and contrast blog readers' perceptions of the future of blogging with those of our blogger interviewees, we analyzed several questions and statements about the future of blogs in our survey. Through the statements we found that the majority (81%) considers that in the future the content of blogs will get fragmented to other web 2.0 technologies. The survey respondents also noted an increase in commercialization and advertising in blogs during the past few years. In fact, 35% of respondents find excessive commerciality and ads to be the most irritating aspect of current blogs. Despite such a belief, 85% of blog readers see a future for high quality blog posts and believe that blogs will become even more influential over time.

We also find that readers are conscious of the massive amount of blogs available in the web: 76% believe that it will be difficult to find good blogs in the future and that bloggers will face an increasing challenge when trying to differentiate themselves. When asked about the future layout of blogs, 82% considered that blogs will become more visual, increasingly relying on graphics and other visual media instead of text. We also wanted to know about the probability of blogs becoming irrelevant to current readers. However as many as 90% of blog readers considered that blogs are here to stay.

Finally, we asked our survey respondents how they currently locate blogs. Similar to our blogger interviewees, a sizeable number of blog readers often use social media to find blogs in addition to search engines. According to the survey, almost half of the respondents (47%) find new blogs by Googling, the next most prevalent way is social media (33%) and links in other blogs (33%). We also asked the readers more specifically which social media channels they use to follow blogs. Our results show that nearly everyone in the sample of blog readers also uses Facebook to follow their favorite bloggers. The second most popular choice of social media was Instagram. The fact that several readers locate and follow blogs through social media supports the bloggers' earlier perception of the need to constantly share updates of the blog on newer forms of social media.

5   Discussion and implications

In this research we employed a mixed methods approach to explore and describe how personal blogging has changed over time within the broader social media landscape in the Scandinavian context. To learn about the perceptions of the future of blogging, we drew from two different, but related populations: long-term bloggers as well as blog readers. We approached these populations with the goal of investigating three research questions about perceptions of changing roles and practices in blogging, as well as beliefs about the future of blogs as social media. In this section, we discuss the identified changes in blogging practices in the context of theories of blogging as self-expression, social sharing and participation.

In order to start and pursue blogging, a person needs to trust both the online community and technology because the medium becomes an outlet for personal sharing and social interaction (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Chai et al., 2011). In addition to trust, a blogger may expect an encouraging environment for interaction and public conversations. Without a supportive environment, a blogger might become frustrated and decide to discontinue their efforts altogether (R Aggarwal et al., 2012). Prior research on blogger behavior is primarily concerned with explaining the antecedents and motivations of blogging, as well as the various personality and demographic characteristics of bloggers. Common theoretical perspectives for

understanding blogging behavior and willingness to share knowledge through the format of blogs are social capital and social exchange theories (Chai & Kim, 2010; Hsu & Lin, 2008). Another approach is Schmidt's analytical model for analyzing blogging practices (2007), which is based on sociological structuration theory. As we analyzed our own data and emergent themes, we find that this model is particularly helpful for organizing our analysis of the changing landscape of blogging.

According to Schmidt's (2007) model, blogging consists of blogging *episodes*, which are framed by rules (adequacy and procedural rules), relations and code. A blogging episode entails publishing, but it can also consist of networking and interacting with other bloggers. The clearest changes in blogging episodes that we observed are created through reader expectations and the consequent effort put into planning, writing and publishing blog posts. In addition to publishing the content on the blog, the content is often shared through the blog's (or, the blogger's) related social media accounts, such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. This finding suggests that the rules that define an episode, and guide the blogging practices in general, are being adapted to the changing social media landscape.

There are two types of rules that bloggers employ: adequacy and procedural (Schmidt, 2007). Adequacy rules guide a blogger's selection of a certain media based on their expectations of the media's gratification, while procedural rules guide the actual blogging episode, such as publishing and creating relationships through the act of blogging. According to our findings, blogging episodes are increasingly involving the use of other consequent social media. This is consistent with prior research according to which some bloggers advocate for incorporating other social media to their blogging practices, while some critic the influence of other media on their blogging practices (Vaast et al., 2013). The use of multiple media channels in service of the blog depicts an evolution in the procedural rules of bloggers, which dictate both which media the blogger selects as well as what content and in which format he or she publishes.

As discussed earlier, bloggers are often defined by their own connections to other blogs as members of common blogging communities. These connections are made implicit through social ties as well as explicitly in the form of direct hyperlinks within and between blogs. However, we find that with the growing expectations of readers and the commercial pressure to be a top blogger, the bloggers put more emphasis on creating and sharing content through various channels than networking/socializing with other bloggers. This change in the patterns of networking has an effect on the routines and expectations that bloggers have of each other (Schmidt, 2007). As mentioned in our findings section, an interviewee pointed out that she and her blogger friends have observed a change in the way bloggers comment to each other. This experience was corroborated by other bloggers as well. Consistent with (Drum, 2015), bloggers are increasing their blog's findability through search engines by creating hyperlinks across their own blog pages, instead of linking to other blogs. Furthermore, our interviewees explained that they adopt new online media channels precisely because they want to better reach their audience. Such a fundamental change implies a transformation in the networking practices of bloggers and what it means to be part of a blogging community. The bloggers in our study indicate that a successful, networked blogger establishes fewer relations with other bloggers through hyperlinks and comments, and instead builds relations directly with readers on other social media, such as Facebook.

Adopting new social media technologies and incorporating them into blogging practices requires a certain skill level and the willingness to invest time in managing relationships across the different channels. Our finding is in line with Schmidt's argument according to which, the blog's software code frames the blogging episode, but it does not restrict it from being combined with other software such as other social media applications (Schmidt, 2007). Popular blogs are able to create an experience that is sometimes described as resembling a magazine (Baumer et al., 2008). It is then the code (the software platform) that simultaneously constrains and empowers bloggers by providing flexibility with regards to the choice of the layout. Therefore it was interesting to find that several bloggers leave the choice of the platform to their employer, giving someone else control of the design and user-experience even when they could rely on their own preferences and judgment.

Based on our findings, we argue that commercialization and increased demand for professionalization in blogging are changing the routines of bloggers. According to our interviewees, bloggers are increasingly compelled to blog more frequently while putting more effort into each blog post. Based on the accounts of

our interviews and focus-group discussion, this shift towards professionalization continues to change what it means to be a blogger. A fundamental aspect of blogs since their inception has been about self-expression in public – bloggers have had control over their ability to express themselves on the Internet as a way to share ideas and foster debate and opinion. However, with increased pressure from reader expectations (e.g., quality and consistency of high-interest content), some have invested more of their time creating, editing and curating the content that is more likely to be of interest to current readers. Thus, the blogs move from serendipitous, unsystematic personal content and reflections to more routine, professional content that competes with the material of online magazines.

To some in the qualitative portion of our study, investing more time and effort in professionalizing their blogs resulted in larger audiences, which subsequently attracted the attention of media companies willing to employ a blogger. This draw towards professionalism is reflected then in the overall blogging ecosystem. As the incentives push towards more professionalization and polished content, blogs arguably become less unique and less personal in nature. This juxtaposes with what made personal blogs so interesting for many bloggers in the first place: the freedom of self-expression and unique perspectives that bloggers communicated through a public, online forum.

The three structural elements of rules, relations and code are intertwined in a way that guides and frames a blogger's online creative and sharing practices. As argued above, through our data we find that bloggers in our study perceive changes in all of these elements, which might resolve in new routines and expectations for the practice of blogging. In the future, bloggers may be shifting away from building the kinds of blog-community relations that once defined the genre when it first emerged in the 1990's. In doing so, bloggers are also moving further from the reciprocal relationships based on hyperlinks between blogs (c.f. Kumar et al., 2004). The way information and relationships are managed will evolve as bloggers select and use different technologies to network with other bloggers – such as Facebook groups and how they use social media to build blog communities and relationships with their readers outside the blog platform. Finally, as the reader expectations become more demanding, we find that bloggers in our study feel a need to adapt their publication rules and identity management strategies to meet the readers' content requirements.

5.1   Implications for researchers and practitioners

Recent years have seen a substantial growth in the scale and scope of structured environments for mass collaboration and sharing, otherwise known as technology-mediated social participation (TMSP) systems. TMSP systems involve the application of user-generated content sites such as blogs and other social media to collectively address issues of social concern (Kraut et al., 2010). The growth and shifting landscape of blogging as core type of TMSP system carries the potential to dramatically change the practice of online personal sharing and online communities of practice among bloggers.

Changing blogging practices such as those in this study provide an exceptionally useful arena to consider how structure and agency relate in online information-sharing environments. More broadly, the interplay between system design, structure and agency is a critical part of understanding different paths of participation and collective outcomes in blogging over time. In particular, the design and operation of blogging platforms provide both structure (social and technical), and scope for human agency (choices and behaviors) in an observable, persistent environment. Researchers and practitioners of blogging systems are often interested in promoting particular types of contribution behaviors that lead to specific, targeted outcomes such as reach, growth, and influence.

This study contributes to prior research on blogs by providing a meaningful description of the changing blogging landscape through a mixed methods approach. Furthermore, by organizing our findings with Schmidt's (2007) framework, our research furthers knowledge on how the changes in external expectations such as commercial entities and blog communities affect the rules and relations of bloggers. For bloggers, our research provides reasons as to why it is important to conform and evolve their blogging practices from publishing in one channel to publishing in multi-channel media. Blog readers increasingly locate and follow blogs on social media such as Facebook and Instagram and thus to stand out, bloggers need to be relevant on those social media websites as well.

As bloggers spend more time re-writing and editing their content they start to shift away from personal blogs to professional blogs. Some of these professional bloggers are likely to get employed by media companies who need new, social media savvy employees, while some might become entrepreneurs who will have to compete with other professional media content such as large media organizations. However not every personal blogger is able or willing to keep up with the pace of professional, full-time bloggers and they might therefore either terminate their blogs or go back to their 'roots'. If deciding to re-adopt the original form of self-expression, bloggers will rather write introspectively than curate their content to please a large audience.

6 Conclusion and future research

6.1 Conclusion

In this paper, we investigated the change in the online landscape of blogging in Scandinavia through a mixed methods approach. By conducting interviews and a survey, we inductively and deductively analyzed our data and provided a meaningful description from the perspective of long-term bloggers. The goal of our research was to address the following three questions:

RQ 1) How have bloggers' roles changed over time?

RQ 2) How have bloggers adapted to the changing landscape of blogging?

RQ 3) What are the perceptions of the future of blogging (for bloggers and readers)?

We discussed our data through Schmidt's framework of blogging practices (Schmidt, 2007) and found that the rules of blogging and relations of bloggers evolve as commercialization and professionalization of blogs increase. We suggest that the bloggers' roles are changing over time from personal to professional. Those bloggers who change their blogging practices adapt to the changing landscape through the adoption of other supporting media, by increasing their self-discipline (blogging on a regular basis) and by editing their content before publishing it.

Based on our research we argue that the future of blogging will be fragmented across various social media, with the blog remaining the core of self-expression. For blog readers, finding relevant blogs will be more laborious as the spectrum of different types and different qualities of blogs will increase. For bloggers, one challenge will be to balance between the amount of commercial and personal content. Finally, as the expectations grow, becoming a popular, A-list blogger will become more difficult in the future. It will require mastering not only the traditional practice of blogging (such as publishing text and pictures) but also various other channels through which a blogger will maintain, strengthen and grow its community. In essence, being a professional blogger will mean having to deal with the tension between intrinsic motivations to blog and external commercial interests.

6.2 Future research and limitations

This research has specific limitations. First, both our interviews and survey were conducted in one Scandinavian country, which limits direct comparisons to other social environments. Similar research should be conducted in other countries before being able to generalize the results to other blogger populations. Another limitation is our blogger sample. We focused on exploring the changes in the blogging landscape and there our interviewees consisted of both professional and personal bloggers, all of which had started blogging as personal blogs. Having both personal and professional blogs could create a bias in their attitude towards the need for commercialization and professionalization—which are key elements that were consistently mentioned by our interviewees. Future research might adopt a longitudinal *netnographic* approach to changing blogging practices by analyzing blogs through blog archives: from the first blog posts to posts published years later. Also, future research could study several bloggers' blogging practices across various communication technologies and create a taxonomy of the characteristics of the content according to each specific communications channel. Finally it would be interesting to study how the changes in specific design requirements transformed over time and analyze whether technologies such as Wordpress and Blogger have adjusted their design affordances for users of these platforms.

References

Aggarwal, R., Gopal, R., Sankaranarayanan, R., & Singh, P. (2012). Blog, Blogger, and the Firm: Can Negative Employee Posts Lead to Positive Outcomes? *Information Systems Research*, 306–322.

Aggarwal, R., & Singh, H. (2013). Differential Influence of Blogs Across Different Stages of Decision Making: The Case of Venture Capitalists. *Management Information Systems Quarterly*, *37*(4), 1093–1112.

Alavi, M., & Leidner, D. E. (2001). Review: Knowledge Management and Knowledge Management Systems: Conceptual Foundations and Research Issues. *Management Information Systems Quarterly*, 107–136.

Baumer, E., Sueyoshi, M., & Tomlinson, B. (2008). Exploring the role of the reader in the activity of blogging. *CHI '08: Proceeding of the Twenty-Sixth Annual SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 1111–1120. http://doi.org/10.1145/1357054.1357228

Bernoff, J., & Li, C. (2010). Harnessing the power of the oh-so-social web. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, *38*(3), 8. http://doi.org/10.1109/EMR.2010.5559138

Chai, S., Das, S., & Rao, H. R. (2011). Factors Affecting Bloggers' Knowledge Sharing: An Investigation Across Gender. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, *28*(3), 309–342. http://doi.org/10.2753/MIS0742-1222280309

Chai, S., & Kim, M. (2010). What makes bloggers share knowledge? An investigation on the role of trust. *International Journal of Information Management*, 408–415.

Chang, Y. J., Chang, Y. S., Hsu, S. Y., & Chen, C. H. (2007). Social network analysis to blog-based online community. In *In Convergence Information Technology*.

Chau, M., & Xu, J. (2012). Business intelligence in blogs: understanding consumer interactions and communities. *Management Information Systems Quarterly*, *36*(4), 1189–1216.

Crestodina, A. (2014). Survey of 1000+ Bloggers: How to Be in the Top 5%. Retrieved from http://www.orbitmedia.com/blog/blogger-analysis/

Dewan, S., & Ramaprasad, J. (2014). Social media, traditional media, and music sales. *MIS Quarterly*, 101–121.

Drum, K. (2015). Blogging Isn't Dead. But Old-School Blogging Is Definitely Dying.

Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). The discovery grounded theory: strategies for qualitative inquiry. *Aldin, Chicago*.

Guadagno, R. E., Okdie, B. M., & Eno, C. A. (2008). Who blogs? Personality predictors of blogging. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 1993–2004.

Hsu, C. L., & Lin, J. C. C. (2008). Acceptance of blog usage: The roles of technology acceptance, social influence and knowledge sharing motivation. *Information and Management*, *45*(1), 65–74. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2007.11.001

Isaacs, E., Szymanski, P., Yamauchi, Y., Glasnapp, J., Iwamoto, K., Minato-ku, K., & Alto, P. (2012). Integrating Local and Remote Worlds Through Cross - c hannel ing, 1–10.

Kenix, J. (2009). Blogs as alternative. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 790–822.

Kim, H. W., Zheng, J. R., & Gupta, S. (2011). Examining knowledge contribution from the perspective of an online identity in blogging communities. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *27*(5), 1760–1770. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2011.03.003

Kottke, J. (2013). The blog is dead, long live the blog.

Kozinets, R. V, de Valck, K., Wojnicki, A. C., & Wilner, S. J. . (2010). Networked Narratives: Understanding Word-of-Mouth Marketing in Online Communities. *Journal of Marketing*, *74*(2), 71–89. http://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.74.2.71

Kraut, R., Maher, M. L., Olson, J., Malone, T. W., Pirolli, P., & Thomas, J. C. (2010). Scientific Foundations: A Case for Technology- Mediated Social- Participation Theory. *Computer*, *43*(11), 22–28. http://doi.org/10.1109/MC.2010.324

Kumar, R., Novak, J., Raghavan, P., & Tomkins, A. (2004). Structure and evolution of blogspace. *Communications of the ACM*, 35–39.

Lee, M., & Youn, S. (2009). Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) How eWOM platforms influence consumer product judgement. *International Journal of Advertising*, 473–499.

Lenhart, A., Purcell, K., Smith, A., & Zickuhr, K. (2010). *Social Media & Mobile Internet Use among Teens and Young Adults. Millennials*.

Li, F., & Du, T. C. (2011). Who is talking? An ontology-based opinion leader identification framework for word-of-mouth marketing in online social blogs. *Decision Support Systems*, *51*(1), 190–197. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.dss.2010.12.007

Li, Y. (2014). Blogging and Identity Construction: A Study on Blogging Continuance Intentions. In *Twentieth Americas Conference on Information Systems* (pp. 1–10).

Liao, C., To, P.-L., & Chuang-Chun, L. (2013). A motivational model of blog usage. *Online Information Review*, *37*(4), 620–637. http://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/OIR-02-2012-0032

Myers, M. D., & Newman, M. (2007). The Qualitative Interview in IS Research: Examining the Craft. *Information and Organization*, *17*(1), 2–26. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.infoandorg.2006.11.001

Nardi, B. A., Schiano, D. J., Gumbrecht, M., & Swartz, L. (2004). Why we blog. *Communications of the ACM*, *47*(12), 41–46.

Nardi, B., Schiano, D., & Gumbrecht, M. (2004). Blogging as social activity, or, would you let 900 million people read your diary? *... of the 2004 ACM Conference on ...*, 222–231. http://doi.org/10.1145/1031607.1031643

Nielsen. (2014). *The Digital Consumer*. Retrieved from http://www.nielsen.com/content/dam/corporate/us/en/reports-downloads/2014 Reports/the-digital-consumer-report-feb-2014.pdf

Orzan, G., Macovei, O. I., Orzan, L. M., & Iconaru, C. (2013). The Impact of blogs over Corporate Marketing Communications: an Empirical Model. *Economic Computation and Economic Cybernetics Studies and Research*, 79–96.

Pihl, C., & Sandstrom, C. (2013). Value creation and appropriation in social media - The case of fashion bloggers in Sweden BT - Special Issue on Opening Up Innovation and Business Development Activities. *International Journal of Technology Management*, *61*(3-4), 309–323. http://doi.org/10.1504/IJTM.2013.052673

Porter, C. E., Donthu, N., MacElroy, W. H., & Wydra, D. (2011). How to Foster and Sustain Engagement in Virtual Communities. *California Management Review*, *53*(4), 80–111.

Preece, J., & Shneiderman, B. (2009). The Reader-to-Leader Framework: Motivating Technology-Mediated Social Participation Theory. *Transactions on Human - Computer Interaction*, *1*(1), 13–32.

Quinton, S., & Harridge-March, S. (2010). Relationships in online communities: the potential for marketers. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, *4*(1), 59–73. http://doi.org/10.1108/17505931011033560

Rishika, R., Kumar, A., Janakiraman, R., & Bezawada, R. (2013). The effect of customers' social media participation on customer visit frequency and profitability: an empirical investigation. *Information Systems Research*, 108–127.

Schmidt, J. (2007). Blogging Practices: An Analytical Framework. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *12*(June), 1409–1427. http://doi.org/doi:10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00379.x

Sepp, M., Liljander, V., & Gummerus, J. (2011). Private bloggers' motivations to produce content – a gratifications theory perspective. *Journal of Marketing Management*, *27*(13-14), 1479–1503. http://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2011.624532

Shao, G. (2009). Understanding the appeal of user-generated media: a uses and gratification perspective. *Internet Research*, 7–25.

Shoham, A., & Ruvio, A. (2008). Opinion leaders and followers: A replication and extension. *Psychology & Marketing*, 280–297.

Siles, I. (2011). The rise of blogging: Articulation as a dynamic of technological stabilization. *New Media & Society*, *14*(5), 781–797. http://doi.org/10.1177/1461444811425222

Straubhaar, J., LaRose, R., & Davenport, L. (2013). *Media now: Understanding media, culture, and technology*. Cengage Learning.

Summers, J. O. (1972). Media exposure patterns of consumer innovators. *The Journal of Marketing*, 43–49.

Technorati. (2011). *State of the Blogosphere 2011*. Retrieved from http://technorati.com/state-of-the-blogosphere-2011/

Toffler, A. (1980). *The Third Wave*. Bantam Books.

Trammell, K. D., & Keshelashvili, A. (2005). Examining the new influencers: A self-presentation study of A-list blogs. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 968–982.

Tremayne, M. (2008). Manipulating interactivity with thematically hyperlinked news texts: a media learning experiment. *New Media & Society*, *10*(5), 703–727. http://doi.org/10.1177/1461444808094353

Vaast, E., Davidson, E. J., & Mattson, T. (2013). Talking about technology: the emergence of a new actor category through new media. *MIS Quarterly*, *37*(4), 1069–1092.

Walsham, G. (2006). Doing interpretive research. *European Journal of Information Systems*, *15*(3), 320–330. http://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.ejis.3000589

Watson-Manheim, M. B., & Bélanger, F. (2007). Communication media repertoires: dealing with the multiplicity of media choices. *Management Information Systems Quarterly*, *31*(2), 267–293.

Wattal, S., Schuff, D., Mandviwalla, M., & Williams, C. B. (2010). Web 2.0 and politics: the 2008 US presidential election and an e-politics research agenda. *MIS Quarterly*, 669–688.

Xun, J., & Reynolds, J. (2010). Applying netnography to market research: The case of the online forum. *Journal of Targeting, Measurement and Analysis for Marketing*, *18*(1), 17–31. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/jt.2009.29