
Original Article

Corporate blogs as e-CRM tools – Building consumer engagement through content management

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Vandana Ahuja

is a visiting faculty at the Jaypee Institute of Information Technology (JIIT), Noida, India. Earlier, she has worked with JILIT – the IT division of the Jaypee Group – which she joined after having worked as a Business Manager with software giant NIIT and Elbee Express. She has research interests in the domain of contribution of the collaborative web to diverse areas of marketing and CRM. E-mails: vandyahuja@yahoo.com, vandana.ahuja@jiit.ac.in.

Yajulu Medury

is COO, Education Initiative, Jaypee Group. He is responsible for coordination of all higher education-related activities and also concurrently the first Vice Chancellor of the Jaypee University of Information Technology (JUIT), Waknaghat, India. He was earlier the CMD of Educational Consultants India Limited (A Government of India Enterprise).

ABSTRACT Corporate Blogs are fast emerging as new organizational tools for marketing, building brand relationships and Customer Relationship Management. This study has been conducted to analyse the ability of an organization to use its Corporate Blog as an e-CRM tool. We attempt to study the impact of brand communication (content type and volume), hosted on an organizational blog, on its ability to induce consumer engagement. Organizations can build relationships with their prospective and current consumers through posts on a Corporate Blog, and encourage them to participate by commenting on the blog, thereby stimulating consumer engagement. The variation in the organizational objective behind hosting each post on the blog is used to categorize the content posted on the blog. An exploratory study enables us to deduce the importance of content typologies in building a relationship with the customer. We are able to identify three types of content typologies – Organizational, Promotional and Relational. We further observe that Relational content hosted by an organization is able to induce greater volumes of consumer engagement (measured in terms of number of consumer comments) than any other content typology. The analysis of dependency of consumer engagement on the volume of content posted by the organization indicates a positive correlation between number of posts and volume of comments.

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Correspondence:

Vandana Ahuja
Jaypee Institute of
Information Technology
(JIIT), Noida, India
E-mails: vandyahuja@yahoo
.com; vandana.ahuja@jiit.ac.in

INTRODUCTION

A Corporate Blog is an online repository serving as a virtual storehouse of information, where organizations post content for consumer consumption.

Objectives include – providing a solution to exploratory consumer browsing, aiding a consumer's quest for information, helping consumers gain access to organizational promotional campaigns and responding to

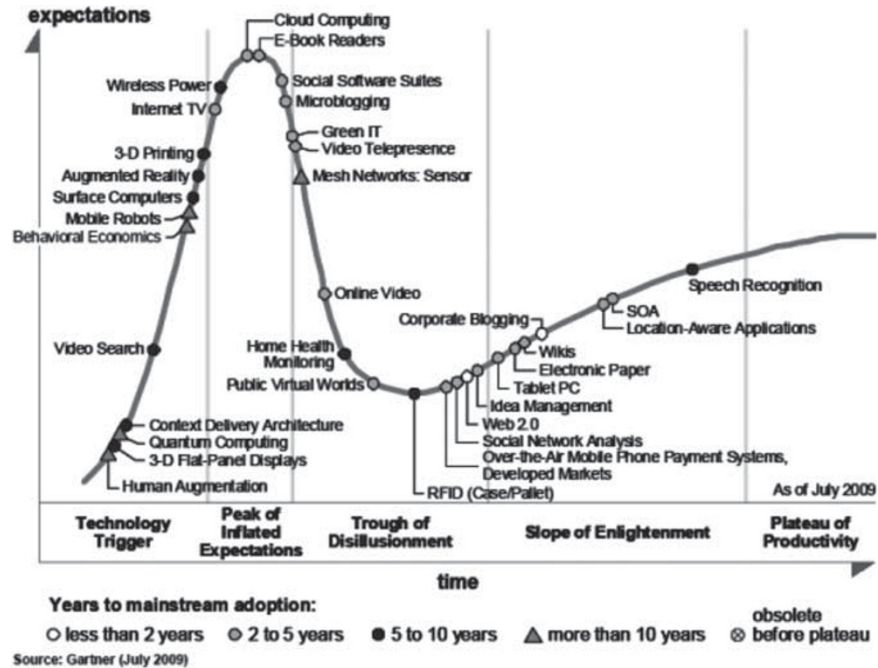


Figure 1: Hype cycle for emerging technologies, 2009.

controversies regarding organization/ product. This creates consumer involvement with this organizational endeavour and eventually achieves consumer engagement for the organization, as the consumer commences participation. Content categorization is done to enable organizations to post consumer-relevant content to induce greater consumer participation. Dependency analysis and regression are used to study the relationship between volume of content posted by the organization and its ability to stimulate greater consumer engagement. This article addresses the need for hosting the appropriate content on an organizational initiative, which, by matching consumer requirements, helps develop a relationship between organization and consumer. The scope of future work is outlined, wherein the knowledge capital created through exchange with consumers can be mined to extract explicit information, which can be leveraged from the organizational perspective for diffusion and exploitation, for subsequent competitive advantage.

According to the Gartner Hype Cycle for Emerging Technologies, 2009 (Figure 1), Corporate Blogging has moved up from the Trough of Disillusionment and is now in the Slope of Enlightenment, inching slowly towards wide-scale mainstream adoption as more and more benefits become visible.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Corporate blogging

Web 2.0 is a collection of open-source, interactive and user-controlled online applications, expanding the experiences, knowledge and market power of users as participants in business and social processes.¹ Web 2.0 tools also represent a significant opportunity for organizations to build new social and web-based collaboration, productivity and business systems, and to improve cost and revenue returns.² These tools of the collaborative web have found applications in the corporate sector in the domains of Marketing, Brand Promotion and Customer Relationship Management. Web 2.0 also appears to have a substantial

effect on consumer behaviour and on new challenges facing strategists and marketers.³ Corporate Blogs, online communities, social networks, wikis, micromedia and folksonomies are some web 2.0 concepts being used by businesses.

The dictionary meaning of a blog is a frequent, chronological publication of personal thoughts and links. As millions of people use blogs as personal diaries on the Internet, they are emerging as collaborative spaces that can be put to multiple uses and that have emerged as the latest mode of computer-mediated communication.⁴ This concept has found widespread acceptance in the corporate world, with the emergence of 'corporate' or 'organizational' blogs. These are people who blog in an official or semi-official capacity at a company, or are so affiliated with the company where they work, that even though they are not officially spokespeople for the company, they are clearly affiliated.⁵ These blogs are further endorsed explicitly or implicitly by the company. Also termed as a hybrid of the personal blog,⁶ they are increasingly being explored by public relations practitioners and feature the insights, assessments, commentary and other discourse devoted to a single company. Organizational blogs seem to appear at the intersection of personal reflection and professional communication. They have evolved from both online and offline modes of communication and have characteristics of both personal and professional communication.⁷ Posts in blogs are tagged with keywords, allowing for content categorization and also for gaining access to the content through tagging as a theme-based classification system. Linking is also an important part of the blogging activity as it deepens the conversational nature of the blogosphere and its sense of immediacy.⁸ An effective blog fosters community and conversation,⁹ drives traffic to the product website, and serves as a medium for interaction with consumers, thereby shaping

consumer perception, eliciting responses, and through a two-way thought exchange process, aids in fostering a connection with the consumers. Blogs have a comparative advantage of speedy publication – they have a first-mover advantage in socially constructing interpretive frames for current events.¹⁰ Blogs are no longer a subculture of the Internet; they have become a mainstream information resource. *External Corporate Blogs* are primarily used as tools by organizations to interact with consumers, partners, marketing intermediaries, associates and components of the external environment, namely media, government agencies and other general bodies. They offer a more up-to-date view of the organization as compared to other traditional communication channels. Tapping into this new channel to listen to and interact with their customers requires new initiatives from corporations.¹¹ They further provide a tremendous opportunity for forward-thinking companies and management to have a significant positive impact on their public perception. People who read organizational blogs perceive an organization's relational maintenance strategies as higher than those who read traditional web content only, thereby making a blog a useful tool for creating and maintaining value-laden relationships with current and potential customers. Launching a corporate brand blog is representative of an organizational desire to share information and engage in a conversation. This is especially true when the blog allows visitors to post their own comments. The informality of communication helps companies build trust,¹² converse with people and even manage public perception by posting suitable responses. The ability of a blog to induce consumer participation by making consumers comment on the posts hosted by the organization creates a dialogue and helps the organization achieve consumer engagement. These web-based interactions can aid in reducing the level of

perceived indifference of a company, and at the same time reinforce a customer purchase decision, by offsetting the feeling of cognitive dissonance.¹³

Although the ability of a blog to achieve higher volumes of engagement in terms of volume of comments is significant, of greater importance is the knowledge capital created through exchange with consumers, which can be mined to extract explicit information that can be leveraged by the organization as a decision support system,¹⁴ for consumer segmentation and strategy formulation. The advantage of blogs is that posts and comments are easy to reach and follow because of centralized hosting and generally structured conversation threads. Currently, all major browsers support really simple syndication technology, which enables readers to easily access posts without actually having to visit the blogs. From a blogging perspective, benefits to users are social as well as informational, and connecting with their community is an important value sought by all types of users, and heavy users of the system realize the greatest benefits.¹⁵ Corporate Blogging is primarily about three attributes – information, relationships and knowledge management. Although there are many different types of corporate blogs, most can be categorized as either internal or external. For the purpose of this study, we focus on external blogs being used by organizations to build brand relationships with consumers and induce participation and engagement.

Customer relationship management

Customer Relationship Management (CRM), which has also been described as ‘information-enabled relationship marketing’,¹⁶ is an enterprise-wide initiative that belongs to all areas of an organization.¹⁷ It comprises processes used by organizations to manage consumer relationships, which also include collecting, storing and analysing data, and is often

termed as data-driven marketing. CRM attempts to provide a strategic bridge between information technology (IT) and marketing strategies, thereby aiming at building long-term relationships and profitability. This requires ‘information-intensive strategies’.¹⁸ It is vital to maintain appropriate Customer Information Management systems by acquiring customer databases and consolidating customer feedback.

Companies interact with customers, treat them as organizational assets, learn about them and through the process of incorporating feedback and co-creation, develop a level of intimacy with them. This serves the objective of better marketing investment prioritization, as improving marketing intelligence will definitely aid firms in improving the selling context. Organizational processes need to change in a way that the organization can recognize individual customers and extract information on who they are and what they want.¹⁹

e-CRM

CRM is the core business strategy that integrates internal processes and functions, and external networks, to create and deliver value to targeted customers, at a profit. It is grounded on high-quality customer data and enabled by IT.²⁰ An important CRM goal is to build long-term and profitable relationships with chosen customers and further get closer to those customers with every point of contact with them.²¹ Hence, the primary objective of most organizations is Customer Acquisition followed by Customer Retention. The heart of marketing is relationships, and nurturing long-term relationships should be the goal of marketing practice.²² These relationships can be formed and managed with the use of IT. In this context, we can define e-CRM as activities to manage customer relationships by using the Internet, web browsers or other electronic touch points.

A higher degree of interactivity possessed by these channels further allows companies to engage in dialogue, organize consumer redressal, solicit feedback, respond to controversies and establish and sustain long-term customer relationships. Existing companies are being challenged to rethink the most basic business relationship – the one between the organization and its customers. CRM is a comprehensive business and marketing strategy that integrates technology, process and all business activities around the customer.²³ Despite media hype about the Internet changing the rules of engagement with customers, it has not changed the underlying fact that addressing customers' needs leads to sustainable profit,²⁴ and that e-CRM is related to customer satisfaction.²⁵ In this scenario, where information overload in the Internet age can force people to become passive receptors of information, it is important for an organization to make sure that the right information reaches the right people at the right time. A higher perceived value by the consumer in the organizational information will stimulate consumer interest leading to a desire to interact, achieving 'engagement' from the organizational perspective. Although this article is devoted to the means for building greater consumer engagement in terms of the volume of comments by consumers, further scope of research is identified in tracking the consumer responses in the form of the consumer comments and mining the same to gauge consumer sentiment and to serve as a decision support system for better segmentation and response management under the aegis of campaign management in a CRM solution. Technology, Knowledge Management, Business Models, Markets and Human Factors are five input variables integral to an e-CRM process.²⁶ Under these conditions, data mining tools can help uncover the hidden knowledge to understand the customer better, whereas a

systematic knowledge management effort can channel the knowledge²⁷ into effective organizational strategies.

CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT

The ability of marketing to engage and endear consumers will ultimately determine whether a user eventually enters into a greater relationship with a brand or organization. It is important to measure the engagement of customers, prospective customers and detractors with an organizational brand, in every area of engagement. Engagement needs to be understood by type, the factors leading to engagement and the value associated with each in terms of ultimate adoption, sales and brand loyalty. The engagement theory comprises the dimensions of Involvement, Interaction, Intimacy and Influence.²⁸ The level of user engagement achieved by interaction between organization and consumer is an important factor contributing to product adoption, thereby driving sales and brand loyalty, as demonstrated in the case of a Corporate Blog, which allows consumers to interact with products, brands and organizations. In the Web 2.0 context, consumer engagement is visible through the means of publishing, posting comments, subscribing, bookmarking, emailing, distributing and networking. When measuring engagement, the level of user interaction is an obvious and important component, and each of the above-stated user actions indicate a different level of engagement.²⁹ A user who comments on an organizational post on a Corporate Blog is at a 'higher level of engagement' than one who simply reads the post. Similarly, a user who creates content about an organizational initiative, that is, shares content about the organization on his/her personal blog is more engaged than both the above stated ones. The degree of consumer involvement is expected to influence both the amount and quality of a consumer's cognitive response. Involved

consumers engage in more laboured research and acquisition strategies.³⁰ The number of comments a blog entry attracts and the number of individuals who write the comments are indicators of participation that significantly load onto involvement.¹²

While user actions in the direction of *Adoption*, like adding to a group, may be indicative of low engagement, rating, commenting, voting, endorsing and favouring signal medium engagement. Further, content-creation activities like blogging or participation in a fan community are indicators of a high degree of engagement. Similarly, adding friends, networking and creating a fan community are factors contributing to the highest degree of engagement.²⁹

BRAND COMMUNICATION

Regular communication between organization and consumer reinforces organizational image and product messages, builds brand awareness and strengthens brand recall. By creating meaningful brand encounters, the consumer–brand relationship can be strengthened. When consumers are regularly in contact with a brand, they may begin to perceive it as a person, a trusted friend who is part of their everyday life, thereby strengthening their loyalty towards the brand. Customer–brand loyalty in cyberspace demonstrates an evolution from the traditional product-driven, marketer-controlled concept towards a distribution-driven, consumer-controlled and technology-facilitated concept.³¹ When consumers engage in a brand relationship,³² they begin to perceive the value related to the brand. Brand knowledge affects future purchases via a brand relationship path that includes brand satisfaction, brand trust and attachment to the brand.³³ Finally, consumers who have greater expected benefits and utility from an ongoing relationship are more likely to commit to it. Having a regular touch point to interact with the customer results in

learning related to the brand and generates a positive attitude by creating a brand association. When consumers form relationships with brands, they use norms of interpersonal relationships as a guide in their brand assessments.³⁴ Further, improving the level of interactivity of the online medium being used by the organization increases the ‘reach’ (percentage of all Internet users who visit a given site) of the medium.³⁵ By targeting the brand image in the consumer’s mind, the customer expectations and perceptions can be influenced. It is the volume and content of brand communication that are vital parameters in this context.

CLASSIFICATION OF CONTENT HOSTED BY THE ORGANIZATION ON A BLOG

Need for content categorization

A Corporate Blog is an organizational response to exploratory consumer browsing, and is being heralded as a paradigm shift in the way companies interact with their consumers. Although the primary idea is to cater to a long-term brand impact, attracting consumers and motivating regular visits by engaging them by hosting appropriate content on the blog is the simple methodology.

They are tools in organizational self-presentation efforts, and attempt to change the flow and balance of information. Blogs are emerging as tools for marketers, which allow them to shape perceptions by presenting a unified mass-market branding image that can be confronted by a counter-flow of dissenting opinions, alternative sources of information and messages.

In this dynamic blog landscape, the typology of content that attracts greater consumer interest and generates subsequent engagement by soliciting participation and involvement through comments needs to be identified to enable organizations to post content in accordance with consumer

receptivity. Although the Corporate Blog serves as an excellent value-communication vehicle, it is imperative to understand the organizational thought behind the content-creation process. Customers devour the content only when they perceive value in the same. This can be achieved when the organizational objectives for content creation match the consumer expectations at the time of contact.

We now attempt to classify the content posted by the organizations on a corporate blog and further try to explore the relationship between the volume and type of content created by the organization and its ability to induce consumer engagement.

METHODOLOGY

Identification of types of posts

Sampling criteria

A survey of 100 blog posts across 10 Fortune 500 corporate blogs was conducted. It was important to conduct a subjective analysis of at least 100 different blog posts to understand the diversity in the type of content an organization hosted. This indicated presence of 27 different types of posts. These were posts on Organizational Growth, Organizational Culture, Product-related Features, Product Prices, posts soliciting consumer feedback, posts referring to blogger meetings and blogger relation programmes, posts about activities of the organization in the realm of its corporate social responsibility endeavours and other organizational events. Also included were posts communicating information on new product launches, any new promotional campaigns, as well as product and service comparisons. There were posts delivering information on organizational achievements in terms of awards and recognition, new research projects, employee experiences and celebrations in the organization. Corporates were also using blog posts to sort out

product-related grievances, and responding to any controversies or media reports regarding product or organization. Posts were also being used to project product and feature comparisons, address new technological issues and even persuade consumers to buy products. Posts were also being used to address dealer-related issues, responding to rumours and criticism, and also to help the consumers and address consumer worries. There were some posts also aimed at general conversational issues like the environment or politics or music/movies/books/jokes to engage the consumers in an online conversation.

These posts formed a diversity of content, which required classification into specific content typologies.

Content categorization using factor analysis

A set of users from the 'Consumer-Generated Media' forum at Facebook, as discussed above, were requested to help in mounting an evaluation grid linking each of these 27 different types of posts to an organizational objective behind the post. The query was hosted through www.qualtrics.com. The evaluation grid was further used to conduct a factor analysis using Principal Components Analysis with Varimax rotation (Table 1) to regroup these 27 posts under Organizational, Promotional, Relational and General categories. The same was used to extract content typologies. This was done by using the highest loading as a determinant of the factor a variable belonged to.

This helped us extract the following content typologies.

Content typologies

- (i) *Organizational content*: Organizational posts can be directed specifically towards sharing news on organizational growth, new projects and endeavours, organizational activities directed towards corporate social responsibility,

Table 1: Total variance explained

Component	Initial eigenvalues		
	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %
1	9.669	35.812	35.812
2	7.137	26.433	62.245
3	6.778	25.102	87.348
4	3.373	12.492	99.839
5	0.043	0.161	100.000
6	5.891E-16	2.182E-15	100.000
7	4.985E-16	1.846E-15	100.000
8	4.104E-16	1.520E-15	100.000
9	3.770E-16	1.396E-15	100.000
10	3.354E-16	1.242E-15	100.000
11	2.819E-16	1.044E-15	100.000
12	2.606E-16	9.652E-16	100.000
13	1.887E-16	6.990E-16	100.000
14	1.356E-16	5.023E-16	100.000
15	1.165E-16	4.314E-16	100.000
16	5.867E-17	2.173E-16	100.000
17	2.891E-17	1.071E-16	100.000
18	-3.991E-17	-1.478E-16	100.000
19	-8.619E-17	-3.192E-16	100.000
20	-1.664E-16	-6.163E-16	100.000
21	-2.068E-16	-7.660E-16	100.000
22	-2.599E-16	-9.625E-16	100.000
23	-2.831E-16	-1.048E-15	100.000
24	-3.500E-16	-1.296E-15	100.000
25	-4.731E-16	-1.752E-15	100.000
26	-5.064E-16	-1.875E-15	100.000
27	-5.763E-16	-2.134E-15	100.000

employee experiences, posts sharing information about cultural events, awards and other organizational achievements and so on. The aim is to use the blog as an outreach mechanism to enhance organizational brand image and build greater respect and value for the organization. Posts under this category are designated *OrgP*, and comments under these ‘Organizational’ posts are designated *OrgC*.

- (ii) *Promotional content*: Includes posts sharing factual data with respect to product features, prices, new products, product comparisons, promotional campaigns and response to any product-related grievances. Also included are posts passively persuading consumers to embrace the product and those addressing technological issues. In this context, the variable ‘Persuade’ loaded onto Promotional content as a significant factor (0.73),

but also showed a reasonable loading (0.67) onto another factor, namely Relational content. However, for the purpose of our research, we use an additional subjective judgement to categorize ‘Persuade’ as a variable under the Promotional content category. Posts under this category are designated *PromP*, and comments under these ‘Promotional’ posts are designated *PromC*.

- (iii) *Relational content*: This category includes posts soliciting feedback, those addressing controversies or rumours about the organization, brand, product or service. Also included are posts addressing dealer issues, bloggers meets, consumer worries and those directed towards consumer redressal. In this context, the variable ‘Dealer_issue’ loaded onto Relational content as a significant factor (0.78), but also showed a reasonable loading (0.61)

on another factor, namely Promotional content. However, for the purpose of our research, we use an additional subjective judgement to categorize 'Dealer_issue' as a variable under the Relational content category. Posts under this category are designated *RelP*, and comments under these 'Relational' posts are designated *RelC*.

All other posts are classified under the general category.

- (a) *Volume of posts and dependency of comments on volume of posts*: Four Fortune 500 Blogs were identified, namely General Motors, Southwest Airlines, Dell and Marriott. Existence of blogs for over a period of 2 years was a prerequisite for the study, as data for a 20-month period had to be investigated. A sample of 1207 posts across these blogs was used for the study. Posts were subjectively classified under the Organizational, Relational, Promotional and General categories on a monthly basis. The volume of comments under each post was noted. A summation of monthly figures for comments gave the volume of comments under the four different categories. The datasheet for the General Motors blog (Table 4), depicts the process, which was repeated for the other three blogs. The per post comment rate and the percentage of comments to total comments were calculated to determine the post typology, which attracted the maximum number of comments for each of the blogs. The Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to determine the correlation between volume of posts and comments in totality, as well as posts and comments under each category of posts.
- (b) *Fitting a regression model*: A regression model was used in case of the General Motors Blog to establish the dependency of total comments on posts. The procedure could

not be repeated for the other blogs owing to a low value of *R* square.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Factor analysis – The principal components method of extraction was used for data reduction. Components with eigenvalues greater than 1 were extracted (Table 1). As the communalities were all high, the extracted components represented the variables well. Four principal components formed the extracted solution. They explained nearly 99.84 per cent of the variability in the original variables. Hence, the complexity of the data set was reduced considerably by using these components, with only a 0.16 per cent loss of information. The rotated component matrix was used to interpret the solution. The rotated component matrix helped determine what the components represented (Table 2). The first component is highly correlated with InfoOrgGrowth and OrgCulture, InfCSR, InfOrgEvents, InfOrgProject, EmpExp, InfOrgAwards. The first factor extracted was hence named as 'Organizational posts' (Table 3). The second component is highly correlated with Bloggersmeet, Dealer_issue, Feedback, Rumor_resp, Controversy, Helpconsu, ConsuWorries. The second factor extracted was termed as 'Relational posts'. The third component is highly correlated with Prod_Features, Prod_Prices, NewProd, PromCamp, Prod_Camp, Prod_Griev and Persuade. The third factor extracted was termed as 'Promotional posts'. All remaining posts were categorized as General posts.

The datasheet for General Motors Blog (Table 4), depicts the volume of posts under OrgP, PromP, RelP and GenP categories, for a 20-month period. TotP is calculated by summation of posts under each of the categories. The number of comments for each post under a particular category is tabulated and summed up to represent OrgC, PromC, RelC and GenC,

Table 2: Rotated component matrix

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization	Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis			
	Component			
	1	2	3	4
InfoOrgGrowth	0.990	-0.004	-0.087	-0.103
OrgCulture	0.983	0.145	-0.107	-0.008
Prod_Features	-0.186	-0.164	0.960	-0.127
InfCSR	0.977	-0.178	-0.116	-0.009
Prod_Prices	-0.073	-0.162	0.964	-0.197
InfOrgEvents	0.989	0.055	-0.132	-0.041
Books_Films	-0.133	-0.039	-0.139	0.980
InfOrgProject	0.988	-0.066	-0.082	-0.110
EmpExp	0.920	0.356	-0.142	-0.079
InfOrgAwards	0.986	-0.013	-0.112	-0.123
NewProd	-0.072	-0.104	0.972	-0.197
PromCamp	-0.146	-0.064	0.986	-0.053
Envissue	-0.083	0.433	-0.170	0.880
Bloggersmeet	0.354	0.912	-0.157	-0.067
Persuade	-0.142	0.666	0.732	-0.011
Dealer_issue	0.612	0.782	-0.102	-0.051
Prod_Comp	-0.141	-0.239	0.958	0.069
Prod_Griev	-0.250	0.508	0.810	-0.141
Eco_issue	-0.099	-0.115	-0.106	0.982
Pol_issue	-0.129	-0.039	-0.138	0.978
Feedback	-0.149	0.964	-0.122	0.159
Rumor_resp	0.423	0.863	-0.125	0.246
Controversy	0.009	0.998	0.053	0.034
HelpCons	-0.091	0.991	-0.059	0.076
ConsuWorries	-0.101	0.993	-0.009	0.067
Celebrations	0.038	0.315	-0.140	0.938
Tech_Issue	0.011	0.045	0.978	-0.205

respectively. Summation of these comments enabled calculation of TotC. The entire process was repeated for the other three blogs.

Per post comment rate (Table 5) was highest for *Relational* posts for DELL, General Motors and Marriott, and highest for promotional posts for SouthWest Airlines.

Percentage of *Relational* comments was the highest for Dell, Marriott and South West Airlines and sizeable for General Motors as well.

General Motors had a higher volume of *Promotional* posts, DELL had equal volume of *Promotional* and *Relational* posts, Marriott and South West Airlines had greater volume of posts in the *Relational* category.

A strong correlation (Table 6) was detected between the volume of posts and comments in most cases.

An attempt was made to fit a regression model (Figure 2). A strong correlation was observed between the total number of posts put up by General Motors and the number of user (current and prospective consumer) comments on the blog. Comments demonstrated an incremental growth trend of 22 per unit increase in post. This is clearly indicative of the level of success that General Motors has achieved with its blog. (Approximately 48 per cent of variation in the number of comments was explained by the number of posts – calculations done over a 20-month period).

CONCLUSIONS

- (i) Brand communication content created by an organization can be classified on the basis of the objective of the communication

Table 3: Content categorization

Organizational		Promotional		Relational		General	
Posts on	Posts on	Posts on	Posts on	Posts on	Posts on	Paste	
Organizational growth (InfoOrgGrowth)	Product features (Prod_Features)	Soliciting feedback (Feedback)	Economic issues (Eco_issue)				
Organizational culture (OrgCulture)	Product prices (Prod_Prices)	Bloggers meet (Bloggersmeet)	New book/movie/music/jokes (Books_Films)				
CSR activities (InfCSR)	New product (NewProd)	Dealer issues (Dealer_issue)	Environmental issues (Envissue)				
Organizational event (InfOrgEvents)	Promotional campaigns (PromCamp)	Response to rumours/criticism (Rumor_resp)	Political issues (Pol_issue)				
Projects and research (InfOrgProject)	Product comparisons (Prod_Comp)	Controversy/media report (Controversy)					
Employee experiences (EmpExp)	Product grievances (Prod_Griev)	Consumer worries (ConsuWorries)					
Awards (InfOrgAwards)	Persuasive to try product (Persuade)	Consumer help (HelpConsu)					
	Technological issue (Tech_Issue)	Celebrations (Celebrations)					

Table 4: Posts and comments for general motors

	Posts						Comments					
	OrgP	PromP	RelP	GenP	TotP		OrgC	PromC	RelC	GenC	TotC	
Oct-06	9	4	3	4	20		20	229	57	146	487	
Nov-06	6	3	1	1	11		11	176	184	27	388	
Dec-06	3	2	3	3	11		11	43	62	138	423	
Jan-07	1	4	5	1	11		11	7	78	237	326	
Feb-07	1	5	7	0	13		13	0	130	409	539	
Mar-07	3	2	2	1	8		8	52	106	185	404	
Apr-07	0	5	3	1	9		9	0	369	246	629	
May-07	1	0	3	1	5		5	21	0	289	311	
Jun-07	0	4	4	1	9		9	0	155	194	365	
Jul-07	1	3	2	0	6		6	18	222	105	345	
Aug-07	2	5	1	1	9		9	121	171	49	342	
Sep-07	1	3	1	2	7		7	10	179	80	300	
Oct-07	3	4	2	0	9		9	20	228	81	329	
Nov-07	3	6	2	0	11		11	43	181	83	307	
Dec-07	3	1	0	3	7		7	87	62	0	230	
Jan-08	6	8	1	4	19		19	62	358	26	616	
Feb-08	2	3	1	4	10		10	43	93	60	291	
Mar-08	5	3	0	0	8		8	72	180	0	252	
Apr-08	0	1	3	0	4		4	0	26	127	153	
May-08	3	3	0	0	6		6	22	131	0	153	

Table 5: Analysis of posts, comments and per post comment rate

<i>Item</i>	<i>Dell</i>	<i>GM</i>	<i>Southwest</i>	<i>Marriott</i>
Percentage of Organizational posts to total posts	30.04	28.99	30.23	27.77
Percentage of Organizational comments to total comments	6.19	15.78	19.67	20.48
Per post comment rate for Organizational posts	7.34	20.06	15.89	12.43
Percentage of Promotional posts to total posts	32.77	36.68	14.18	20.37
Percentage of Promotional comments to total comments	34.31	44.63	26.21	15.37
Per post comment rate for Promotional posts	37.3	44.83	45.13	12.72
Percentage of Relational posts to total posts	32.14	20.11	37.2	30.55
Percentage of Relational comments to total comments	58.58	31.06	45.73	46.51
Per post comment rate for Relational posts	64.94	56.9	30.01	25.66
Percentage of General posts to total posts	5.04	14.2	18.37	21.29
Percentage of General comments to total comments	0.91	8.51	8.37	17.62
Per post comment rate for General posts	6.45	22.08	11.12	13.95

Table 6: Correlation between posts and comments

<i>Correlations</i>	<i>GM</i>	<i>Southwest</i>	<i>Marriott</i>	<i>Dell</i>
TotP and TotC	0.69	—	—	No significant correlations
OrgP and OrgC	0.687	0.496	0.506	—
PromP and Prom C	—	0.471	0.78	—
RelP and RelC	—	0.401	0.726	—
GenP and GenC	—	0.821	0.59	—
OrgP and PromC	0.843	—	—	—
PromP and RelC	0.734	—	—	—
OrgP and TotC	0.687	—	—	—
PromP and TotC	0.673	—	—	—
TotP and Org C	—	—	—	—

- (ii) A significant correlation between number of posts and number of comments indicates that the volume of the organizational efforts can stimulate consumer engagement as represented by the volume of comments on the blogs. An increased organizational effort in terms of repeated contacts with the consumer through increased number of posts in a virtual environment can create

- (iii) Relational posts appear to induce a higher degree of consumer engagement, as measured by volume of comments on the posts, thereby indicating that organizations should host greater volume of relational posts. The content attractiveness of the Relational posts appears to strike an emotional chord with the consumer enticing him to engage with the organization, thereby showing that corporates can achieve success in these e-CRM endeavours.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.690 ^a	.476	.447	96.98060

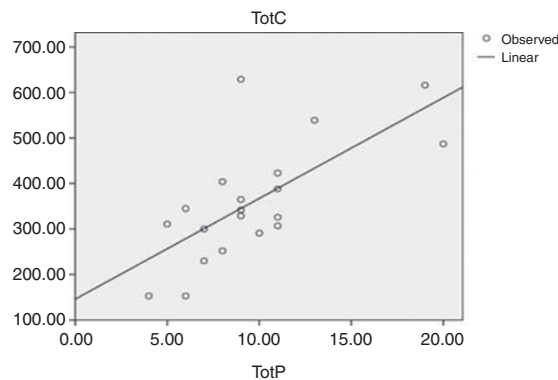
a. Predictors: (Constant), TotP

b. Dependent Variable: TotC

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Correlations		
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part
1	(Constant)	145.991	57.050		2.559	.020			
	TotP	22.125	5.468	.690	4.046	.001	.690	.690	.690

a. Dependent Variable: TotC

**Figure 2:** Regression model for general motors.

- (iv) An incremental growth trend between posts and comments is indicative of the success of an organizational blog towards building consumer engagement. As seen in the case of the General Motors Blog, comments depict an increase per unit increase in post.
- (iii) Page views on a blog are a function of a series of other factors as well, especially other promotional activities that give greater visibility to an organization. However, comments, and hence consumer engagement, appear to be a function of content type.

LIMITATIONS

- (i) One primary reason for the lack of observed correlation in the case of Dell could be certain server changes they instituted in 2007, where consumer comments were barred for a particular duration.
- (ii) The blogs have been taken from the Auto, IT, Hospitality and Airline industries. There is further scope for study to observe patterns in specific industry verticals.

IMPLICATIONS

Organizations should identify the appropriateness of content to the target population of onsite visitors and host content that is attractive to them. By adopting adequate content management strategies, tools offered by the collaborative web, for instance, corporate blogs can be mobilized as channels for building relationships between organizations and consumers. As the organization increases contact with the consumer, by increasing

its own efforts, the chances of forming a relationship with the consumer also increase proportionally. Content that is relevant to the consumer in terms of striking an emotional chord with the consumer attracts more visitors and comments. Hence, although it is important to host organization-specific content in terms of organizational projects, endeavours and achievements, which is a mere statement of fact, it is the Relational content that finds greater favour with the consumer.

DISCUSSION

The emotional appeal and immediacy generated by a relational post, especially with those responding to controversies or soliciting feedback from consumers strike an instant chord with a consumer, enough to make him establish contact with a Corporate Blog, thus achieving engagement and exposing him to a wide range of brand content. Organizations aiming at soliciting consumer engagement through the virtual world can contribute to a consumer's cognitive thought process, address his pre- and post-purchase confusion and dissonance by posting content that will reassure the consumer. A regularity in posting leads to increased consumer contacts aids in strengthening brand recall and develops a brand relationship, thereby inducing participation and leading to consumer involvement, and an increased perception of value in the organization/product. Engagement leads to purchase intent, and brand loyalty, thereby enabling the organization to achieve the twin CRM goals of Customer Acquisition and Customer Retention.

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