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A cross cultural study of corporate blogs in the U.S. and in Korea

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Abstract: Corporate blogging is now world wide due to the potential benefits of blogging. The purpose of this study is to investigate corporate blogging in the U.S. and Korea. The framework to compare corporate blogging in two countries is corporate blogging strategies developed by Lee et al. (2006). Comparing corporate blogging strategies in the U.S., top-down corporate blogging strategy IV (promotion) is mostly adopted in Korea, and most companies use their blogs at the third party site. Promotion blogs have gained popularity and high readership in Korea unlike U.S.

Keywords: corporate blogging, promotion blogs, cross-cultural study

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1. Introduction

As the world becomes more wired and interconnected, the Internet has become an essential tool in today's business environment. Most employees gain higher efficiency and communicate more effectively by utilising the prevailing technology. For organizations, the Internet enables them to maintain market competitiveness creating a sense of empowerment among employees as well as increasing their productivity.

Along with the unprecedented influences of the Internet, blog has been rapidly changing existing patterns of communication between people, business marketing in organizations, and even Public Relations (PR) by politicians. Blogs have been named as the number one trend in top ten tech trends for 2005 (Fortune, 2005) and is considered as 'the most explosive outbreak in the information world since the internet itself' (Business Week, 2005). The total number of blogs is estimated at two hundred million until February, 2006 (Blogherald.com, 2005). Among the blogs, corporate blogs were estimated to reach five thousand (Sifry 2004). Such a popularity of blogs may have its roots in the unique characteristics of blogs itself such as rapid and wide dispersion (using RSS and Trackback), kind of personal diary, interactivity, etc (see special issues of blog in CACM 2005). With this booming trend, companies have seen the benefits of blogging (About, 2004) and started their own blogs. There is a paucity of research on corporate blogs in the academic area so far (Lee et al., 2006).

Blogs emerged first in the U.S. (Jensen, 2003) as the Internet did (Internet Society, 2003). While most blogs in the U.S. have evolved into the shape of journalism and personal diaries, blogs in Korea have evolved around portal sites into a form of hybrid blogs, which is similar to existing websites, but equipped with unique functions of blogging. Previous studies showed that the Internet was adopted differently by

organizations and by countries, depending on their purposes (Wallsten, 2005; Morahan-Martin, 2004; Ferle et al., 2002). Like the Internet, blogs are now being used diversely, depending on organizations (Lee et al., 2006). However, there is no study to examine corporate blogging by countries. Considering popularity and usage of blogs in two countries, the United States and Korea, it will be of value to the differences of adoption and usage of blogs and blogging in organizations between two countries. Through this study, we seek to provide deeper understandings of the adoption and usage of corporate blogs between U.S. and Korea, based on corporate blogging strategies (Lee et al. 2006) and cultural factors.

To conduct this study, first we will review blogging in the U.S. and in Korea to understand how blogging has evolved in the U.S. and in Korea respectively. Second, we will investigate corporate blogging in the U.S. and in Korea with five types of corporate blogging strategies. Third, we will address how companies in the U.S. and in Korea adopt corporate blogging strategies differently. Finally, we will discuss the differences, especially promotional blogging in multinational corporate cases in terms of cultural factors.

2. Blogging in the U.S and Korea

Blogging in the U.S.: Since the term ‘weblog’ was first coined by John Barger, American blogger, in 1997, blogging has spread rapidly ‘during 1999 and the years following’ (Wikipedia, 2006). Since 2001, some popular bloggers have emerged with up to a million visits a day and politicians have expressed their opinions on blogging. After the second Iraqi war, many bloggers paid attention to politicians’ comments or opinions and showed the power of bloggers as opinion makers in politics. Therefore,

blogs in the U.S play a role as media in breaking, making, and shaping news stories and bloggers use blogs to share their opinions through commenting about posts (Wikipedia, 2006).

Blogging in Korea: Blogs in Korea started in 2001, but the substantial diffusion of blogging was in the beginning of 2003 (Inews24, 2005). Unlike the U.S., portal sites have introduced blogging and provided blogging services to the public. Even an online community site, Cyworld developed a new hybrid blog, 'Cy' whose name is an abbreviation of Cyworld. Although this hybrid blog does not provide the same features of original blogs such as RSS or Trackback, but has functions of original blogs in posting bloggers' writings, pictures, commenting opinions and linking with others' blogs. Thus, Cy is acknowledged as a blog (Nam, 2005; SERI, 2005; Shin, 2003). In Korea, Cyworld blogging achieved a huge success with enormous blog members. The total member of cyworld reaches 18 million, which is 37% of the total Korean population and 75% of the total Internet users (Maeil Business, 2006). Therefore, it is not too much to say that Cy-blog represents blogging in Korea. Because Cyworld is an online community site, Cy-blog tends to play a role of not opinionated media but social networking (SERI, 2005).

3. Research model

To compare corporate blogging in the U.S. and Korea, we adopt Lee et al. (2006)'s research framework consisting of five corporate blogging strategies. They (2006) categorized five corporate blogging strategies according to the characteristics of

corporate blogs. As seen in table 1, corporate blogging strategies can be divided largely into two parts: bottom-up strategy and top-down strategy.

Bottom-up strategy

Bottom-up strategy allows every company member to use various types of corporate blogs inside company-owned domains. Therefore, employees can present their opinions or ideas according to not, directions or messages from top management but, their autonomies. Companies support employee blogging and exercise minimum control with blog aggregator sites where all corporate blogs are linked.

Top-down strategy

In top-down strategy, high-ranking executives, few select individual employees or a select group of employees are allowed or assigned for corporate blogging. Therefore, these types of blogs are relatively under high control of companies, and information or messages provided to the public are filtered from the management perspective. The top-down strategy is further subdivided into four strategies: top-down I (top management commitment), top-down II (individual), top-down III (group), and top-down IV (promotion). The characteristics of the four top-down strategies are summarised in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 Here

4. Methodology

Corporate blogs in the U.S was analysed by the five corporate blogging strategies of Lee et al. (2006). They investigated corporate blogs of companies ranked in the 2005

Fortune 500 which represent the leading companies in using information technology (Robbins and Stylianou, 2003; Young and Benamati, 2000; Liu et al., 1997). The 18 companies studied, among 500 companies, were using corporate blogs at their study point of time. 5 more companies were later found to be using corporate blogs after their study. Therefore, in this study, 23 companies are used for corporate blogging in the U.S. (NewPRWiki, 2005).

In Korea, the information of companies adopting corporate blogging information has not been reported yet by any article or research center. Therefore, we selected the 2005 'Korea 100 companies' as the data source of this study. 'Korea 100 companies' are considered as the leading companies ranked by Hankyung Business and Korea Information Service every year with public trust (SERI, 2005) like Fortune in the U.S. To figure out companies using corporate blogs, in the Korea 100 companies, we searched corporate blogging with each company's name of the Korea 100 companies and 'blog' as keywords in five search sites such as Google, Yahoo Korea, Empas, Naver, and Daum and a representative blog site, Cyworld. After searching for three months, we found 14 companies using corporate blogs among the Korea 100 companies and 3 U.S. companies operating in Korea such as Hewlett Packard Korea, Motorola Korea, and Nike Korea. In the next section, a total of 23 companies in the U.S. and a total of 17 companies in Korea were used to compare corporate blogging in the U.S. and Korea.

5. Descriptive analysis

5.1 Corporate blogging strategies in the U.S.

Corporate blogging in the U.S. is various, although most companies use top-down blogging strategy as seen in Table 2. There are 2 companies in bottom-up strategy, 6

companies in top-down I (top management commitment) strategy, 2 companies in top-down II (individual) strategy, 6 companies in top-down III (group) strategy, and 7 companies in top-down IV (promotion) strategy.

Microsoft and SUN Microsystems are using bottom-up corporate blogging strategy. This strategy encourages employee blogging company-wide with the least control. The reason why Microsoft and SUN Microsystems are adopting bottom-up blogging strategy may be due to the two companies' corporate nature, high technology software development. In developing advanced technology products and supporting customer service continuously, employee's ongoing efforts are required. From this point of view, employee blogging is the best to draw spontaneous participation of employees. Further more, organizational culture may have an effect on adopting bottom-up corporate blogging strategy. According to two Microsoft bloggers, 'Microsoft culture has always had as one of its strengths that it gives enormous freedom to its employees' (Omar S., 2004). Many employees at SUN Microsystems took free corporate culture as a merit for their employees on SUN Microsystems at workplace surveys (Vault, 2006).

Insert Table 2 Here

Executives of GM, Boeing, Time Warner, Sprint, McDonald's and Oracle launched their blogs where top management discussed companies' visions, industry trends, or sometimes their personal stories (Lee et al., 2006; DB Research, 2005). In top-down I corporate blogging strategy, executives or CEOs can attract more bloggers and media interests than other types of blogs, because of being well known, which leads to more bloggers's hits (DB Research, 2005; Gaines-Ross, 2000). Moreover, top-down I corporate blogging strategy may effectively be used for improving corporate identity or

image through sharing executives' thought leaderships and communicating with various stakeholders (Bindslev, 2006).

IBM and HP also adopting top-down II corporate blogging strategy. Key bloggers are select individuals or sometimes executives without top management commitment. In top-down II corporate blogging strategy, most blogs have relative low readership, which might be due to resistance of customers or employees against official information delivered by high-ranking individuals. In Dell, Cisco, EDS, Xerox, Texas Instruments, and Amazon, corporate blogging is maintained by a select group of engineers, developers or team members. In top-down III corporate blogging strategy, corporate blogs provide a certain product's information and service dealing with special topics. Therefore, these corporate blogs can attract people interests in special niches.

Top-down IV corporate blogging strategy is adopted by companies promoting their products in bloggoshpere. Ford, Procter & Gamble, Motorola, Viacom International, Honeywell International, Nike and Maytag are using this strategy. Most blogs in this strategy do not seem to use an authentic human voice and even translate simple traditional marketing speak. Therefore, in the U.S., promotional corporate blogs do not attract bloggers' or customers' interests and have lower readership than other types of blogs (Lee et al., 2006).

5.2 Corporate blogging strategies in Korea

Corporate blogging in Korea is mainly for promotion as in seen Table 3. There are no companies adopting bottom-up and top-down I corporate blogging strategy. Only two companies are using top-down II corporate blogging strategy and top-down III corporate blogging strategy respectively. The others are top-down IV corporate blogging strategy

for promotion. Hyundai Department in top-down II corporate blogging strategy has a human resource development blog maintained by one author. However, this blog presents education pictures rather than thought leadership. In top-down III corporate blogging, POSCO has a blog of webzine, the abbreviation of ‘web magazine’, operating by a webzine team. This blog focuses on matters of common interests related to POSCO’s people.

Insert Table 3 Here

Most companies in Korea adopting corporate blogs use top-down IV corporate blogging strategy. As seen in Table 3, all but one company use Cy-blogs of a third party site, Cyworld which has the colossal number of bloggers. For example, the number of visitors per day of Motorola reaches on average about 4000. If the number of visitors logging on to their blogs can partly tell the success of the promotion, the promotion in the blog is definitely successful. Therefore, All of Table 3 and many other companies use Cy-blog to take advantage of extremely low cost and gaining many customers at the same time.

6. Discussion

The proper adopting of information technologies can bring significant impacts to companies leading their successes or failures (Lainhart, 2000). Several factors affecting the utilizations of information technologies should be considered before adopting them. These factors may be organizational or national culture, industry’s characteristics and IT infrastructures (Johns, 2003). Factors can be applied to explain different corporate blogging in the U.S. and Korea.

Organizational or national culture influences how corporate blogging strategies are adopted. For example, Microsoft and SUN Microsystems's organizational culture represented as maximum employees freedom at work encourages employee blogging. Also, employee blogging can be explained by the U.S.'s culture which is very individual, while Korea's is relatively collective (Calhoun et al., 2002).

Hofstede (1980) studied four dimensions explaining the differences among national cultures. Among those dimensions, power distance and uncertainty avoidance are also applied to selections of corporate blogging strategies. If organizations or nations with large power distance, the structures of organizations or nations is hierarchical. Uncertainty avoidance is the degree of uncomfortable feeling with uncertainty and ambiguity. If the degree of uncertainty avoidance is strong, organizations or nations dislike use of certain technology and are more likely to rely on rules, regulations or experts. Korea or Korean organizations have larger power-distance and stronger uncertainty avoidance than the U.S. (Calhoun et al., 2002). Therefore, companies in Korea may adopt top-down corporate blogging strategy rather than bottom-up corporate blogging. Also, they use mainly promotion blogs at the third party sites to avoid any risk of corporate blogging. However, Korea is one of the leading countries in information technology in the world and the infrastructures of information technology are very high (OECD, 2003). Thus, promotion blogs in Korea operate more with high technology features than those in the U.S.

Insert Table 4 Here

6.1 Promotion blog

The distinct difference between corporate blogging in the U.S. and Korea is preponderant adoption of top-down IV corporate blogging strategy, as seen in Table 4 and a new form of promotion blog, Cy-blog, in Korea. Through a content analysis, several characteristics of promotion blogs in Cyworld were identified.

- Various multimedia functions (music, flash, video)
- Emotional promotion (emotional icons, avatar, graphics letters,)
- Customer Participation (various events)

Most companies in Cyworld are using multifarious functions such as music, flash, voice and video of which some are not used in U.S.'s promotion blogs. According to a study (Palmer, 2002), high-quality information by various media functions enhance customer response. Thus, promotion blogs in Korea may provide better product information and more customers' interests than promotion blogs in the U.S. In addition to this, companies in Cy-blog adapt the concept of 'social presence' which represents the degree to which the communication channel leads users to feel emotionally close or present (Fulk and Boyd, 1991). In Cy-blog, companies apply emotional promotion with emoticon, a combination word of emotion and icon or avatar, a small animated character representing personality of user which is a sort of a virtual reality. This approach makes companies and customers emotionally close in blogs, causing interactivity among them. Finally, promotion blogs in Korea hold diverse events in which customers take part. These participations may increase product or brand awareness. In conclusion, companies in Korea take the best advantage of blogging benefits in their promotion blogs.

6.2 Limitations

Because of the short history of corporate blogging, we could not find many companies adopting corporate blogs both in the U.S. and Korea. Thus, the result of this study could be enough to explain the differences of corporate blogging between the U.S. and Korea. Also, the original framework of corporate blogging strategy developed in the U.S. context did not reflect the characteristics of corporate blogging in Korea. For example, low readership in top-down II and top-down IV corporate blogging strategy were modified in this study. Therefore, new research models should be required for more comprehensive cross-cultural study.

7. Conclusion

This paper investigated corporate blogging in the U.S and Korea. According to the corporate blogging strategies framework (Lee et al., 2006), corporate blogging in the Fortune 500 companies in the U.S and 100 companies in the Korean was compared. The usage of blogs in the U.S. and Korea were started differently by social and cultural factors, which affected corporate blogging in two countries. Therefore, corporate blogging in the U.S. and Korea have adopted differently in terms of corporate blogging strategies and blog types. In the U.S., five corporate blogging strategies are being used diversely, while in Korea, one type of corporate blogging strategy, top-down IV which is for promotion are dominant.

Promotion blogs in Korea is very popular in an online community site, Cyworld, because of huge bloggers. Cy-blog in Cyworld is a hybrid blog type and provides various features to companies. Companies attract customer efficiently with several merits such as extreme low cost and unique contents. Even multinational companies,

Motorola and Nike, operating their business in Korea use Cy-blogs for promoting their product to adapt themselves to Korean social and cultural environments. Therefore, this study shows the different usage of corporate blogging in a cross-cultural context and awakens the importance of the cultural factors in adopting information technology.

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Table 1 Corporate blogging strategies

Blogging Strategies	Characteristics
Bottom-up (Company-wide)	Employee blogging Maximum employees' autonomy in blogging (companies have just aggregator sites linking employees' blogs) Several types of blogs available Various purpose (Product development, customer service, communication with customers, thought leadership, etc)
Top-down I (Top management commitment)	Executive or CEO blogging Control by top management commitment Several types of blogs available Purpose for thought leadership or communication with stakeholders
Top-down II (Individuals)	High-ranking or select individual blogging Control by a company Several types of blogs available Purpose for thought leadership
Top-down III (Group)	group blogging Control by a company One type of blog Purpose for collaboration or knowledge sharing
Top-down IV (Promotion)	Promotion blog Maximum control by a company One type of blog Purpose for marketing products or strengthening brands

Table 2 Corporate Blogging Strategies in the U.S.

Bloggng strategies	Companies	Rank	Examples
Bottom-up (Company-wide)	Microsoft	41	The Scobleizer – Robert Scoble, Technical Evangelist (scoble.weblogs.com) Heather's "Marketing and Finance at Microsoft" Blog - Heather Hamilton, Senior Marketing Recruiter(blogs.msdn.com/heatherleigh) Microsoft Community Blogs Portal (www.microsoft.com/communities/blogs) Channel 9 (channel9.msdn.com)
	SUN Microsystems	194	Planet Sun (blog.sun.com) Java.net Weblogs (weblogs.java.net) Jonathan's Blog - Jonathan Schwartz, President and Chief Operating Officer (blogs.sun.com/jonathan) JavaOne Conference Weblogs (java.sun.com/javaone/blogs)
Top-down I (Top management commitment)	General Motors	3	GM FastLane Blog - Bob Lutz, Vice Chairman and Chief Operating Officer (fastlane.gmblogs.com) GM Smallblock Engine Blog (smallblock.gmblogs.com)
	Boeing	25	Randy's Journal - Randy Beseler, Vice President of Marketing (www.boeing.com/randy) 777-200LR Flight Test Journal (www.boeing.com/commercial/777family/200LR/flight_test)
	Time Warner	32	James Calacanis's blog, CEO of Weblogs Inc. (www.calacanis.com)
	Sprint	67	Things That make You Go Wireless – Vicki Warker, Vice President Product Management & Marketing (www.businessblog.sprint.com)
	McDonald's	116	Ra'ah-Steve Wilson, Senior Director of Global Web Communications (www.Swaynewilson.com/wordpress)
	Oracle	220	Oracle Executive Blogs (www.oracle.com/corporate/executive/nlog/index.html)

(continued)

Table 2 Corporate Blogging Strategies in the U.S. *(continued)*

Blogging strategies	Companies	Rank	Examples
Top-down II (Individual)	IBM	10	Intertwingly – Sam Ruby, Senior Technical Staff Member (www.intertwingly.net/blog) DeveloperWorks Bloggers (www-106.ibm.com/developerworks/blogs) GameTomorrow (www.gametomorrow.com/blog) Mainframe (www.mainframe.typepad.com) Rational Software Development Conference (www-128.ibm.com/developerworks/blogs/rsdc2005)
	Hewlett-Packard	11	HP Technical Blogs (www.devresource.hp.com/blogs/index.jsp#tech) HP Executive Blogs (www.devresource.hp.com/blogs/index.jsp#exec)
Top-down III (Group)	Dell	28	Dell Linux Blog (www.linux.dell.com/blog)
	Cisco	91	High Tech Policy Blog (www.cisco.com/gov/blog)
	EDS	95	EDS' Next Big Thing Blog (www.eds.com/sites/cs/blogs/eds_next_big_thing_blog)
	Xerox	132	Playon (http://blogs.parc.com/playon)
	Texas Instruments	166	TI Video 360 blog (http://blogs.ti.com)
	Amazon	303	Amazon Web Services (www.aws.typepad.com)

(continued)

Table 2 Corporate Blogging Strategies in the U.S. (continued)

Bloggng strategies	Companies	Rank	Examples
Top-down IV (Promotion)	Ford	4	2005 Mustang Weblog (http://blog.ford.com/BLOG.CFM)
	Procter & Gamble	26	Sparkle Body Spray (www.sparklebodyspray.com)
	Motorola	49	Team Moto (http://burton.motorola.com/en/team_moto/kazuhiro/blog)
	Viacom International	69	The Real Word/Road Rules Blog (www.rwrrblog.com)
	Honeywell International	75	Honeywell Blog (www.honeywellblogs.com)
	Nike	173	Art of Speed (www.gawker.com/artofspeed)
	Maytag	410	Sky Box (www.ka-thunk.com)

Table 3 Corporate Blogging Strategies in Korea.

Blogging strategies	Company	Rank	Examples
Bottom-up (Company-wide)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Top-down I (Top management commitment)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Top-down II (Individual)	Hyundai Department	85	HRD Blog (http://blog1.hmall.com)
Top-down III (Group)	POSCO	3	POSCO Webzine Blog (http://news.posco.co.kr/news/docs/kr/talk)
Top-down IV (Promotion)	Samsung Electronics	1	Laptop Blog (www.cyworld.com/sensacademy)
	LG Electronics	5	Wedding Products Blog (www.cyworld.com/lgwedding)
	SK Telecom	7	Ting Blog (www.cyworld.com/tingcy)
	KT	8	Call Bonus Blog (www.cyworld.com/KTcallbonus)
	Korea Exchange Bank	16	KEB Blog (www.cyworld.com/keb)
	Shinsegae	19	Shinsegae Blog (www.cyworld.com/sinsegae)
	KTF	24	KTF Blog (www.cyworld.com/hagt2005)
	CJ	39	Hetbanh Blog (www.cyworld.com/hetbahnevent)

(continued)

Table 3 Corporate Blogging Strategies in Korea (*continued*)

Blogging strategies	Company	Rank	Examples
Top-down IV (Promotion)	Amore Pacific	56	Sulloccha Blog (www.cyworld.com/sulloccha)
	Lotte Chilsung	65	Lottechilsung Blog (http://www.lottechilsung.co.kr/event/200410_greentea/event1)
	Hite	70	Stout Blog (www.cyworld.com/stout)
	LG Telecom	86	Cyon Blog (www.cyworld.com/cyonidea)
	Hewlett-Packard Korea	N/A	HP Photo Korea Blog (www.cyworld.com/cyonidea)
	Motorola Korea	N/A	Motorola Korea Cyon Blog (www.cyworld.com/motorola_kr)
	Nike Korea	N/A	Nike Korea Blog (www.cyworld.com/nikelove)

Table 4. Corporate blogging strategies in the U.S. and Korea

Blogging strategies	Companies in the U.S.	Companies in Korea
Bottom-up (Company-wide)	Microsoft SUN Microsystems	
Top-down I (Top management commitment)	General Motors Boeing Time Warner Inc Sprint McDonald's Oracle	
Top-down II (Individual)	IBM Hewlett-Packard	Hyundai Department
Top-down III (Group)	Dell Cisco EDS Xerox Corporation Texas Instruments Texas Amazon	POSCO
Top-down IV (Promotion)	Ford Procter & Gamble Motorola Viacom International Honeywell International Nike Maytag	Samsung Electronics LG Electronics SK Telecom KT Korea Exchange Bank Shinsegae KTF CJ Amore Pacific Lotte Chilsung Hite HyunDai Department LG Telecom Hewlett-Packard Korea Motorola Korea Nike Korea