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Awareness and Effectiveness of Corporate Blogging in Companies in Kosovo

An Honors Society Project
Presented to the Academic Faculty

by

Fjoralba Krapic

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Membership in the
Honors Society of RIT Kosovo

Supervisor: Venera Demukaj

RIT KOSOVO
June, 2017

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of blogs as new marketing, communication and informative tool has led companies around the world to use them as an important part of their marketing strategy. It is important to note that very little research has been done on the extent of influence that blogs have for companies, and no research has been done in Kosovo regarding blogging or specifically corporate blogging. This thesis investigates how some companies in Kosovo do marketing, whether they are aware of corporate blogging, and what their future plans propose. Results suggest that using blogs as a tool in the marketing mix can be highly beneficial, but due to the low number of companies in Kosovo that use blogging, this study was inconclusive in providing significant results.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis could not have been completed without the help and support of several people. First, I would like to thank my advisor, Prof. Venera Demukaj-Bislimi, for guiding me through the thesis process. Thank you both for your guidance and ideas, but most importantly thank you for your genuine interest in my chosen topic.

To my friends, Hana, Vesa and Dea, I offer sincere thanks for the support, encouragement, and amounts of laughter you gave me while completing this task. Your enthusiasm, charisma and motivation helped propel me forward and made this thesis less stressful.

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INTRODUCTION

Through time, traditional marketing strategies have treated customers as an “extra dimension” and have put emphasis on matters such as the value of exchange, price, promotion and other terms that are still evident and important. The new marketing strategies suggest that this emphasis should slightly be shifted and directed towards the concept of *dyadic marketing* strategies that “focus on the customer relationship and the benefits of mutuality.” (Hougaard, S. and Bjerre, M., 2009, p. [24]). The importance of building customer relationships is further enforced in several cases in the literature review.

Inbound marketing is a new data-driven strategy that is merely focused on creating meaningful content for customers to attract and convert them from being visitors to customers. Blogging is one of the types of inbound marketing that has recently become a popular tool of creating and sharing content online. Apart from individuals who use blogging for their personal interests to build content-based articles, another successful dimension of blogging is Corporate Blogging (Gill 2009). According to Brafton, “Corporate blogging is the practice of creating content that addresses industry updates, expert tips or best practices and company news from the perspective of a brand.” (Ahuja, 2009) Corporate blogging, although still a new concept to many, has delivered benefits to companies according to Fortune 500.

Throughout the project, companies that use corporate blogging will be those companies that have a website, constantly update their web-page, write content-wise articles and have identifiable authors. The aim of this project is to show whether companies in Kosovo are aware of in-bound marketing strategies with a special focus on corporate blogging, how corporate blogging can contribute to domestic companies in achieving their Consumer Relationship Marketing goals and the benefits of applying corporate blogging. Further, the research aims at identifying companies that have promotional and content websites. Ultimately, the analysis provides recommendations for domestic companies based on case studies from only a few companies that use corporate blogging in Kosovo and cases of corporate blogging in other developing countries. It is worth mentioning, however, that no research has been done in Kosovo regarding blogging.

LITERATURE REVIEW

“Marketing channels are perhaps the most numerous and economically most important Inter-organizational networks in any society.”

(as quoted in Hill, Jeffrey)

This section provides thorough literature review of scholarly reviewed articles followed with detailed discussion. Considering the fact that the nature of the phenomenon of corporate blogging is rather recent, there were a limited number of scholarly articles from which I could provide an in-depth analysis. Due to this fact, most of the literature was used to provide some general information on practices and usage of corporate blogging. Also, since corporate blogging has never been researched before in Kosovo and there are no scholarly articles, most of the literature reviewed is based on evidence of other countries.

OVERVIEW OF BLOGGING & CORPORATE BLOGS

The term “blogging” was first coined by Jorn Barger in 1997, who published regularly to a web log called *Wisdom* blog, a blog that had a structure same as the usual blogs we recognize nowadays. The developments of simple tools such as “Xanga”, “Blogger,” and “Live Journal” allowed individuals who were not used to manually enter HTML (hyper markup language) to easily create and post to a website. Following these developments, social and cultural developments increased the popularity of blogs and individuals started sing blogs for political, company, environmental and many other topics (Blankenship, L.). Blogs, although many definitions are constructed, are defined as websites where information is posted online to the public, and where the public can easily interact with the blogger (the system’s content manager) through comments.

Corporate blogs are a type of blogs that have evolved from personal blogs to blogs that corporates, organizations or companies use. The key distinction between personal blogs and corporate blogs is that personal blogs are usually maintained by an individual who expresses his/her own opinions, personal beliefs or simply personal views regarding a certain topic. Corporate blogs, however, are maintained by either one or more people within a company, they represent the views of the company, and are mainly used as a communication and marketing tool. Although corporate blogs can be internal (accessible only to employers and employees within a company) and external, I am going to use the definition of corporate blogs as being external blogs, meaning they are accessible to the online public.

Before moving forward, another distinction between corporate and microblogs needs to be stressed. Microblogs are small blogs that have limited capacity of writing a message, and are mainly used by Twitter and Facebook. However, microblogs are not corporate blogs, but according to Kaplan and Haenlein, they can be used “to enhance the company’s overall reputation” through use of social media channels.

BENEFITS OF CORPORATE BLOGGING

One of the most important uses of corporate blogs is as a tool of communication that helps establish communication and direct feedback from customers or stakeholders. As suggested by Lydia Negrutu, benefits of corporate blogging can be informational, social and other. Getting and sharing information, obtaining feedback and problem solving are included in informational benefits, while community building, networking, managing, developing a reputation and improving communication and collaboration is included in social benefits. Other benefits are the increased efficiency in the company by simply managing the content. Blog managers allow readers to easily navigate in the blog by letting them filter the information on relevant categories, tags, dates, most read or other characteristics. Moreover, through blogs, companies can “target specific individuals, companies and consumers” (Negrutu). Further, setting up a blog is easy and cheap in terms of financial costs, and this becomes even more important for small companies, discussed later in this section, since it allows them to grow without having to pay advertising companies.

BLOGGING AND SOFT-SKILLS

The changing environment of marketing, companies, internal labor markets etc., has made companies/organizations to think of new strategies that are effective, creative, trust-building and cost efficient. The rapid technological development has invented new ways of doing companies, and has managed to change some components of educational systems. Nowadays, in order to handle the challenge and intensity to succeed in such a fast transformation, studies have shown that young professionals are now valued more if they possess important soft skills such as creative and critical thinking, problem solving, writing and analytical thinking. According to Smart et al., company students are faced with challenges since company schools are slow at implementing “contemporary approaches and tools that might help to improve the required skills (Smart, Kelley, & Conant, 1999). Although hard-skills are still valued by most of organizations, the increase in effectiveness from using soft-skills has made this shift from traditional to new marketing even more important. The emergence of blog as a new trend is positively correlated with soft skills and has shown an enormous growth, which according to Johnson, the number of blogs doubles every 5 months. Moreover, corporate blogging specifically has given organizations the opportunity of promoting “communications with internal and external stakeholders.” (Laudon & Laudon, 2007) This type of blogging is used by organizations to either provide information on products, news and content relevant to the company. Literature suggests that using blogging as a marketing tool increases levels of involvement because of “extended interactivity and context relevancy.” (Kaplan, Piskin, & Bol, 2011)

PROMOTIONAL BLOGS

Amongst different types of blogs such as newsletter blogs, free-lance blogs, executive blogs etc., I will derive my focus in promotional blogs. As the word itself suggests, such blogs are determined to allow companies promote their products and events through their websites. Promotional blogs are found in most of companies in Kosovo, since a majority of them have a “basic” website in which the usual categories involve information about them, contact, product and projects. According to Hong-Hee Lee, this type of blog is characterized with “lack of an authentic human voice.” The key purpose of promotional blogs is promoting products and services while also receiving customer feedback. Companies that use such type of blogging are usually more focused on social media marketing (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram).

CONTENT BLOGS

Creating content in websites that companies use may seem boring and unnecessary to some employees, CEO’s or anyone responsible for online marketing. Some professionals or companies do not have time to devote to creating content or building an online audience through content, since their type of company or professional area requires more focus in building things, litigating, counseling etc. According to Chuck Sink, an independent marketing consultant, when companies devote time to increase the quality of information assets, their return on assets increase (Sink, Chuck). Most of the companies in Kosovo, according to my view, do not devote time to content creation because it introduces a new dimension of costs. However, I believe there is a lack of awareness on how the content creation can possibly generate profit and build stronger customer relations.

A. STARBUCKS MOVES TO CONTENT CREATION

To support my views, I will use the example of Starbucks, a well-known American coffee shop, that has recently entered the world of content creation, with the aim of “casting itself as a positive force on social issues.” The CEO of Starbucks, Howard Schultz, argues that moving into content creation will help them connect directly with customers. The strategy they chose is through “series of text, video and podcasts in stores and on its mobile app.” Building quality content is now one of the top priorities of Starbucks, and they have specifically mentioned how this creation of content will help them move away from daily “cynicism” and “hate” mainly produced recently by the Hilary-Trump political campaign (Starbucks moves...). Whether or not this strategy will be successful is something to be seen in the future, however, moving to content creation with a purpose of being a positive source of content with topics regarding politics, social issues etc., is only one of the ways that companies could use corporate blogging for.

B. “COCA-COLA JOURNEY” – HOW CONTENT MARKETING WORKS FOR COCA-COLA

Becoming a source of information itself, Coca-Cola runs a “Coca-Cola Journey” website through which they have succeeded in engaging with customers and produce content. Coca-Cola Digital Communications and Social Media group director argues that “content has been the core of how the company connects and engages with its customers.” The goal of such strategy is to measure what they call **EOI**, or Expressions of Interest. Further, considering the fact that Coca-Cola is a global company, they allow each market site they have around the world to adjust for cultural factors. Further support of their success of content marketing is showed through a focus group study, where visitors of the website stated that the journey of Coca-Cola improved their perceptions of the brand (Busk, Doug). Lastly, Coca-Cola was awarded for being the best web magazine in the Online Communications Award during 2015.

RELATIONSHIP MARKETING

Major importance is placed in Relationship Marketing, a concept that Morgan and Hunt define as “all marketing activities directed toward establishing, developing and maintaining, successful relational exchanges (as quoted in Olivo, 2013, p.30). The complexity of today’s world has increased competition and introduced the need of applying new theories and practices within companies. Taking into account the amount of new technologies and globalization itself, marketing as a field of study has been re-conceptualized, since nowadays relationships are at the core of marketing. Besides improving marketing transactions, financial performance etc., relationship marketing enables companies to add value to joint performance marketing activities and therefore lead to benefits such as satisfaction, commitment and trust. Amongst marketing activities that can be used for relationship marketing, Anderson and Weitz stress that building the above mentioned benefits, companies should have constant interactions, good exchange of communication, shared values and goals, and also “a balanced power or dependency and limited opportunistic behavior among participants” (as quoted in Olivio, 2013, p.31). Ultimately, corporate blogging has proven to be one of the best ways of building and maintaining relationship marketing strategies to companies that are using it around the world.

THE DISADVANTAGES OF CORPORATE BLOGGING

Apart from advantages of corporate blogging mentioned above, Van Rensselar argues that the risks of corporate blogging are issues that need to be considered before deciding to blog. Companies that use corporate blogging are concerned with driving customers away, since blogging can also be boring or unnecessary to some customers. Blogs need to have links connected to other websites in order to be friendly to search engines, and some companies believe this is bad for their company since they do not want to drive

their customers and visitors away. Further, updating and maintaining content of blog is not easy, and employees may sometimes feel they are wasting time. McGovern highlights this issue by stating:

“...blogs are easy to start and hard to maintain. Writing coherently is one of the most difficult and time-consuming tasks for a human being to undertake. So, far from blogs being a cheap strategy, they are a very expensive one, in that they eat up time. As a result, many blogs are not updated, thus damaging rather than enhancing the reputation of the organization.” (as quoted in Harwood, p.17)

Other disadvantages, according to Van Rensselar, include litigation risks, security violations, E-discovery Violations, Reputation Assaults and Regulatory Violations.

Further, Scrivens introduces a new dimension by placing major importance on the Return on Investment and how some companies use blogs mostly because of the increase in ROI:

“In a traditional marketing sense, companies measure marketing ROI by seeing how many products they sell after an ad campaign launches. However, how do you measure mindshare that can be produced by a blog? You can't, really—and that may scare some organizations away. You could measure the traffic that the blog receives, but traffic does not equate to money in all cases.” (as quoted in Harwood, p.14)

Companies that believe they will start a blog should consider the potential advantages and disadvantages from it. Not all companies are the same and not all of them need to blog.

SMALL COMPANIES AND BLOGGING

When analyzing literature on the effect of blogging in small, middle and big companies, numerous of articles argue that blogs are most important for small companies. During first stages of companies, blogs can help “build relationships very effectively.” (As quoted in Hill, Jeffrey) Since blogs are inexpensive in terms of creating, they also require only basic technical knowledge on how to be set up and maintained. Small companies benefit from this the most, since the barriers to entry for blogging are almost non-existent. One of Microsoft’s first blogger, Joshua Allen, stresses the need of creating blogs when you are a start-up or small company. He argues how using blogs can help attract and convert visitors to customers. To stress this even more, Jeffrey Hill quotes:

“In many cases, it is the intimate person-to-person nature of a blog that helps establish and maintain a relationship with an existing or potential 5 Search conducted on 23 June 2005. 27 customers. For many small companies a personal relationship is their main difference from a “faceless” large organization.” (as quoted in Hill, Jeffrey)

However, to a large extent, small companies in Kosovo do not seem to use blogging as a marketing tool. It is paradoxical since the interest in blogging is exponentially growing, while companies in general are still not using blogging as their marketing tool. Reasons why or whether small companies in Kosovo consider blogging in their first stages is a recommendation for future research.

METHODOLOGY

Considering the fact that company blogs are still new to companies in Kosovo and in order to increase the validity of the study, I divided the research in two parts. The first part of the research measures the degree of awareness about “Corporate Blogging” and “Content Marketing” among companies in Kosovo that have a website but do not currently use blogging. The second part of the research analyzes companies in Kosovo that have a website and use blogging in order to measure the effects, advantages and disadvantages of using blogging.

The conceptual model

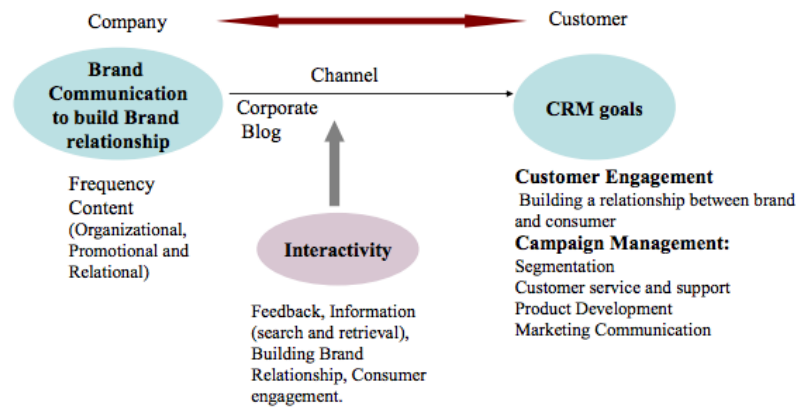


FIGURE 1: USING CORPORATE BLOGGING FOR INTERACTIVE MARKETING AND CRM

SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

FIRST PART

After obtaining data from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics regarding number, names, description and other information of companies in Kosovo, I went through all the companies and identified those that had a website. From the list of companies that had a website, I selected a convenience sample of 95 companies. The chosen companies were further analyzed in terms of content and frequency of updating their websites as well as their content blogging—or lack thereof. If they were doing blogging, they were immediately put into the second part of the research and they were analyzed separately.

In order to gather data, I initiated a web-based survey for companies that were not located in Prishtina. Additionally, by using quantitative research methods, I was able to detect why these companies do not do blogging, whether they are aware of the term and their future plans. The survey did not include open-ended questions, but if someone taking the survey had additional things to say, their responses were recorded.

PROCEDURE

Before visiting any of the companies for the survey, an e-mail was sent to invite each participant in my study (see Appendix A). If the participants did not respond, I either went to their company headquarters or sent another e-mail for reminding purposes. The purpose of this procedure was to increase the response rate.

For companies which were located outside the area of Prishtina, I created an online survey. To be in line with the Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research at RIT, all responses were confidential and respondents were aware of all their rights. The consent letter can be found in Appendix D.

DATA ANALYSIS

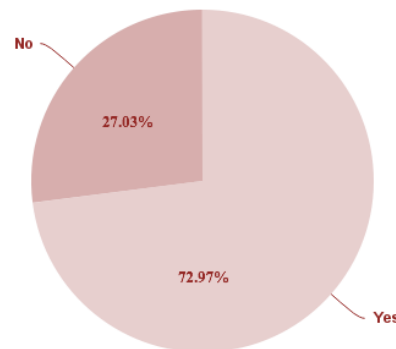
Responses were analyzed using IBM SPSS, in order to analyze responses using cross tabulations. Survey answers were analyzed using SPSS cross tabulation. It is worth mentioning that out of 95 invitations to participate in the study, only 45 responded initially. In order to reach to a minimum of 60 responses, the survey was re-sent to the companies who had not responded where 15 more companies responded. The names of the companies will remain confidential throughout the study.

SECOND PART: INTERVIEWS

The second part of the research was meant to interview people from companies in Kosovo that use blogging in their websites. The interviewees were selected using non-random sampling, precisely ‘purposive sampling’ form where the researcher identifies sources where the best information could be drawn. A qualitative method was chosen in order to allow people bring in useful information on how blogging has proven to be either beneficial or non-beneficial to their company. These companies, which are very few in

Kosovo, were used as case-studies. For interview questions, see Appendix D. The interviews carried out for this research were face-to-face interviews and telephone interviews. Telephone interviews were longer than face-to-face interviews as the interviewees, for some reason, felt more comfortable discussing about the topic via telephone. Interviews were then translated into verbatim transcripts. These transcripts were helpful in determining the assumptions, patterns, categories and other information from the interviewees. The patterns found during interviews were later put into a pattern matrix that allowed closer look on the exact intentions of why they used, what benefits, drawbacks and future plans on blogging or content marketing were.

Q1 Are you aware of the concept of corporate blogging?



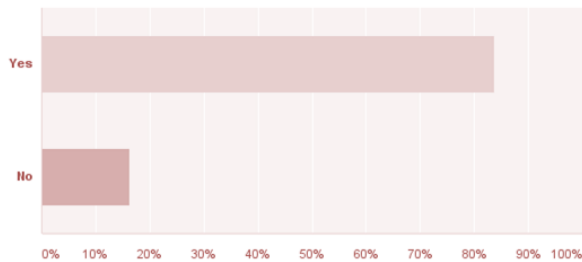
ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

This part of the study focuses on the analysis of the results from the surveys with companies and interviewees' perceptions of using blogging as a marketing tool. Apart from measuring awareness of Kosovar companies of the concept of corporate blogging, other points measured were reasons why some companies do not even have a website, why some have a website and whether they consider switching to more rich content websites in the future.

MEASURING AWARENESS

One of the crucial aspects of this study was to measure whether companies in Kosovo are aware of corporate blogging. Since blogging is a new trend, especially in Kosovo, website analysis of some companies in Kosovo allowed to determine that most of the companies are not using blogging and may be not aware of the concept. However, out of 75 respondents, 72.97% of them said that they are aware of the concept, while 27.03% were not aware.

Q2 Are you aware of the growing importance of blogging in Businesses by marketing managers for marketing purposes?



When asked about the growing importance of the trend of blogging, 83.78% agreed that they are aware of the growing importance. However, this number of companies who are aware of the importance of blogging does not match with the fact that 65% of them have promotional websites (discussed later on the analysis), websites that are solely focused on displaying products and services and are not focused on producing content. The results of awareness suggest that more than half of the companies are aware of the concept and the

growing importance, but more than half of them are still not incorporating tools of corporate blogging or content marketing.

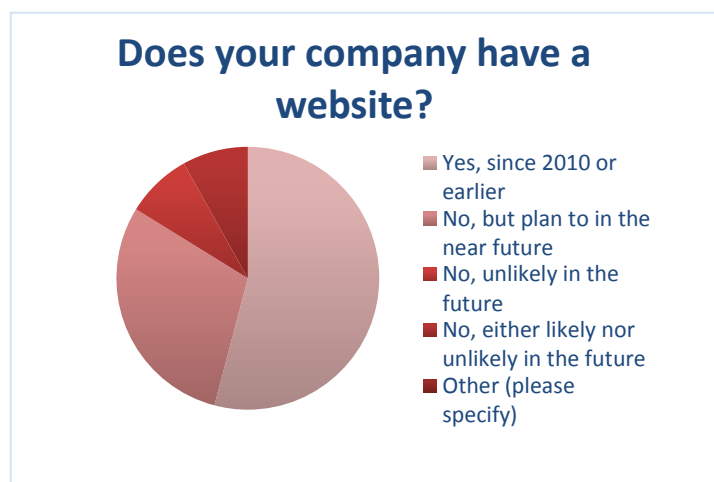
MARKETING CHALLENGES

Since blogging or content marketing is connected to marketing and communication within a company, the study also aimed at detecting the challenges and the focus that companies in Kosovo have. Two of the biggest challenges for them are training the team and hiring high skilled labor. These two challenges are certainly not new in general, but they are one of the challenges that have continuously persisted in almost all markets, and especially Kosovar market. This leads to the belief that the challenge of hiring and training may be the reason why some companies view corporate blogging or content marketing as costly, as the team should be trained to blog. This issue or mismatch of information here appears to be interesting and worth researching in the future. None of the respondents specified any other challenge, but budget and return on investment were also important. Literature review suggests that the team responsible of blogging or content marketing should be passionate and fully aware about the company’s goals, otherwise the content will most probably not represent the true objectives of the company.



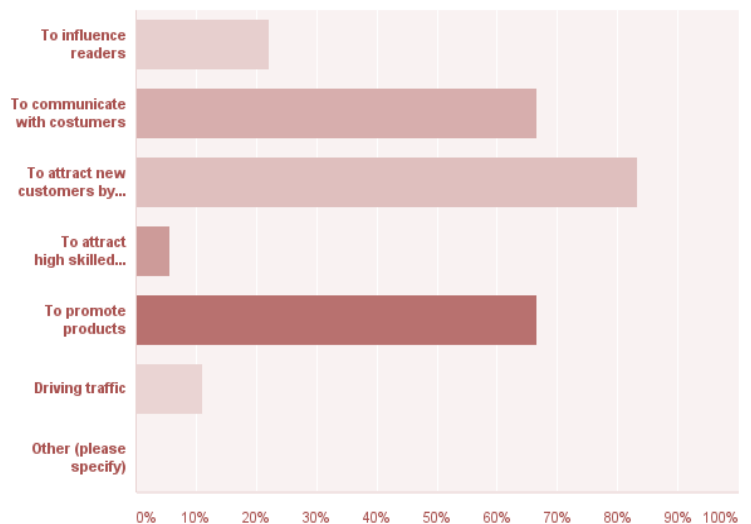
WEBSITES

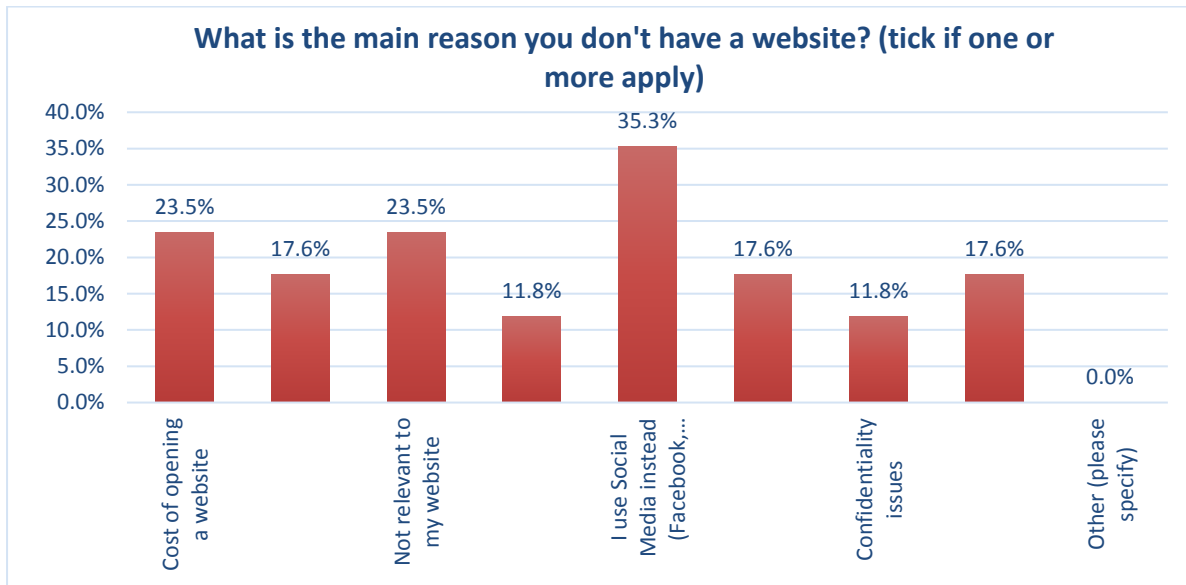
Analysis of the respondents' websites allowed the researcher to evidence the frequency of posting and content. It is crucial to note that some of the companies researched did not have websites, and these companies were asked for reasons why they do not have a website that are shown later on the study. The reason why the sample include companies that did not have websites was to measure the reasons why these companies did not have websites and whether they believe they will switch in the future.



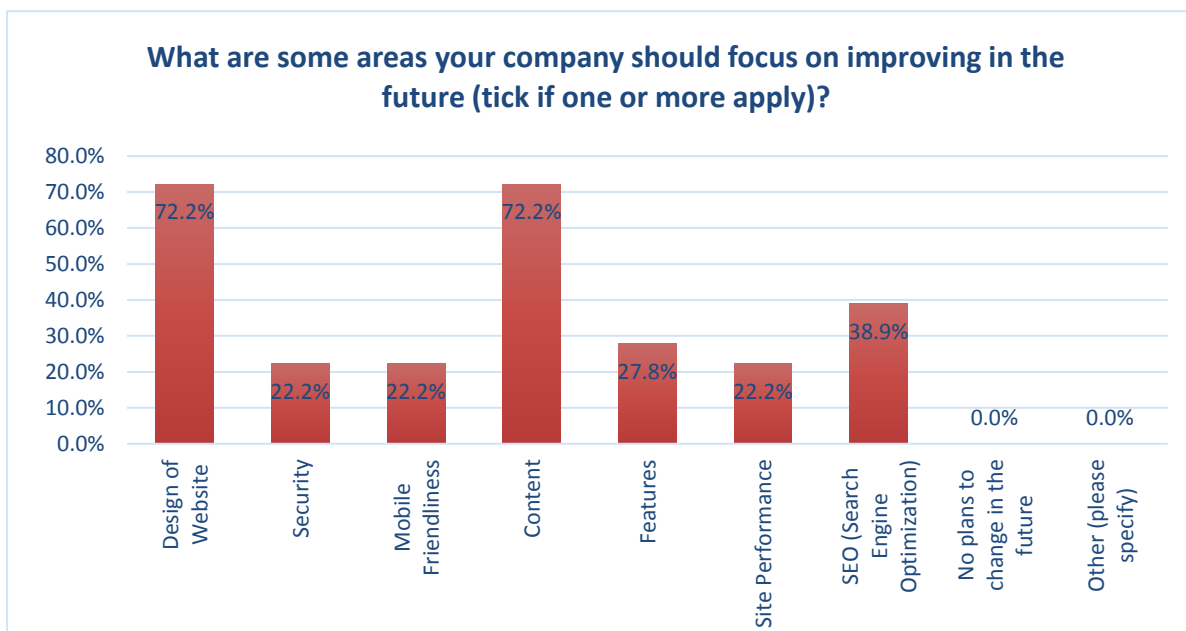
A number of 45.9% showed companies who do not have websites, 29.7% of them planning to open one in the future, 8.1% of them that think that opening a website is unlikely in the future, and 8.1% of them thinking either likely nor unlikely. The main reason why these companies do not have a website was that most of them use social media instead of websites. Using social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram has recently shown an increase in use, especially in Kosovo. The newly features added such as sponsorship allow companies to easily advertise their products and services on these platforms without the need of opening websites. Some even believe that opening a website is costly in terms of money and time and is not relevant to their company. Again, this point connects to the marketing challenges that companies face when hiring and training team, which is costly to them. Confidentiality issues and information security are not as important as other reasons, however, companies that use corporate blogging have reported having these issues and will be discussed later on the study.

Q9 What are some of your main reasons for having a website?





On the other spectrum, companies that have websites have shown that one of the main reasons they have a website is to attract new consumers, communicate with current ones, and promote their products and services. It is important to note that all companies that had websites were using promotional websites instead of content. Reasons for this were that having a promotional website required low costs in maintaining the website, since updating was very infrequent, and the design of the website is what draws customer’s attention the most. However, areas in which they believe they should improve in the future include improving content and design of websites.



Out of all the respondents, 64% stated that they would like to switch to content websites in the future by also giving the following reasons:

- To educate and inform consumers
- Because it helps with google ranking (SEO)
- Would be easier to reach to consumers
- Blogging is a new marketing strategy that we are approaching so we have to regularly update our websites with quality content.

On the contrary, when asked why 36% of them would not switch to content websites in the future, some stated their reasons as follows:

- Not enough/detailed info. We don't know the audience/end results, as well as knowledge/professionalism of bloggers. But, definitely looking forward to try something new.
- Because of the massive information overload, stressing out the end-user.
- I don't think it is useful.

When asked that whether they believe soft or hard skills are more important on today's company environments, 51% argued that both are very important, but soft skills are becoming slightly more important. Lastly, on average, companies surveyed think that corporate blogging in Kosovar company is neither important nor not important.

COMPANY FOCUS & MARKET FOCUS

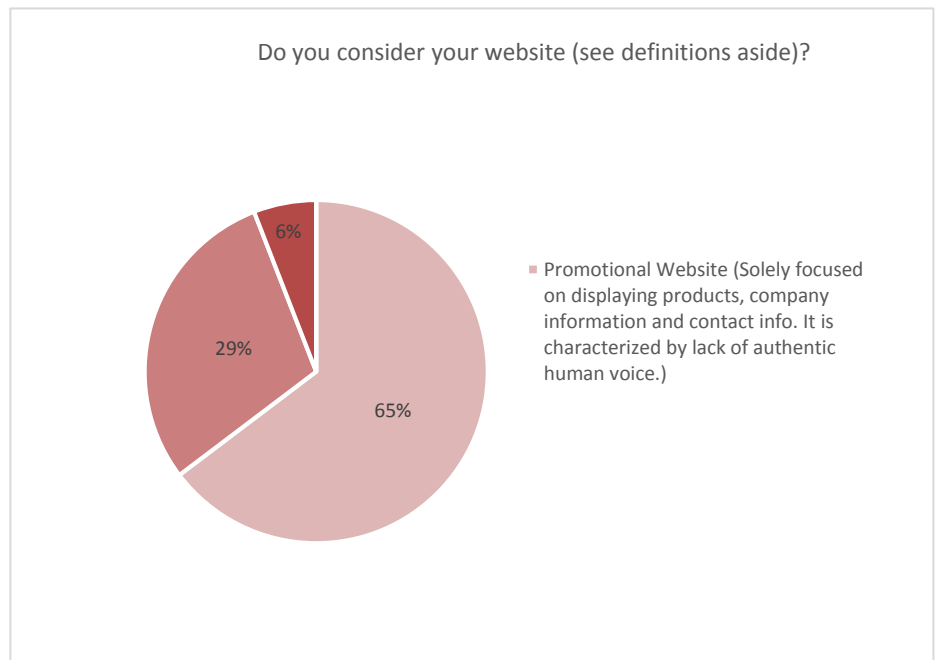
In accordance with most the literature review, the current company environment requires a special approach to customer relationships. Customers are a key component of marketers who want to deliver a better experience of their brand. Having a strategic marketing plan can be a competitive advantage. Based on survey results, 55.8% of the companies were primarily focused on customers, concretely



on relationship marketing. As stated above in Small Companies and Blogging in the Literature Review section, besides improving marketing transactions, financial performance etc., relationship marketing

enables companies to add value to joint performance marketing activities and therefore lead to benefits such as satisfaction, commitment and trust.

As for marketing priorities, increasing sales volume is one of the classic priorities that has persisted since a long time, but right after this the companies are prioritizing reaching the right audiences and creating quality content. This, however, does not match with the fact that 64.7% of the companies who have websites consider their websites promotional, websites that are solely focused on promoting their products/services and are characterized by lack of authentic voice.



The above responses show a clear mix and match of the characteristics of transactional and relationship marketing, a model adopted by Sammie and Walters. Most of the respondents argued that their companies are focused on customers, a characteristic that is high in relationship marketing. However, when the questions were on marketing and sales, most of them argued that they were more focused on making the sale rather than mutual satisfaction between customers and them. While respondents recognize the role that the customers have in defining the value

they desire and as purchasers, they still believe that having promotional websites is easier, cheaper and better for their companies. The respondents revealed that their marketing focus is primarily customer acquisition, with only two respondents failing to mention this point and arguing that their marketing focus is on customer retention. This result tends to confirm the view that companies in Kosovo

Table 1.2: Major Characteristics of Transactional and Relationship Marketing²

Criteria	Transactional Marketing	Relationship Marketing
Marketing Focus	Customer Acquisition	Customer Retention
Time Orientation	Short Term	Long Term
Marketing Goal	Make the Sale	Mutual Satisfaction
Relationship Focus	Create Exchanges	Create Value
Customer Service Priority	Low	High
Customer Contact	Low to Moderate	Frequent
Commitment to Customers	Low	High
Characteristics of the Interaction	Adversarial, Manipulation, Conflict Resolution	Cooperation, Trust, Mutual Respect, Confidence

FIGURE 2: CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT - [HTTP://KFKNOWLEDGEBANK.KAPLAN.CO.UK](http://KFKNOWLEDGEBANK.KAPLAN.CO.UK)

are not mainly concerned with blogging or content marketing solely because their marketing focus is not on retaining but acquiring.

INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

WHY INTERVIEWERS CHOSE TO HAVE BLOGS

Interviewees claimed that the main purpose of having a website is connecting to customers and delivering accurate information. However, those that had a more sensitive website, a hypothetical example would be a website related to men's health, argued that their purpose is very specific and their targeted audience is, in line with the analogy of the hypothetical example, mostly men who are interested in the type of health service we offer. One of the interviewees whose main goal is to provide community services in the health sector, argued that the main reason for having a blog is:

“The aim of the blog / our site is to disseminate accurate information to the layer of the women who are unable to attend classes for pregnant sessions.”

“Given the nature of our site, we are directly linked with patients which we monitor in the center, and this tells that our page has as the main goal the delivery of information regarding health to a broader spectrum at some extent, but we are mainly focused on our patients.”

On the other hand, interviewees that had a more general website, a hypothetical example would be a website related to graphic design, argue that their purpose is to target their already loyal customers but also to attract new ones from different spheres. One important thing to note is that some of the interviewees, those who had websites related to the area of graphic design, public

relations, marketing and advertising, used blogging in hopes of outsourcing in the future. Outsourcing, although not an initial research question, appeared to be much present in most of the respondents. Although it is clear that this varied among different types of companies, most of the companies interviewed believe blogging is the method to draw traffic by companies who are willing to outsource in Kosovo. This pattern is supported by evidence that suggests that web searches are the best way for B2B as they companies search for content rather than Facebook or other social media posts. Blogging attracts and convinces in a different way from social media, and that is why most of the interviewees used it for outsourcing opportunities.

Interviewees	Attracting new customers	Spread important information	Relationship Building	Networking	SEO	Outsourcing Opportunities
#1	*			*	*	*
#2	*		*	*	*	*
#3	*	*	*	*		
#4	*			*	*	*
#5	*	*	*			*

TABLE 1 PATTERN MATRIX

This Pattern matrix shows the areas where the interviewees felt they dedicated the most focus. It is clearly shown that all of the interviewees use their blogs to attract new customers and networking. Interviewees who believed their blog offered them outsourcing opportunities, gave importance to SEO because it allows outsourcing companies to reach to them quicker.

Literature review suggested that one of the most popular cited marketing benefits is continuous communicating with customers. Customer feedback via comments was one of the benefits that interviewees viewed as a valuable basis of marketing information.

UPDATING AND MAINTAINING THE WEBSITE

When interviewees were asked about who is responsible for managing the blog, all of the them claimed they do not have a specific person dealing with updates, rather most of the people had access to the blogging part of the website and published articles with the consent of the majority. In order to induce traffic in their websites, most of them re-posted some of their old posts, mostly a rework or an update to an old post, when they did not have new topics, or they produced new content. One of the best ways of improving SEO was using keywords or hashtags depending on the type of blogpost. Most of their traffic came from using keywords, and this was also their best way of targeting international companies and other cultures.

Interviewees	Frequency of Updating	Average Time Spent (per blog)
#1	Once per week	1 hour
#2	Once per week	1 hour
#3	3-4 times per week	2-3 hours
#4	1-2 times per week	1 hour
#5	1-2 times per week	1 hour

TABLE 2: FREQUENCY OF UPDATING

In the beginning of creating blogs and writing content, most argued that they updated their websites more than once a week, because their goal was to show readers how committed they are to writing quality content. One pattern I noticed throughout the interviews was that respondents did not feel the need of updating their websites more than once per week because the topic of the blogpost had to be analyzed and thought well before posted. Further, half of them had a specific day in which they posted, whereas others had a more ad-hoc approach.

TIME TAKEN FOR PRODUCING CONTENT

Depending on the topic, most of the interviewees argued they spend 1-2 hours producing a post, but updating a specific part of the website only took them about 5-10 minutes. Throughout interviews I was able to find out that all of them spent at least 3 hours to write a blog post when they first started writing. Since then, most of them have gotten better and faster and are usually aware of what the audience is attracted to. However, writing content is not just choosing a topic and writing, but it has other components imbedded. The part that takes most of the time is research and pictures. Most of them spend most of their time researching on topics and gathering appropriate information. Pictures, on the other hand, are a component that require Authorization Rights when using them. The biggest problem of writing content that one of the respondent noticed is as quoted:

“the lack of specific terms in the Albanian language is one of our biggest problems. Despite this, lack of access to certain laws is also another problem.”

Besides these issues, companies want to make sure that the content they produce goes in line with the company’s voice, meaning it represents fully the company and not the person who is producing the content.

Making sure the content represents the company is time consuming since the articles have to go through two or three people who analyze the content.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Most of the benefits brought by corporate blogging were reaching audiences, whether for potential outsourcing or customers. However, one of the things they all had problems with was measuring the return on investment. Nearly all the interviewees argued that there are no tools in measuring the degree to how much blogging is bringing them return on investment. First, if the blogposts increased traffic in the website, traffic would not always mean new customers or new potential outsourcing. Also, it largely depends on the type of the company. For example, one of the interviewees argued that they use blogging solely to inform a certain sector of the population for a variety of issues. In this case, return on investment cannot be measured since it is not the goal of why they use blogging. Whether there has been an improve in the conditions of the readers, meaning it has improved social welfare if the company blogs about health, mental, physical or other conditions, is another aspect that is also extremely hard to measure. In conclusion, there is no conclusive evidence to suggest that blogging is worth the time and money invested, but the initial investment is very minimal.

RISKS OF BLOGGING

Some of the interviewees stressed the fact that posting content online comes with responsibility. Content should be analyzed carefully because the probability of misinterpreting the content is high. Another factor introduced when blogging is that engaging customers online means they can easily post comments and respond to the content however they may feel like doing. Responding to comments is where most of the interviewees had problem with, as they needed to follow a structured and careful approach. “*Controversial content is the worst.*”- said one of the interviewees whose company had to write about controversial topics. Monitoring the blog and its consistence is key to maintaining a positive view on the company. However, some of the interviewees whose content was not as controversial as others argued that this does not appear to be a problem for them.

LIMITATIONS AND CONSTRAINTS

The first and most important limitation is that not many companies in Kosovo have appeared to be interested in studies regarding blogging and content marketing and it was hard to get a representative number of companies that would participate in the study. Also, blogging is a new concept and there is lack of research on exact effectiveness of corporate blogging as a marketing tool. Due to this, it was hard to base the results on other studies and compare to the case of Kosovo. Lack of understanding of the topic was the biggest barrier in getting respondents attracted to the topic. In order to get a better perspective on the issue, the study should be continued for a longer period of time and also be expanded to the perspective of blog readers. Blog readers would give an important insight on the topic since they would show how blogs affect them and their perspective on brand image. Another consideration would be to track companies that have stated they will switch to content websites and see whether they will do so in the future. Also, it would be interesting to have a more definitive view on the companies who do not have websites but use social media portals and see whether they do blogging on Facebook or other portals instead of on a website. It could also be argued that qualitative research on the interview part is subjective, as the interviewees offered different experiences and opinions, and their opinions are not necessarily representing the majority.

CONCLUSION

The aims of this research were to measure awareness on corporate blogging or content marketing and determine whether companies in Kosovo consider using corporate blogging or content marketing in the future. The results of the study were inconclusive because of the response rate and the fact that the companies differ in their experiences. However, the research confirms an evident pattern found in most published literature that blogs can be beneficial to companies, and that there is a chance that some of the companies in the research switch to content websites in the future. Although these companies seemed to have understood the growing importance of blogging, they also showed unwillingness of updating and maintaining the blogs, as to some this was seen as costly. Further, the companies all saw an increasing importance of relationship marketing and connecting with customers. In this aspect, most of them were focused on using Facebook, Instagram or Twitter in reaching out to customers. However, none of the interviewees or surveyed companies who used blogging was not able to provide direct link to benefits of blogging, apart from increased traffic in their websites. Most of literature review discussed in this study highlighted the importance of blogging as an opportunity of being in dialogue with customers. One of the most important aspects of blogging was to allow communication between the views of the company and the views of the customers. A substantial dissimilarity between the results and published literature was that most of the surveyed companies and interviewees did not see blogging as a dialogue, rather a monologue with customers. Although most of the respondents had generally a positive view on blogging in the future, a number of constraints was clear during surveys and interviews. Apart from being seen as costly in financial terms, blogging appeared to be costlier in the aspects of time. Moreover, blogging required a basic understanding of SEO and other technical aspects that most of the respondents were unwilling to invest in. Potential barriers of blogging were also legal issues and the lack of specific terms in the Albanian language. Privacy was also regularly mentioned in the literature and was apparent in some of the responses. The last concern was that all of the respondents felt like they were “*blogging in the dark*” as they had no ways to measure the exact reaction and amount of impact they were transmitting. In conclusion, it is clear that most of the respondents believed the advantages of using blogging are greater than the disadvantages, however, it would be incorrect to assume that blogging would be beneficial to the point that it would cause companies to replace other public relations techniques.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: METHOD OF CONTACT

E-MAIL

Hi,

My name is Fjoralba Krapi and I am a Bachelor student at RIT/Kosova (AUK). I have chosen corporate blogging as my thesis topic. I'm investigating the awareness, attitudes, perceptions, practices, and motivations of corporate bloggers in Kosovo. In order to do this, I need to question a number of companies in Kosovo and was wondering whether you would be willing to take part in this thesis project.

While studying your company's website, I feel convinced that you would be able to deliver valuable insights and perceptions into the area of corporate blogging. I am planning to conduct most of the surveys online through e-mails, please be aware that they will only take approximately 5-10 minutes.

It is important to note that very little academic research has been done in the area of corporate blogging and it will be interesting to see how the phenomenon is viewed from your perspective.

If you decide to take part in this study, your company information and name will not be published and will be kept confidential. If needed, I will also send you more detailed information about the study and an agreement form to be e-mailed back to me, as well as the survey.

Please feel free to contact me either via this email address (fjoralbak@auk.org).

I hope that you will be interested in participating and look forward to hearing from you.

Best,

Fjoralba Krapi

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

Title of Project:

Principal Investigator: Fjoralba Krapi, RITK Student
Str.Garibali, 21/5
Prishtine, Kosove 10000
00377/45-260-432; fjoralbak@auk.org

1. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this research study is to investigate the awareness, attitudes, perceptions, practices, and motivations of corporate bloggers and non-corporate bloggers in Kosovo.
2. **Procedures to be followed:** You will be asked to answer *5-10 questions* during this interview.
3. **Duration:** It will take about *5-10 minutes* to complete the interview.
4. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is confidential. The data will be used only for research analysis, where your company information and name will not be published. If needed, I will provide detailed information about the study.
5. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Participant Signature

Date

Person Obtaining Consent

Date

APPENDIX C: THE SURVEY

Notes: Throughout this survey, I will refer to companies that have a website but only use it for displaying products and other basic information as companies with promotional blogs. On the other spectrum, I will refer to companies that have a website and continually update it with content as companies with content websites.

- 1. Are you aware of the growing importance of blogging in Companies by marketing managers for marketing purposes?**
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
- 2. Are you aware of corporate blogging?**
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
- 3. Do you consider your company to be primarily (tick if one or more apply)?**
 - a) Customer focused,
 - b) Marketing focused
 - c) Product focused
 - d) Sales focused
 - e) Other, please specify:
- 4. What do you think are your company's top marketing priorities?**
 - a) Reaching the right audience
 - b) Increasing total sales volume
 - c) Creating quality content
 - d) Converting leads to customers
 - e) Other, please specify:
- 5. What do you think are your company's top marketing challenges?**
 - a) Training team
 - b) Securing budget
 - c) Finding Sponsors
 - d) Hiring high skilled labor
 - e) Providing Return on Investment
 - f) Other, please specify:

6. Does your company have a website? (If yes, go to question no.8)

- a) Yes, since 2010 or earlier
- b) No, but plan in the near future (during the end of 2016 or beginning of 2017)
- c) No, unlikely in the future
- d) No, neither unlikely nor likely in the future

7. What is the main reason you do not have a website?

- a) Cost of opening a website
- b) Cost of maintaining a website
- c) Not relevant to my company
- d) Information security
- e) I use social media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) instead of a website
- f) Lack of technical knowledge
- g) Confidentiality issues
- h) Don't know
- i) Other, please specify:

8. Do you consider your website (see definitions in footnote)?

- a) A promotional website¹
- b) A content website²
- c) Other (specify)

9. What are some of your main reasons for having a website?

- a) To influence readers
- b) To communicate with costumers
- c) To attract new customers by providing product information
- d) To attract high skilled labor
- e) To promote products

¹ **Promotional website:** Solely focused on displaying products, company information and contact info. It is characterized by lack of authentic human voice.

² **Content website:** Integrating **blogging** activities in the overall content marketing, social media marketing, loyalty marketing, community marketing, lead generation, etc. strategies. Whatever the goals are in an individual context: **corporate blogging** and blog marketing are part of a broader context. The company using a content website updates content regularly.

- f) Driving traffic
- g) Other, please specify:

10. What are some areas your company should focus on improving in the future (tick all that apply)?

- a) Design of Website
- b) Security
- c) Mobile friendliness
- d) Content
- e) Features
- f) Site Performance
- g) SEO (Search Engine Optimization)
- h) No plans to change in the future
- i) Other, please specify:

11. If you have a promotional blog, do you consider switching to a content blog in the future?

- a) Yes
- b) No

12. If yes, why?

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

13. If no, why?

- 1) _____
- 2) _____

14. Base on your personal opinion, which one do you think is more important in todays company environment?

- a) Soft skills
- b) Hard skills
- c) Both
- d) None

15. Additional Comments:

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your reason of starting a corporate blog?
2. Who manages your website?
3. Who is responsible of creating content in your website?
4. What is the average time spent blogging?
5. How frequent do you post content?
6. Do you proof-read your content before publishing?
7. In your opinion, what are the advantages of corporate blogging?
8. If any, what are the drawbacks of using blogging as a marketing tool?
9. What are some issues you have encountered while creating content for your blog?
10. Have you been able to see any impact from your blog?
11. How has your blog affected your relationship with the audience?
12. Are there any legal concerns you face with during creating content?
13. In general, do you think that companies in Kosovo should focus on corporate blogging?
14. Any additional comments?

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