

The Social Media Release as a Corporate Communications Tool for Bloggers

—LEYLAND F. PITT, MICHAEL PARENT, PETER G. STEYN, PIERRE BERTHON AND ARTHUR MONEY

Abstract—This study examines the impact of a new communications tool, the Social Media Release (SMR), on bloggers. Specifically we seek to determine what factors will influence bloggers' intents to use SMRs or their components. Our global survey of 332 bloggers finds that bloggers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the SMR, and the use of SMRs by companies positively affect their decisions to use SMRs now and in the future. We also find that bloggers' current use of SMRs influences their decisions to continue using SMRs. Implications on the use of SMRs as corporate communications tools are drawn.

Index Terms—Blogs, bloggers, social media releases, technology acceptance model.

Over the past 20 years organizations have probably been exposed to more new communications tools and technologies than they have been in the previous half-century. While arguably these tools are all part of the same phenomenon of the internet - email was succeeded by the world wide web, then came blogs and social media (such as YouTube and Facebook), and more recently, micro-blogging applications like Twitter; managers could hardly be blamed if they were unable to keep up with the latest medium or technology, while scholars have found themselves on a research treadmill as they study various aspects of new communications media and technologies in order to better understand what they will mean to practice and research.

Blogs, and the blogging phenomenon have been of particular importance to both managers and researchers alike. Organizations have found that in many instances the best avenues to get their messages to target audiences in a credible way are by way of blogs and the bloggers who construct them. Formally defined, a blog (a contraction of the term web-log) is a type of website that contains mainly narrative, usually maintained by an individual (a blogger), with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as

graphics or video [1]. Most blogs are essentially informal online diaries, loosely maintained by individuals as a way of recording events in their lives, mainly in order to keep friends and family members informed and amused. However a large and growing number of blogs have more formal agendas. Many organizations use blogs to keep their audiences and stakeholders informed of their activities, and many journalists have turned to blogging as a way of attaining a more immediate rapport and interaction with their readers. Consumers of blog content value them because they are more current than most mass media, and also because in many instances they are seen as more credible than most mass media - not only with regard to advertising, but with regard to content as well.

So when a new tool emerges that has the capacity to change the way managers interact with bloggers, and that also has implications for scholars, their research and teaching, it is important that it be given attention, not only from a practical implementation point of view, but from a research perspective as well. That is the purpose of this paper. In the article that follows, we examine a relatively new professional communications device called the Social Media Release (SMR), and its effects on bloggers. Specifically, we seek to determine what factors will affect bloggers' decisions to use SMRs in their blogs.

We proceed as follows: First, we provide a brief overview of the blogging phenomenon, with specific reference to the communications literature. Second, we examine SMRs, defining and describing them. Next, we explore a theoretical framework that permits an explanation of the future uptake of SMRs by bloggers. Then, we outline and present the results of a survey designed to determine whether and why B2B bloggers would use SMRs or elements of them in their work. We conclude by acknowledging the limitations of the research, the consequences for the

Leyland F. Pitt is with the Segal Graduate School of Business, Simon Fraser University, 500 Granville St, Vancouver, BC, Canada, V6C 1W6, 778.782.7712 (email: lpitt@sfu.ca)
Michael Parent (corresponding author) is with the Segal Graduate School of Business, Simon Fraser University, 500 Granville St, Vancouver, BC, Canada, V6C 1W6, 778.782.5214 (email: mparent@sfu.ca)
Peter G. Steyn is with the division of Industrial Marketing, e-Commerce and Logistics at Luleå University of Technology, SE-971 87, Luleå, Sweden, +46.920.492.046 (email: peter.steyn@ltu.com)
Pierre Berthon is with the McCallum Graduate School of Business, Bentley University, 175 Forest Street, Waltham MA, 02452, 781.891.3189 (email: pberthon@bentley.edu)
Arthur Money is with the Leeds University Business School, University of Leeds, Leeds UK, LS2 9JT, +44.0.113.343.6321 (email: gillianmoney@ntlworld.com).