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## Executive Blogging: Indian Corporate Heads in the Blogosphere

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### Abstract

*This study analyzes the content, usability, interactivity and connectivity of Indian executive blogs. Results indicate that among the Indian CEOs and top executives who blog, most are associated with the Information Technology and Internet sectors. A content analysis of the blogs shows that popular blogging topics include industry outlook, technology trends and tips, current affairs and insights on the economy. Executives working with privately-held companies blog more about their personal lives and topics such as entrepreneurship, marketing and advertising, and entertainment than those with public companies. The blog posts of these executives are often in the nature of individual opinions. The executives also provide actionable tips on various topics and products on their blog. While the blogs score high in the interactivity category and do reasonably well in the usability category, most suffer from poor connectivity in terms of providing links to other blogs and websites in the blogroll. Indian executive bloggers need to break out of their isolation and get better exposure by improving connectivity.*

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## Executive Blogging: Indian Corporate Heads in the Blogosphere

What do Indian CEOs and top executives blog about? How frequently do they blog? Are their blogs interactive? How do their blogs rate on the connectivity and usability scale? The purpose of this study is to address such questions by examining individual blogs maintained by CEOs and top executives of Indian origin. This study does not focus on corporate and organizational blogs where top executives might contribute periodically. Specifically, this study aims to identify and analyze the content, usability, interactivity and connectivity of Indian executive blogs.

However, before delving into the field of executive blogging, it is important to identify the primary characteristics of blogs. The historical roots of the word “blog” can be traced to the year 1997 when an active Internet user John Barger coined the term “weblog” to describe the list of links on his website that “logged” his online activity (Wortham, 2007). Two years later, Peter Merholz, another active user, broke the word into “we blog” and soon the term “blog” began to be used both as a verb and a noun (“It’s the links,” 2006). In 2003, the word “blog” became a part of the Oxford English Dictionary.

Merriam Webster defines a blog as “a Web site that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments, and often hyperlinks provided by the writer.” While this definition does a good job defining blogs, one must remember that unlike personal journals, which are often private, blogs are social by nature (“It’s the links,” 2006). Chris Anderson, author of the well-known blog “Long Tail: A Public Diary of Themes around a Book” describes a blog as “a scratch-pad, and a discipline to collect your thoughts, compose your thoughts, advance your thoughts, and do it in public in a way that can amplify your thoughts by not only reaching an audience, but also getting feedback on your thoughts” (Banks, 2007, p.19).

*The Economist* magazine offers a more technical definition of the blog:

Technically, it means a web page to which its owner regularly adds new entries, or ‘posts’ which tend to be (but need not be) short and often contain hyperlinks to other blogs or

websites. Besides, text and hypertext, posts can also contain pictures ('photoblogs') and video ('vlogs'). Each post is stored on its own distinct archive page, the so-called 'permalink,' where it can always be found ("It's the links," 2006).

It is difficult to determine the exact number of blogs as the blogosphere is a highly dynamic environment. However, it may be relevant to mention that the blogosphere is indeed growing rapidly: Technorati, a research firm that tracks trends in the blogosphere, indexed 133 million blogs worldwide since 2002 in its annual State of the Blogosphere report (Winn, 2009).

### ***Executive Blogging***

It is known that blogging is not very popular among the top brass in the corporate world. According to a survey which polled 470 senior executives worldwide, just over 10% have a blog of their own while 69% read blogs overall and 31% contribute to other blogs ("Senior executives," 2009). While more employees are blogging at corporations, few top executives are becoming a part of that trend (Graybrow, 2005). Solomon (2005) points out that while a blog written by a top executive provides news straight from those who actually take major decisions, apprehensions about stakeholder perceptions may not allow the executive to be honest in his or her postings.

The very nature of blogging may also go against what most executives are trained to do: "Blogs, after all, are known for being spontaneous, raw, and controversial – while many corporate executives have spent their career being everything but" (Larson & Smart, 2005). Thus, Bob Lutz, GM vice chairman of product development, says that alert executives will probably not make good bloggers as "most senior executives rise to the top by being very analytical and buttoned up and left-brained" (see Larson & Smart, 2005). Bob Parsons, CEO of privately-held domain name registrar GoDaddy.com, adds that few top executives blog because the blogosphere is "unsanitized" and "most executives are too conservative, and too play-it-safe to do this" (Graybrow, 2005).

The fact that executive blogging is a not-so-common practice among top executives makes it an even more pressing area of research. Who are the top executives that blog? If blogging makes top executives and their companies vulnerable, why do some of them blog? According

to Larson and Smart (2005), executives blog for primarily three reasons: 1) To promote their views without having the media work as a filter 2) To create a sense of dialogue with stakeholders 3) To humanize the face of the company.

In a 2009 survey of bloggers by Technorati, 58% respondents said they were better known in the industry because of their blog and 15% said their blogging gave them more “executive visibility” within their company (Sussman, 2009b). Furthermore, 56% said their blogs have helped establish their companies as a “thought leader” in the field (Sussman, 2009a).

Some executives thus view blogs as a “valuable management tool” (Larson & Smart, 2005). For instance, Rich Marcello, senior vice president and general manager of business critical servers at HP, says that his public blog helps promote a new style of management: “It’s much more about leading in a way that’s a good balance between who you are as a person and what you’re doing at work, showing that you’re just as comfortable dealing with poetry as with profit and loss” (Larson & Smart, 2005). Thus, Marcello’s blog includes diverse entries such as postings on a good quarterly result and a poem he wrote for his late father on Father’s Day (Larson & Smart, 2005).

### ***Blogging in India***

According to the findings of a 2006 online survey of more than 1000 MSN portal visitors, the Indian blogosphere is still in its infancy. The report titled “Blogging India: A Window’s Live Report,” showed that only 14% of India’s netizens blog (“Business Blogs,” 2006). Low internet penetration in the country estimated at 5.22 percent of the total population and the limited nature of regional language blogging might have contributed to the slow growth of the Indian blogosphere (Perera & Raghav, 2009). However, the fact remains that the Indian blogosphere “has grown steadily, if unspectacularly, from a handful at the dawn of the country’s Internet era in the early 2000s to an estimated 3.2 million” (Perera & Raghav, 2009). In a report published in the Mint newspaper, Gaurav Mishra, chief executive of a Delhi-based social media firm, estimates that today there are between 200,000 and half a million active blogs in the Indian blogosphere (Perera & Raghav, 2009).

The Indian blogosphere today remains a niche community that is both English-language dominated and urban centric (Perera & Raghav, 2009). Based on a study of 7,895 blogs self-registered at indibloggers.in, Ravin and Mishra (2009) point out that as many as 92% of blogs by Indians are in English while the rest are in regional languages including Hindi, Tamil, Marathi and Telugu. Regional language blogging is also limited by the fact that most people are forced to use an English language keyboard (Raghav, 2009). Further, the study found that most bloggers are based in Indian cities including Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi, Mumbai and Hyderabad. Finally, men dominate the Indian blogosphere with a break up of 78% men and 22% women bloggers (Ravin & Mishra, 2009).

Tellingly, the "Blogging India" report, which was developed by the blogging site, Windows Live Spaces, also showed that "blogs written by business leaders were found by half of all online users in India to be the most enjoyable to read" ("Business Blogs," 2006). The report also indicated that technology was a favorite among those frequenting the blogosphere: "When asked which subjects they enjoyed reading the most, the majority of respondents cited technology at 32% followed closely by news and education at 24% illustrating the impact of India's booming technology sector on society" ("Business Blogs," 2006).

While corporate blogging is also just beginning to take root in India (Bhatt, 2008), Rajiv Karwal, a CEO blogger and co-author of the book *Corporate Blogging in India* points out that CEO blogging has generated a lot of interest in the country (Karwal & Chaturvedi, 2009). Karwal mentions a few eminent executive bloggers in his book: Nandan Nilekani (co-founder, Infosys), Ajit Balakrishnan (Rediff.com), Basab Pradhan (Gridstone Research), Rajesh Jain (Netcore), Vineet Nayar (HCL) and Arun Natarajan (Venture Intelligence).

Although it is apparent that not too many Indian CEOs maintain individual blogs, one must keep in mind that these executives might contribute posts to a group blog or an organizational blog. For instance, Infosys has several blogs where the entire senior management team contributes (Karwal & Chaturvedi, 2009). Meanwhile, Rajiv Dhingra, founder and CEO of WATMedia Pvt Ltd., which owns India's leading digital media blog WATblog.com, blogs on professional matters on the organizational blog, which tracks the Web, Advertising and Technology (WAT) Industry in India.

Business blogs may thus follow different author formats. However, this paper focuses on individual blogs maintained by top executives. Based on the literature review and trends in the Indian blogosphere, the following research questions were framed:

RQ1: What is the nature of content of Indian executive blogs?

RQ2: How interactive are Indian executive blogs?

RQ3: How usable are Indian executive blogs?

RQ4: How connected are Indian executive blogs?

### **Methodology**

As few Indian CEOs blog, the researchers used a purposive sample with the aim of including the maximum number of executive blogs in the sample. As mentioned above, the sample does not include corporate blogs or group blogs where several executives might contribute content periodically. Only individual blogs of top executives from India and the Indian Diaspora were selected.

The sample selection process involved searching for lists of Indian CEO and top executive blogs by running keyword searches on the *Google and Yahoo* search engines. A search for the keywords “Indian CEO blogs” and its related versions such as “Indian CEO bloggers” was conducted. The first three pages of Google and Yahoo searches were taken into account.

The two lists of Indian CEO blogs that were common to both the Google and Yahoo searches were <http://blog.blogadda.com/2009/06/10/best-indian-ceo-blogs-at-blogadda> and <http://www.labnol.org/india-blogs/indian-bloggers.html>. The Yahoo search also yielded a third list <http://abhishekmittal.com/2009/01/05/business-blogs-in-india/>. A separate search for the keyword “Indian CEOs social network” brought up the following list of CEOs who tweet <http://business.mapsofindia.com/social-media-for-business/indian-ceo-on-twitter.html>. The researchers then used the information to identify the bloggers in the list.

Another list that was used to select executive blogs for this study was from the Indibloggies website <http://www.indibloggies.org>. Indibloggies, which describes itself as a “parody clique on the [bloggies](#),” has been giving out publicly-chosen awards to bloggers from India and the Indian Diaspora since 2003. Individual blogs of top Indian executives were selected from the list of 2008 nominees in the “best business indiblog” category on the indibloggies website.

The selected blogs were coded between February 1, 2010 and March 31, 2010. Here it is important to note that the blogosphere represents a dynamic environment where blogs may rapidly change, move location or even disappear.

### *Coding Scheme*

The coding scheme draws upon a previous study on the structure and content of blogs conducted by Jordi Xifra and Assumpcio Huertas in the year 2008. Xifra and Huertas’s study included the following primary variables: author, content, interactivity, usability and connectivity. As this study focuses on blogs written by CEOs and top executives in India, it focused on the last four variables only. This study operationalizes the content variable by analyzing the topics and issues included in the blogs. A list of dominant items in the blogs was prepared and the emerging themes were categorized into broader topics.

Xifra and Huertas’s study defined the interactivity variable as the “degree of user participation, according to the interactive resources available on the blog” (2008, p. 270). They further explain that interactivity does not simply refer to users being able to post comments on the blog; it also includes other interactive resources such as posting of images, video and audio. To measure interactivity, the researchers of this study used the following six parameters: 1) They determined whether the blog permitted posting of external comments by visitors to the site 2) whether it provided contact information of the blogger 3) whether it contained images 4) whether it contained videos 5) whether it contained surveys 6) and, whether the blog permitted subscription to the posts alone or to the comments on the posts as well.

The usability variable measured the ease with which a user can access and navigate the blog, which is an important feature of effective online communication. To measure this variable,



the researchers used five parameters: 1) whether the blog has an internal search engine 2) whether the old posts are organized in reverse chronological order in the archives 3) whether the content of the blog is divided into clear labels and categories 4) whether the “most recent posts” are explicitly marked 5) And, whether the blog has trackbacks. Trackbacks notify users when someone refers to their posts thus facilitating communication between users.

Finally, the connectivity variable measured the extent to which the blogs were linked to the larger blogosphere. To measure this variable, the researchers examined the blogroll, which should not be confused with hyperlinks inside the posts. Instead, a blogroll comprises a list of links to various blogs or sites and is usually provided as a sidebar or footer on a blog’s front page.

Blogrolls are important as they can boost traffic to a blog: “With each blogroll that your blog is listed on comes the possibility that readers of that blog will click on your link and visit your blog. Blogrolls equate to publicity and exposure across the blogosphere” (Gunelius, n.d.). In other words, “the blogroll is an attempt by the author to place his blog in a specific genre or group, and a reciprocal effort by a posse of bloggers to raise each other's visibility on the internet (because the number of incoming links pushes a blog higher in search-engine results)” (“It’s the links,” 2006). Keeping the above information in mind, the researchers in this study used the following parameters to measure connectivity. They found out whether the blogroll provided links to: 1) same-industry blogs 2) other-industry blogs 3) other types of blogs 4) other-industry websites 5) same-industry websites 6) and, other types of websites.

After coding the data, the researchers ran frequencies, cross-tabulations and correlations using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

## Results

Twenty-four of the 35 bloggers in this sample live in India while the rest are top executives of Indian origin living abroad, including United States, Australia and Canada. While 27 of the 35 bloggers were CEOs/Founders/Co-Founders of firms, the rest were top executives such as vice presidents and chief technology officers. Only two of the 35 bloggers are women. One of them is founder and CEO of a San Francisco-based online media company

while the other is a managing director at a marketing research and strategy firm in Mumbai. In fact, 16 of the 35 bloggers in this study live either in Mumbai or Delhi. Other popular Indian cities include Bangalore, Pune and Chennai. Among those who live abroad, most live in the San Francisco area.

Eleven of the 35 bloggers are associated with publicly traded companies: Ajit Balakrishnan, Founder Chairman and CEO, Rediff.com; Anaggh Desai, CEO, The Bombay Store; Ganesh Natarajan, Vice Chairman and CEO, Zensar; Lakshmi pathy Bhat, Vice President, DraftfcB; Mohan Babu, Principal Architect and Enterprise Architecture Consultant, Infosys; Rahul Sood, Chief Technology Office, HP Global Gaming / VBU; Rohit Bhargava, Senior Vice President, Strategy & Marketing, Ogilvy Public Relations; Sanjeev Bikhchandani, CEO, Info Edge Ltd.; Shantanu Ghosh, Vice President, India Product Ops, Symantec; Simarprit Singh, CEO, Compare Infobase Ltd.; and Vineet Nayar, CEO, HCL Technologies. Thus, it is not just the CEOs of start-ups and small companies that are blogging. Top executives from large, publicly traded firms are also a part of the blogosphere.

Another important trend to note is that a significant majority (66%) of the bloggers are associated with the Information Technology and Internet sectors. Seventy-four percent of the bloggers in this sample have an engineering/management background. In fact, most bloggers are highly educated: 60% have a master's and/or a doctorate degree. Only one blogger, Rahul Sood, is a college dropout: He is the founder of luxury computer designer VoodooPC which was established in 1991 and acquired by HP in 2006. He tells his story in his blog titled "Rahul Sood's Weblog":

I was quite bored after high school, and sometimes I would roll out of bed at 11 a.m. with no desire to go to class. Luckily, my fiancé inspired me to take a major risk—I started Voodoo with \$1,500 on a credit card and an \$85 ad in the newspaper. After selling eight computers in my first week, I simply stopped showing up to classes. I didn't even bother to drop out. After a year or so, we landed a successful workstation contract with a large marketing company (Sood, 2007).

Finally, a quarter of the blogs in this sample have been maintained for more than 5 years – with a blog updated regularly since 1997. Rajesh Jain, founder/CEO, of Netcore Solutions, has been blogging regularly since 1997. While 83% of bloggers have posted one to four times within the one-week period from the date of coding, Rajesh Jain has posted as many as 7 times within that period.

### *The content of Indian executive blogs*

Many of the blogs have jazzy titles. For instance, Alok Kejriwal, founder/CEO of contests2win.com, an online gaming company, has titled his blog “When Rodin met Robinhood.” Avinash Kaushik, co-founder of Market Motive, a firm that provides Internet Marketing Training, has named his blog “Occam's Razor.” In a similar vein, Kris Nair, executive director at Opdrage Venture Partners, a firm that nurtures early stage ventures, has a blog titled “Less Humans, More Robots” while Vishal Gondal, founder/CEO at India Games, has a blog titled “God in Chief.”

Some bloggers also use their own names as part of the blog title. For example, Simarprit Singh, the founder/CEO of Compare Infobase Ltd., has titled his blog “Simarprit’s Weblog.” And, Lakshmi pathy Bhat, vice president at Drafftcb, has a blog titled “Bhatnaturally: Ramblings on Advertising, Apple and New Media.”

As Table 1 shows, the most frequently blogged about topic is industry outlook at 94%. Both technology trends and current affairs rank second at 83% each. Other popular topics include marketing and advertising, insights on the economy, online social media, personal stories, entrepreneurship, entertainment, travel and food, etc. Posts on most topics are in the form of individual opinions and often include tips and related advice for readers.

The engineering background of a majority of the bloggers in the sample and their positions in technology-driven firms is possibly the reason for the high prevalence of posts on technological innovations and trends. Posts that suggest ways and tips to best use a new or existing tool or software are also quite common and are mostly based on the experience and know-how of the bloggers themselves. These also include posts by bloggers explaining new features in products and software offered by their companies.

For instance, Avinash Kaushik's blog Occam's Razor, which focuses on Web Analytics, includes posts on how to get maximum value from Google Analytics by providing a nine-point checklist of what he calls "Analytics Awesomeness" (Kaushik, 2009). In a similar vein, Ashutosh Nilkanth, founder/CEO of a feedit.com, a company that provides web syndication software, writes about the technology of augmented reality and how it can be used in consumer space by giving examples of products that use it in various ways.

Shalin Jain, founder/CEO of Tenmiles, a software company, blogs about the cost of iPhones in India in the year 2008 in a post:

Apple high price point was seen as a major disappoint among the growing apple fan following and the apple-pro user base. The best of the business and multi-media enabled phones cost 20-25k. India has a very good market for 20k-25k range. Apple should have at least priced the lower end model to 29,000....I am expecting a price dip soon – very soon! (Jain, 2008).

Further, while current affairs remained a popular topic at 83%, not many executive bloggers wrote on political issues, which measured just 46%. In the current affairs category, bloggers wrote several posts during the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks. For instance, Vishal Gondal, founder/CEO of India Games, expressed his shock in the following words:

The big industrialists and powerful people always use to think that terror is something which cannot touch them....The recent attacks have completely changed the perception. Any one of the high profile people could have been there (Gondal, 2008).

Another popular topic included online social media and networking (74%). The bloggers offered tips on how firms and individuals can use online social media to network better and create online communities. In fact, two of the bloggers, Gaurav Mishra and Kiruba Shankar, make a living running social media consultancies.

Personal stories also ranked high as a topic at 71%. However, bloggers at private firms blogged more about their personal lives than those at publicly traded companies: While 83% of blogs written by executives at private firms included personal stories, only 45% of blogs written by executives at publicly traded companies carried the same.

Some of the personal posts were quite humorous. For instance, Alok Kejriwal, who is the founder CEO of a privately-held online gaming company, wrote a post titled “Why do women carry such large handbags?” Kejriwal (2009) blogs:

In the car, the phone in the handbag rings, and since the bag is almost the size of a cave, it takes forever to find the irritating ringing thingy in the tunnel – by which time the caller gives up and hangs up. Each new store we visit, she first heads to ‘womens bags’.... Why are women fascinated by big handbags? And why do they buy new ones ever so often?

Other such posts focused on bloggers’ personal struggles. For example, Anaggh Desai, CEO at the Bombay Store, blogs about his struggle with weight in a category titled “fat2fit” (Desai, 2009). Rahul Sood, the founder of luxury computer designer VoodooPC, blogs about his father’s death:

We had just finished watching half of the movie ‘Gladiator’ -- and the next day he was non functional. It was a disaster. He never got to see Voodoo explode the way it did, but I'm pretty sure he's watching over us (Sood, 2010).

The post goes on to talk about how Sood had a one-way communication with the attending surgeon and doctor. Sood (2010) asks: “Imagine if there was an instant way for doctors to share notes and collaborate on cases and let patients participate?” Many blogs were replete with such compelling personal stories.

Further, while 75% blogs written by executives at private firms carried posts on entertainment, only 36% blogs written by executives at publicly traded companies includes posts on that topic. Following a similar trend, 79% blogs written by executives at private

firms carried posts on entrepreneurship while only 45% blogs written by executives at publicly traded companies carried the same. The posts on entrepreneurship often included specific and detailed tips on how to make a start up successful.

For instance, Sahil Parikh, the founder of [DeskAway](#), which was ranked in the [top 30 hottest startups](#) in India by TataNEN in 2008, offered advice on entrepreneurship to the readers of his blog:

Know when to pass - when you say 'no' you really know what you are working towards. When we were a design agency, at one point we started taking up all kinds of projects - web, development, print, logo etc. We had forgotten what we stood for and running the business was not fun (Parikh, 2010).

Sanjeev Bikchandani, CEO of Info Edge India Ltd, is also someone who gave numerous tips on the entrepreneurial spirit on his blog. Here is an example from a post titled “Selecting the Right Business Partner”:

You need to continuously work on your relationship with your partner. Continuously communicate, keep each other fully informed, spend time together, give each other candid feedback, listen a lot and give each other enough space. It’s like marriage (Bikchandani, 2010).

Although blogs are public interfaces, only five blogs carried legal disclaimers. While some disclaimers were formal and/or technical, others followed a more humorous tone. For instance, Lakshmipathy Bhat, vice president at DraftfcB, posted the following disclaimer:

This blog reflects my thoughts and opinions. It does not reflect the thoughts or opinions of my company, its parent company, my wife, my kid, my clients, my cat, MySpace, my car, or my Macbook. All rights reserved. Subject to change without notice. Don’t quote me on that. Don’t quote me on anything. Patent pending (Bhat, 2009).

Finally, only 29% of the blogs carried advertisements. Most of the blogs with advertisements included GoogleAds.

### *Interactivity of Indian executive blogs*

As Table 2 shows, most blogs were fairly interactive despite significant shortcomings. An overwhelming 86% of the blogs carried pictures. While most blogs carried a few pictures pertinent to the topic of the post, a few blogs stood out for the good quality of the pictures. One blog that had some excellent pictures was by Shalin Jain, who described himself as someone who runs a software company for a hobby and seriously pursues music and photography. Jain's blog stands testimony to his skills in child portrait photography.

Another blog that stood out for excellent photography was by Shantanu Ghosh, Vice President of India Product Operations at Symantec. Ghosh, who describes himself on his blog as a "traveller, foodie and gearhead," posted pictures that tell the story of his gastronomical journeys across the world (Ghosh, n.d.).

Seventy-one percent of the blogs also carried videos. The videos primarily comprised YouTube clips on current affairs, humor, advertisements and important speeches. Some blogs also contained personal video clips.

Another feature that made the blogs lively was the conversational tone used by the bloggers. All except two blogs followed a conversational tone. The bloggers used reader-friendly language coupled with a subtle sense of humor. For example, Kris Nair, who is the executive director of Opdrage Venture Partners, a privately-held firm that helps entrepreneurs build businesses, introduces himself in his blog with the following words:

I have had my fingers in everything. It is my tendency to jump around from hobby to hobby, from task to task, with little or no warning, and with much undue haste. This has always been a problem for me (Nair, n.d.).

Another blogger, Lakshmiopathy Bhat, vice president at Draftfcb, a communications agency, introduces himself in the following way:

I started life as a child. And then I grew up to be an adult.... Love (includes but not limited to): all things Apple, authentic Udipi food, gadgets, old magazines, new magazines, Carl Hiassen, kadi jokes, Cricket, old Hindi film songs, Dire Straits-type music, Airplane! the movie, the song Barracuda, reading Fake Steve Jobs, Asterix, MAD magazine, the design of the New York Times website and paper, great design, 24, CSI Vegas, Empire Magazine, to get back issues of imprint, Movie and Illustrated Weekly (Bhat, 2008).

While all blogs allowed external comments, only 9% permitted anonymous comments. Allowing anonymous comments would make it easier for users to post critical comments on the blog, which could ensure more candid interaction between users and bloggers. Meanwhile, only 63% blogs permitted subscription to comments on posts although all blogs facilitated subscription to posts.

Further, a significant majority of bloggers (86%) provided some form of contact information on the blog. The most common method of contact provided was the email address of the blogger. Several bloggers also offered information about other modes of online networking on their blog such as their Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn accounts. Twitter was popular among the bloggers even as sixty-three percent of them provided links to their Twitter accounts on their blog.

Finally, only 17% of the blogs carried surveys although they can serve as great interactive tools. While several bloggers cited findings of surveys conducted by other organizations, they did not post any surveys of their own. Some bloggers provided links to surveys that were being conducted by their friends and acquaintances.

### ***Usability of Indian executive blogs***

Usability of a blog refers to how well users can navigate and use its content. One of the most important features that enhance the usability of a blog is an internal search engine. In this study, as Table 3 shows, an overwhelming majority of blogs (89%) did have an internal search engine. Eighty-six percent of blogs also had archives. Both these features make it easier for users to get information on specific topics.



However, only 60% blogs had content organized under clear labels and categories. When content is not organized clearly under labels, it becomes extremely difficult for users to find something specific, especially when the blogs have posts that are several years old. Further compounding the problem was the fact that only 40% blogs had their “most recent posts” explicitly marked.

Finally, only one-third of the blogs used the trackback feature. Trackbacks notify users when someone refers to their posts thus facilitating communication between users. As few blogs in this sample use the trackback feature, they are grossly underutilizing a possible channel of communication.

### *Connectivity of Indian executive blogs*

The blogs in this sample are poorly connected with the blogosphere. As Table 4 shows, blogrolls of only about one-third of the blogs link them to same-industry blogs. Worse still, blogrolls of only 11% of the blogs connect them to same-industry websites. There is little exchange across industries too. Thus, blogrolls of only one-fifth of the blogs are linked to other-industry blogs while a mere 3% of the blogs are linked to other-industry websites.

Furthermore, the blogrolls of only four people in this group of Indian CEOs and top executives carried links to another blogger in this sample. Thus, even this niche group of Indian executive blogs is barely inter-connected. As these blogs rank low in terms of connectivity, they stand isolated in the blogosphere.

One of the possible reasons for such poor connectivity of Indian executive blogs could be that blogging has not really made strong inroads in executive circles: There are so few CEOs that blog. Secondly, it's possible that the few Indian executives who blog are not really keen on increasing traffic to their blogs or improving their search engine placement. Only future studies that delve into the motives of executive blogging can determine the actual reasons for poor connectivity of Indian executive blogs.

### ***Inter-variable analysis***

To conduct an inter-variable analysis, each parameter comprising the interactivity, usability and connectivity variables was given a value of 1. Blogs in this sample scored quite high in the interactivity category and did reasonably well in the usability category. In fact, eighty percent of the blogs in this sample scored 6 or more in the interactivity category, which comprised a total of 8 parameters. In the usability category, which comprised five parameters, the mean and median are almost the same and they fall at the centre of the range of 1 – 5 (as seen in Table 5).

However, the connectivity category presented a different picture: Nearly 50% of the blogs in this sample scored 0 in the connectivity category, which comprised six parameters. Thus, one may conclude that Indian executive blogs in this sample score rather poorly in terms of connectivity and there remains significant scope for improvement in this sphere.

Furthermore, a correlation of the three variables shows that both interactivity and usability variables are significantly & positively correlated, i.e. blogs which are more interactive are also the ones which are more usable. Connectivity, however, does not appear to be correlated with either of the other variables.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The previous section provided an account of blogging patterns among Indian CEOs and top executives. The results indicate that even as the Indian blogosphere remains dominated primarily by executives from the Information Technology and Internet sectors, those from other sectors have not really started exploiting its power.

The fact that blogging is not very popular among the top brass is reflected in the small size of the purposive sample used in this study. The researchers attempted to identify and include as many individual blogs maintained by top Indian executives in this study. This trend of few Indian executives blogging is in keeping with the worldwide trend of unpopularity of blogging among top executives. Worse still, only two of the executive bloggers in this sample are women.

Kiruba Shankar (2008), an avid blogger and CEO of a social media firm writes that when he asked people to name five Indian CEOs who blog, most could not go beyond two names. In an article titled “Corporate Blogging And Why CEOs Don’t Get It,” Shankar mentions three fears that stop CEOs from blogging: fear of saying too much; fear of backlash; and the fear of writing when pressed for time.

These fears possibly explain why only 57% of blogs in this sample included posts on happenings in the executive’s own firm. Giving too much information about the goings-on in one’s own firm might create problems with stakeholders. Instead, the more popular topics for the top executives included industry outlook, technology trends and tips, current affairs, insights on the economy, online social media, entrepreneurship, etc. Overall, such posts were in the nature of the executive’s individual opinions and expert views on specific trends, issues, products, etc.

This finding is in keeping with blogging trends both at home and abroad. The “Blogging India” report, which was based on an online survey of MSN portal visitors in 2006, showed that “having a platform for self-expression factored heavily into the motivation to blog in India with 58% starting a blog to express passionate views” (“Business Blogs,” 2006). Internationally, the 2009 Technorati survey also showed that tremendous importance is given to voicing one’s opinion on one’s blog. Thus, 71% respondents in the Technorati survey said they blog at least in part to “speak their minds” (Sussman, 2009b). Other reasons included the need to share one’s expertise and experiences, making money or doing business (Sussman, 2009b).

The COO of Sun Microsystems, Jonathan Schwartz, emphasizes the importance of being authentic in blog postings:

Find your voice. Be honest and open. Be respectful of your audience. Don’t treat blogging like advertising – it’s not. Use humor. Link to those who interest you and influence you....the rule of thumb is simple: Know the guidelines, then let loose (Schwartz, 2005, p.1).

While letting loose can be tricky for top executives who are under constant pressure to ensure that their posts do not jeopardize the image of their company, only five blogs in this sample carried a corporate disclaimer. Terilli and Arnorsdottir (2008) conducted a study of CEO blogs and also found that a majority of the CEO blogs they examined did not deny corporate liability: They did not carry a terms and conditions policy, which explicitly states that the views expressed on the blog belong to them and not the organization (Terilli & Arnorsdottir, 2008). However, it must be pointed out that while most blogs in this sample did not carry a corporate disclaimer, 66% blogs did not have the blogger's organization prominently displayed on the blog.

Results also indicate that executives who work at privately-held companies blog more about their personal lives than those at public companies. Executives at private firms also blog more on topics such as entrepreneurship, marketing and advertising, and entertainment than executives at public companies. Kiruba Shankar (2008) points out how tricky it can be for the CEO of a publicly listed company to blog as “market analysts, hard-nosed journalists and shareholders are constantly peering in closely for signs.”

On the other hand, Shankar adds that it is small and medium companies which can gain a lot from corporate blogging: “These are companies that cannot afford the luxury of hiring a PR agency or taking up half page ads in leading newspapers as part of their brand building exercise. For them, blogs are an effective medium to reach out. It gets the word out, it builds credibility and connects with the community” (Shankar, 2008).

Moreover, blogs provide a space where executives can showcase multiple aspects of their personalities. Many bloggers in this sample thus shared personal stories in their posts. All except two bloggers used a conversational tone in their posts. Many also used a subtle sense of humor that made their posts interesting. Kelleher and Miller (2006) emphasize the importance of making blogs conversational, whether it is written by executives or maintained by the organization: “Blogs are a good place to speak candidly with a conversational style (e.g., ‘invite people to a conversation’), and this conversational style may be an important part of the process of building and maintaining computer-mediated relationships” (p. 410).

Apart from the conversational tone, the use of pictures and videos also helped make the blogs in this sample quite interactive. A significant majority of bloggers also provided some form of contact information on their blogs including their email addresses and/or links to their Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter accounts. Twitter was very popular among the bloggers in this sample. Raghav (2009) remarks that bloggers are often active on Twitter and even use it to spread information about their blogs.

Robert Scoble, who co-authored the book *Naked Conversations: How Blogs are Changing the way Businesses Talk with Customers* stresses the role of interactive tools to ensure success in blogging: “Use images. Go above and beyond, and be more thorough, more in-depth in your topic coverage. Use video instead of just text. Be a better networker” (Banks, 2007, p. 108).

While networking is critical to the success of blogging, results of this study show that most Indian executive blogs in this sample suffer from poor connectivity. Specifically, half the blogs in this sample scored 0 in the connectivity category. First and foremost, these executives need to improve connectivity by providing links to other bloggers in their blogroll. It is only when blogs are linked to one another that online communities can be created.

Mary Jo Foley, a technical journalist and full-time Microsoft watcher, points out that unless a blogger links to other blogs, his or her own blog will turn in to a “walled garden” (Banks, 2007, p. 52). Mike Masnick, who started blogging in 1998 and owns one of the oldest business blogs “Techdirt” also emphasizes the importance of linking to other blogs: “Pay attention to other bloggers. Link to them. Comment on their sites. Assuming you’re writing about a subject that other people are interested in, and you communicate well enough, people will find you” (Banks, 2007, p.89).

However, it must be pointed out that while most blogs in this sample had poor or no blogrolls, a few bloggers such as Gaurav Mishra, whose blog received the Indibloggies Best Business Blog award in 2008, provided links to other bloggers in the posts itself. Thus, specific posts in Mishra’s blog were well-linked to other blogs so that an information chain

was created. Well-linked blogs also get better traffic. Kristin Darguzas, who runs the blog ParentDish that gets more than two million views per month, emphasizes that highlighting other bloggers is “a great way to bring people in. If you highlight a popular blogger with a post, they’ll usually reciprocate and link to you, and it becomes all viral” (Banks, 2007, p. 174).

Apart from improving connectivity, Indian executive blogs can become more usable if the content is organized under labels and categories and the “most recent posts” explicitly marked. Using the trackback feature will also help executives link to relevant posts. Further, executive bloggers can make their sites more interactive by posting surveys and allowing subscription to the comments on their posts.

Few bloggers in this sample permitted anonymous comments on their blogs. Foley points out that many who comment on blogs opt to be anonymous: “I think many people are afraid of posting with their real names. They either work for a company that doesn’t approve of them posting or weighing in, or they want to pretend to be impartial when they aren’t. Some also just want license to say things anonymously that they’d never dare say in person or via e-mail” (Banks, 2007, p. 51). Allowing anonymous comments would possibly get more people to engage with the posts.

This study focused on individual blogs maintained by top Indian executives. As more executives take to blogging, more definite patterns will emerge and generalizations may be drawn. Researchers need to delve into the motives of blogging among top executives. As blogging is a relatively new phenomenon, it is critical to explore the impact of executive blogging on various stakeholders. Individual blogs apart, future research needs to analyze blogs maintained by groups of top executives and corporate blogs. How different are they from individual blogs? Are there intercultural differences among blogs maintained by people from different countries? The monetization of the blogosphere through advertisements and campaigns also needs to be explored.

To conclude, this study showed that among the top Indian executives who blog, most are associated with the Information Technology and Internet sectors. An analysis of the blogs showed that popular blogging topics included industry outlook, technology trends and tips,

current affairs and insights on the economy. Posts were often in the nature of the executive's individual opinions and expert views on specific trends, issues and products. The executive bloggers also provided actionable tips to users on various topics. While the blogs scored quite high in the interactivity category and did reasonably well in the usability category, most suffered from poor connectivity in terms of links to other blogs and websites in their blogrolls. Indian executive bloggers need to break out of their isolation and get better exposure by linking extensively to other blogs of interest. Finally, to end with the words of Gina Trapani, the founding editor of technology blog Lifehacker.com: "A successful blog is like a hungry pet that needs to be walked, fed, washed, cleaned up after, and loved regularly" (p. 31).

Table 1: Content

| Topic                                   | %  |
|---|----|
| Industry Outlook                        | 94 |
| Technology Trends & Tips                | 83 |
| Current Affairs – Others                | 83 |
| Marketing & Advertising                 | 80 |
| Insights on the Economy                 | 77 |
| Online Social Media / Networking        | 74 |
| Personal Stories                        | 71 |
| Entrepreneurship                        | 69 |
| Entertainment (Movies, Music & Gaming)  | 63 |
| Travel & Food                           | 60 |
| Information about goings-on at own firm | 57 |
| Civil Society Engagement                | 57 |
| Humor                                   | 49 |
| Current Affairs – Politics              | 46 |
| Human Resources Management Tips         | 43 |
| Education                               | 43 |
| Sports                                  | 43 |
| Literary Expressions                    | 23 |

Table 2: Interactivity

| Features                                   | %   |
|--|-----|
| Blog allows external comments              | 100 |
| Blog allows subscribing to posts           | 100 |
| Blog tone is conversational                | 94  |
| Blog provides author's contact information | 86  |
| Blog displays photographs                  | 86  |
| Blog contains videos                       | 71  |
| Blog allows subscribing to comments        | 63  |
| Blog contains surveys                      | 17  |
| Blog allows anonymous comments             | 9   |

Table 3: Usability

| Blog has                              | %  |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| An internal search engine             | 89 |
| Archives shown chronologically        | 86 |
| Clear labels and categories           | 60 |
| "Most Recent Posts" explicitly marked | 40 |
| Trackback feature                     | 34 |

Table 4: Connectivity

| Links                             | %  |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| Blogrolls to other types of blogs | 40 |
| Blogrolls to same-industry blogs  | 37 |
| Links to other types of websites  | 26 |
| Blogrolls to other-industry blogs | 20 |
| Links to same-industry websites   | 11 |
| Links to other-industry websites  | 3  |

Table 5: Inter-variable Analysis

| Variable      | Minimum Observed | Maximum Observed | Maximum Possible | Mean | Median | Standard Deviation |
|---------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------|--------|--------------------|
| Interactivity | 3                | 8                | 9                | 6.26 | 6.00   | 1.039              |
| Usability     | 1                | 5                | 5                | 3.09 | 3.00   | 1.067              |
| Connectivity  | 0                | 5                | 6                | 1.37 | 1.00   | 1.592              |



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