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The A-List vs. the Long Tail: Technology Bloggers and Reputation

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates reputation as it pertains to independent bloggers. We propose that the existing corporate reputation literature does not apply to independent bloggers because independent bloggers may or may not be blogging for money, are “I” centric as opposed to customer centric, and have no ideal standards to be judged against. We apply Chris Anderson’s (2006) long tail theory to independent blogging and propose the nature of independent blogging is different depending on whether the blogger is in the head or in the tail of the hit distribution curve. Consequently, the reputational characteristics of a blogger may vary depending on the context and depending on where along this curve the blogger falls. Although Anderson uses the long tail theory to explain an economic phenomenon, it is a useful lens to explain behavioral differences among independent bloggers. Furthermore, this conceptual paper theorizes that the salience of specific types of identity, the level of social capital, the importance of subjective norms, and attitudes toward the status quo will all vary throughout the hit distribution curve of the long tail and all of these factors will have an impact on a blogger’s reputation in a given context. We illustrate this theory with examples from the independent technology blogging community.

KEYWORDS

Reputation, long tail, blog, weblog, over-choice, social capital, theory of planned action

1. INTRODUCTION

Is the term “reputable blogger” an oxymoron? This question is interesting because blogging is becoming (or is already) a main stream communicative activity. As the audience for and the competition between bloggers grows, reputation becomes an important phenomenon to study in this context. Blog readers need to be able to effectively navigate the blogosphere (community of all blogs on the Internet) in order to find information from reputable sources while bloggers need to position themselves in the community in order to build and maintain an audience to disseminate their ideas. Reputation is an important piece in this process.

The blogosphere is made up of (among others) corporate bloggers, main stream media (MSM) bloggers, online news bloggers, and independent bloggers, all with different agendas.¹ We use the term independent bloggers to mean bloggers who are not employed by or do not have an agenda tied to specific corporate or media firm economic interests. These blogs represent the “traditional” blog where the blogger is writing about whatever comes to mind with no external party influencing the content. Corporate and MSM bloggers, on the other hand, have distinct commercial purposes. The corporate blogger blogs, at least in part, to enhance the interests and reputation of the firm while the MSM blogger blogs to enhance the interests and reputation of his/her MSM outlet. Therefore, the

¹ Our analysis focuses on professional or knowledge bloggers and does not consider individuals who maintain personal blogs to keep in contact with friends, for example, in social networking sites like Facebook.

reputation of a commercial or MSM blogger is related to the reputation of the corporation. Both types of bloggers have a similar desire to build a solid, positive reputation in order to promote the best interests of their employers. Furthermore, these bloggers inherit, at least in part, reputations (positive or negative) from their employers.

Evaluating the reputation of an independent blogger, however, is much different. Independent bloggers may or may not be blogging to generate revenue. These bloggers may not have to follow the typical rules of business and marketing, but they still have to develop a reputation to attract readers to spread their ideas. They can, for example, place their own interests ahead of their readers, but they still have to engage in activities that will maintain an audience.

Given that reputation is important but the typical rules of business may not apply, this paper attempts to understand the reputational characteristics that do apply to independent bloggers. To answer this question, we analyze characteristics of independent bloggers in terms of Chris Anderson's (2006) long tail theory. We propose that the salience of specific types of identity, the level of social capital, the importance of subjective norms, and attitudes toward the status quo will all vary throughout the hit distribution curve of the long tail and all of these factors will have an impact on a blogger's reputation at a specific time in a given context.

Having an understanding of reputation as it pertains to the discourse activities of independent technology bloggers and the long tail theory is important for information systems research for two main reasons. First, prior literature in the information systems field has tended to focus on online reputation from an economics perspective (Dellarocas, 2006). This study extends that literature by using an economics based theory (long tail) to explain online behavior in a non-transaction oriented context. Second, one size fits all blogger reputation systems such as Technorati's online reports measure popularity-not reputation. This paper demonstrates that reputation is a much broader concept than popularity and building a reputation system that goes beyond simply counting linking activity, page rank and/or site traffic is a socio-technical problem that has yet to be solved. Before such a system can be developed the problem must be fully understood. This paper attempts to add to the literature by providing some initial insights into reputation as it pertains to independent bloggers.

The remainder of the paper is organized in four sections. First, we review the existing literature on reputation and the long tail theory. Second, we analyze the nature of independent blogging as it pertains to reputation and the long tail theory. Third, we illustrate our theory using examples from an independent technology blogging community. Finally, we conclude by discussing the implications of our theory.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Conceptualizing Reputation

Anderson and Shirako (2008) define reputation as "the set of beliefs, perceptions, and evaluations a community forms about one of its members" (pg. 320). Perceptions are the key concept in this definition as perceptions may be based on actual events, on rumors, on lack of information and/or on misunderstandings. Furthermore, it is possible that a person or a company wants to have a specific reputation in the community, but the community forms a different one. Bromley (1993) makes an important distinction between "(a) what is *in fact* generally said or believed with (b) what people *think* is generally said or believed" (Bromley, 1993, pg. 1). For example, in a business context a manager may think she has a reputation for being open and honest with her employees, but her employees may actually believe something quite different.

One aspect of reputation that is not incorporated in Anderson and Shirako's definition is the idea that reputation is not static. It can go through many cycles of creation, maintenance, damage and repair depending on numerous internal and external factors (Rhee & Valdez, 2009). As such, reputation is an evolving perception of a firm or of an individual's ability to meet its expectations in a given context at a specific moment in time (Hannington, 2004).

Additionally, reputation does not imply one community or a unanimous consensus within a given community. An individual has a reputation when multiple community members (but not necessarily all) share the same perception or belief about him/her, and the strength of that reputation grows as more people share the same perception (Anderson and Shirako, 2008). There can be many communities and subgroups where a firm or an individual may have a different reputation in each one. This is particularly true of online communities. The nature of the Internet is such that the social spheres surrounding a blogger, for instance, may be completely unknown and, theoretically, infinite (MacDougall, 2005). For example, an online community in India may have a different perception of a particular blogger than a similar online community in the United States, and the blogger may not know about either group's perceptions.

The reputation creation process starts with visibility or some form of name recognition (Hannington, 2004). Visibility is similar to fame (or notoriety if visibility is negative) in the sense that a person or entity is in the news or in the public eye. Simply being visible, however, does not mean that an individual has a reputation, but reputation does require visibility (Hannington, 2004). What an individual or firm does with visibility is a reputation building process. Furthermore, the reputation building process is an iterative cycle of creating, maintaining, damaging and repairing a given reputation (Rhee & Valdez, 2009). This process is not linear or unidirectional and it takes time to develop, maintain, and/or repair a reputation within one or more communities.

To summarize reputation is dynamic, is based on perceptions, and may be different in different communities. Reputation, however, may also be understood in terms of a community's perception of an individual's identity (Bromley, 1993). While a complete literature review of the complex concept of identity is beyond the scope of this paper, the next section provides a brief review of the relationship between reputation and identity.

2.2. Reputation and Identity

According to King and colleagues (2008), identity can be defined as an individual's self view and it can be broken into three levels. The first and broadest level of identity is social consisting of group memberships (for example, "Democrat," "Republican," "German", "American"). The second level of identity is relational consisting of interpersonal relationships. This is the sense of identity used when an individual identifies himself in terms of the company he keeps but not necessarily with his group memberships or unique personal attributes. The third level of identity is individuating (uniqueness of an individual). Individuating identity refers to individual characteristics that make a person one of a kind (for example, character traits, learned skills, special talents and so on).

We posit that the different levels of identity are important to reputation because people may be evaluated based on different levels of identity, depending on the context. An individual, for example, may develop a reputation in a particular community based on the groups he belongs to (social identity) while other individuals may develop a reputation based on relationships with other people (relational identity) or based on unique skills (individuating identity). Furthermore, identities are negotiated in interactions with the public (Bromley, 1993) and different communities may place different salience on any one of these levels.

Our proposed link between the levels of identity and reputation is rooted in Erving Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theory of impression management. This theory states that an individual's identity is dynamic and is constantly being reshaped by interactions between individuals (actors) and audiences. The actor tries to present a portion of his identity (social, relational, or individuating) in a manner such that it will resonate with an audience. This resonance (or lack thereof) is time and context dependent and forms a foundation of reputation.

2.3. Long Tail Theory

Before discussing how the long tail applies to reputation, it is first necessary to provide an overview of the theory. The long tail theory is an extension of Alvin Toffler's (1970) theory of over-choice. The theory of over-choice states that as more and more products enter the marketplace, customers are faced with the danger of over-choice

whereby the customer has too many choices, reducing his ability to evaluate all possible alternatives. This leads to an inefficient customer because the customer suffers from a “paralyzing surfeit” of choices. A key premise to the over-choice theory is the idea that technology reduces the costs of producing small variations of the same product and automation generally “frees the path to endless, blinding, mind-numbing diversity” (Toffler, 1970, pg. 228).

Chris Anderson (2006) makes sense of this over-choice problem by theorizing that the tail end of the distribution curve is substantively different from the head. The long tail theory is a distribution curve with a small group of high-frequency products at the head followed by a large set of low-frequency products in the tail. The products at the far end of the distribution curve have a very low probability of occurring. According to Anderson, the tail end of the distribution curve does not offer “mind-numbing diversity” as Toffler suggests but an actual set of niche products that are uniquely different from the offerings in the head. Anderson posits that people drift down the distribution curve toward the niches in the tail, because the tail satisfies narrow interests better and people have narrow interests in some aspect of their lives. In some fields such as music and blogging, the tail is theoretically limitless as the Internet offers unlimited shelf space.

In order to understand how the long tail applies to bloggers and their reputational activities, it is necessary to establish an appropriate frame of reference. For example, if discussing the larger MSM market, then blogging can be viewed as a long tail product in relation to traditional main stream media outlets like the *New York Times* or the *Wall Street Journal* (see left side of Figure 1). If framing the analysis in terms of the blogosphere, then the most popular blogs, the so-called “A-list” bloggers², will be in the head and the niche (or less popular) blogs will be in the tail (see right side of Figure 1). Regardless of the frame of reference, the number of bloggers in the tail is enormous. In terms of the blogosphere, Technorati (an Internet blog searching service) currently has 133 million blogs indexed in its database.³

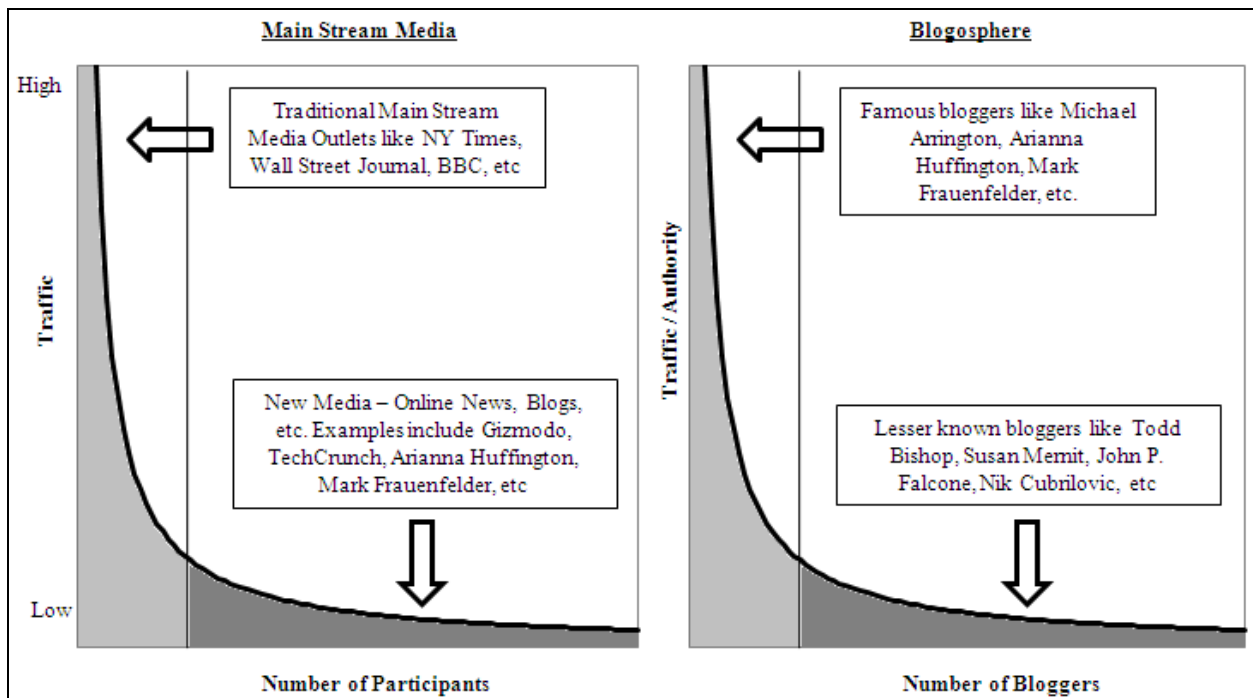


Figure 1: Frame of reference determines location on the curve for bloggers

² A-list bloggers are considered those with the most inbound links and highest authority, which are functions of traffic, page rank and linking activity on blog search engines like Google Blog Search and Technorati.

³ Downloaded on 2/27/2009 (<http://thefuturebuzz.com/2009/01/12/social-media-web-20-internet-numbers-stats/>).

The framing of the analysis is important for reputation as it pertains to the long tail because normative behaviors may vary depending on the context. What could be seen as a normative practice in one context might be seen as a challenging or rebellious practice in another. An A-list blogger, for example, might be challenging the status quo (relevance and importance of print media) within the larger context of MSM, but this might be seen as normal behavior, that is, maintaining status quo within community of other bloggers, within the context of the blogging community. Thus, the MSM community might develop one perception of this blogger (possibly negative) while the broad community of bloggers may develop an entirely different perception (possibly positive) of this blogger based on the same action. Furthermore, when a tail blogger views the actions of this same A-list blogger, the tail blogger might form a perception of the A-list blogger as being over-bearing or self-centered. Thus, the different referent groups represent the many publics associated with reputation (MacDougall, 2005).

3. Theory of Reputation and the Long Tail of Bloggers

Are there certain characteristics or behaviors of bloggers in the head and in the tail that are relevant to the formation of a reputation in a specific referent community? We propose that in addition to visibility, the salience of specific types of identity, the level of social capital, the importance of subjective norms, and attitudes toward the status quo will all vary throughout the hit distribution curve and all of these factors will have an impact on a blogger's reputation in a given context (see Figure 2). For the purposes of this paper, the hit distribution curve refers to a distribution plot with the number of bloggers on the horizontal axis and the authority (function of traffic and inbound links) of a given blogger on the vertical axis (depicted on right side of Figure 1).

We are not proposing that characteristics at different points on the distribution curve will correlate with a positive or a negative reputation as the referent group will form their own perceptions. Some groups may view certain activities positively while other groups might view the same action more negatively. Actions and discourse that promote or challenge the status quo are good examples. Certain groups view challenging the status quo as positive while other groups view this as negative.

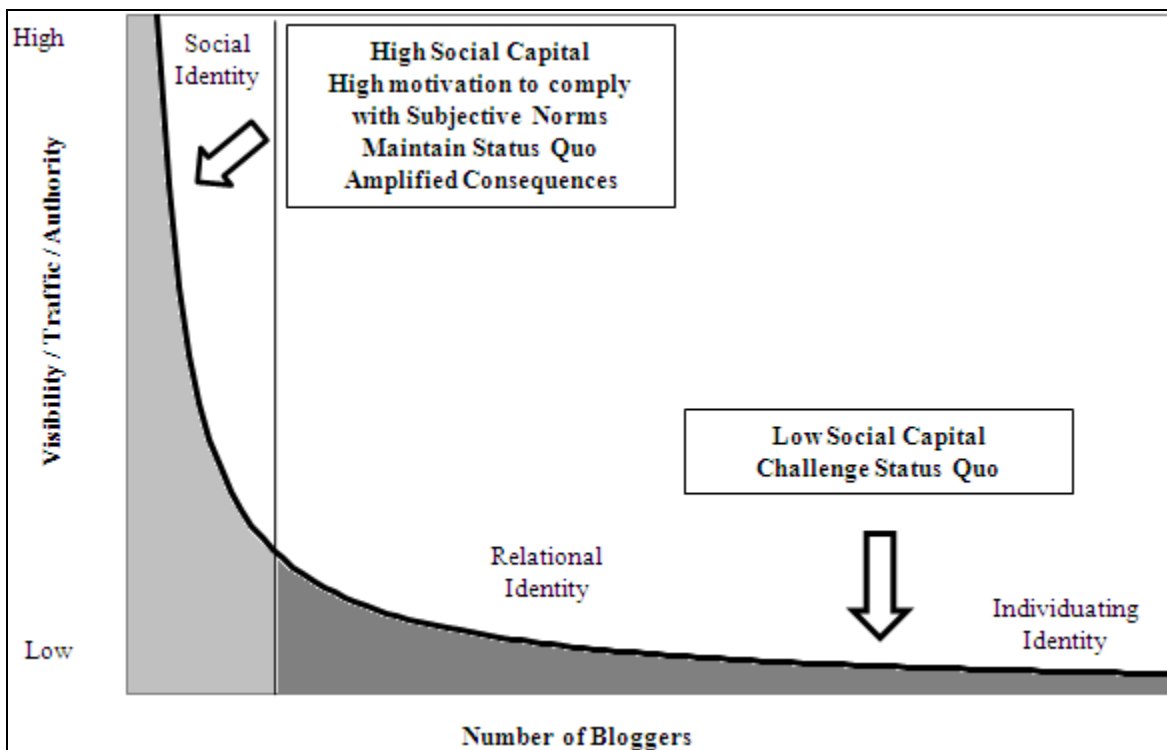


Figure 2: Blogger hit distribution curve

3.1. Differences in Social Capital and Salience of Types of Identity along the Curve

One theory of social capital states that individuals generate social currency by forming relationships with other people and then utilize that currency to create tangible and intangible benefits. This definition of social capital suggests that there are advantages to forming and joining groups because group membership and network connections can help an individual (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu (1986) states that the “social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural, or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected” (pg. 249).

In terms of blogging, social currency can be accumulated online and/or offline. Online, bloggers can engage in linking activities (to/from other blog sites), can utilize complimentary social networking technology (for example, Twitter and FriendFeed), and can design their sites for search engine optimization. Offline, bloggers can get together and form real (as opposed to virtual) social networks with other bloggers and/or other industry professionals. These offline relationships can then be brought online by engaging in normative online behaviors, such as referring to each others' posts and linking to their blog sites.

In an analysis of discourse practices between technology bloggers, Vaast and Davidson (2008) found technology bloggers in their sample engaged in discursive practices such as directing readers to other blog sites and engaging in online debates with other tech bloggers. This analysis suggests that bloggers are trying to increase the strength of the relationships between community members of tech bloggers. According to Coleman (1988) social capital may be manifest in relationships whereby actions of group members may impact the social capital of an individual group member in a direct or indirect manner. Therefore, although Vaast and Davidson (2008) are not specifically referring to the accumulation of social capital, their discourse analysis does suggest that bloggers are aware of the concept of social capital as it pertains to relationships within groups of technology bloggers.

Like all currency, however, social currency is not accumulated immediately. Unless an individual is famous or extremely well connected before starting a blog, most independent bloggers probably start in the tail end of the distribution with little or no social currency. As such, we suggest the following:

Proposition 1a: Bloggers in the tail end of the distribution will have low levels of social capital and, in the absence of social capital, bloggers may engage in reputation building activities centered on the individuating identity.

Proposition 1b: Bloggers in the middle of the distribution will have moderate levels of social capital and may begin to use this capital in their reputation building activities thereby shifting focus away from individuating identity in favor of relational identity.

Proposition 1c: Bloggers in the head end of the distribution will have high levels of social capital and may take advantage of this by engaging in reputation building activities centered on social identity.

3.2. Importance of Subjective Norms along the Curve

According to the theory of planned behavior, subjective norms are defined as an individual's perception that the people close to him/her think a particular behavior or action should be performed (Ajzen, 1991). In other words, a subjective norm is the perceived social pressure to engage (or not engage) in a particular action or behavior. A subjective norm is comprised of normative beliefs (what an individual thinks influential referents expect) and motivation to comply (how important it is for an individual to do what influential referents expect). For example, A-list bloggers will probably have a desire to comply with the A-list linking normative behavior, because this linking behavior may increase the likelihood of remaining in the A-list group. Therefore, we propose the following:

Proposition 2a: The motivation to comply with normative actions and behaviors is generally higher for bloggers in the head than in the tail end of the distribution, and a failure to comply with normative actions and behaviors may impact reputation.

Proposition 2b: Bloggers in the head end of the distribution have an expectation that other bloggers in the head want them to comply with normative actions and behaviors, and a failure to meet these expectations may impact reputation.

Anderson and Shirako (2008) provide evidence that links behaviors with reputation for well-known individuals. In a series of studies involving negotiations, they show that more socially connected individuals were impacted more from both positively and negatively perceived behaviors than were less socially connected individuals. A-list bloggers by virtue of the number of people that read their blogs on a daily basis have increased visibility in many different online communities. Therefore, in addition to having increased pressures to comply with normative actions and behaviors, the research by Anderson and Shirako (2008) suggests that their behaviors will be scrutinized much more so than their long tail blogger counterparts. This leads us to propose the following:

Proposition 3: The positive and negative actions and behaviors of bloggers in the head may have an amplified impact on reputation.

3.3. Relationship between the Status Quo and the Long Tail

According to systems justification theory, individuals have a desire to justify their egos, their group memberships, and the social system in general; system justification theory also posits, quite paradoxically, that members of disadvantaged groups often support the status quo of the society to some degree (Jost et al., 2004). This theory, however, also suggests that minority groups may challenge the status quo if the incentive to change is undeniable. We posit that the incentive to change in the online environment may be quite high. For example, in our analysis of the current blogosphere, bloggers are challenging the status quo of traditional MSM journalists and lesser known bloggers are questioning the legitimacy of A-list bloggers quite regularly. Therefore, we propose the following:

Proposition 4a: Challenging the status quo is an expected behavior of bloggers in the tail of the distribution and actions contrary to this normative expectation may impact reputation.

Proposition 4b: Maintaining the status quo is an expected behavior of bloggers in the head of the distribution and actions contrary to this normative expectation may impact reputation.

4. ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES

The following examples come from the technology blogging community. Drawing on the research by Davidson and Vaast (2009), we define technology bloggers as bloggers who write about high technology business, hardware, software, technology strategy, and so on. Independent tech bloggers are bloggers who are not employed by technology firms or mainstream or trade media outlets. The head represents the most popular technology bloggers and the tail represents the niche (or less popular) technology bloggers. For the purposes of the following examples, the head and the A-list refer to the same group of bloggers. These are the bloggers that have the most inbound links and highest authority (function of traffic, page rank, and linking activity) on blog search engines such as Google Blog Search and Technorati.

4.1. Head Bloggers and Reputation

Jason Calacanis is an influential technology blogger, who was an early member of the A-list blog group. The following blog entry by Calacanis exemplifies the social identity, social capital, and status quo propositions discussed in the previous sections.

What a joke...a couple of years ago Scoble, Jarvis, and I were the blue collar bloggers! We were hustling trying to get our voices heard and a couple of years later—after blogging daily/hourly—the supposed “A List” got some traction and attention. Here is a tip: THEY EARNED IT!!! They busted their butts for years blogging in an intelligent way. They were not given their seats at the table—they took them! There is no “A List” — it’s a myth. There are people who blog every day, have something intelligent to say, and who get linked to more than the folks that are some combination of a) new, b) have little to say, and c) are not hustling. If you want to be part of the A List you can do it in < 90 days...I think there are a lot of folks who think because they re-blog a couple of stories a day for a couple of weeks, and they don’t go anywhere in terms of traffic, that they are being “held back” by the A-list (<http://calacanis.com/2007/03/17/the-dumbest-argument-in-the-blogsphere-a-list-vs-blue-collar/>).

Calacanis is identifying with (social identity) and taking pride in the fact that he is an A-list blogger, despite the fact that the first part of his post denies the existence of an A-list. He is also stressing the social capital of A-list bloggers (“get linked to more” and the strong social network of other bloggers such as Scoble and Jarvis) is earned and accumulates everyday through hard work. Lastly, Calacanis is clearly not trying to challenge the status quo with this post. He is saying that there is no problem with the current state of affairs in the blogosphere and the people who are not on the A-list simply have to try harder.

For this reason, this rant may impact Calacanis’ reputation in either a positive or negative manner depending on who the referent other is. The tail bloggers will probably view this post as a negative while the other A-list bloggers will probably view this post as a positive.

The next excerpt is from Michael Arrington, an A-list technology blogger and founder of the popular blog site TechCrunch, who is discussing Robert Scoble, another A-list blogger with history of blogging for Microsoft and currently an influential independent technology blogger, and his shift in behavior away from the expected A-list normative behavior. This exemplifies the amplified effect and subjective norm propositions discussed in the previous section.

On Twitter Robert has nearly 45,000 followers and has written over 16,000 messages. On Friendfeed Robert has nearly 23,000 subscribers...So Robert has spent 2,555 hours spent reading tens out thousands of mostly inane Twitter and Friendfeed messages, and has written a few thousand messages of his own. Meanwhile, we as a community lost the regularly entertaining and thoughtful posts of a great writer (<http://www.techcrunch.com/2008/12/22/im-sorry-robert-but-its-time-for-a-friendfeed-intervention/>).

Although using tools like Twitter and Friendfeed may be increasing Scoble’s social capital, incessantly using these tools is against the expectation of normative behavior for A-list bloggers. A-list bloggers are supposed to use their own sites to create and disseminate “entertaining and thoughtful posts” on a regular basis. Using Arrington as the referent proxy for the community of A-list bloggers, Scoble’s reputation is taking a negative hit in this community, because he knows the normative belief of his social group and is violating that norm (<http://scobleizer.com/2008/12/22/did-i-harm-my-blog-by-friendfeeding-this-year/>).

Furthermore, this change of behavior has people in the A-list community talking about Scoble’s behavior. Due to the fact that Scoble is a very well connected member of the community, his deviation from the norm may have an increased impact on his reputation. This is consistent with our third proposition and with Anderson & Shirako’s (2008) conclusions concerning the amplified effects of changes to behavior for well-known individuals.

4.2. Tail Bloggers and Reputation

Tony from “Deep Jive Interests” is a practicing Doctor who also blogs about technology topics on his personal blog site. The following excerpt by Tony exemplifies the low level of social capital in the tail end of the distribution curve.

So I'm a tech blogger of the new media persuasion. And there's a conference that many new media bloggers are going to — perhaps you've heard of the one Mike Arrington and Jason Calacanis is putting together, TechCrunch 40. Now, I'm *not* going to TechCrunch 40... But if you never met any people "live" though, and made all of your relationships virtually — well, *could* you, and still be regarded a "real" blogger? I suspect the answer is a hearty "yes", albeit that it's probably harder. Harder to make connections, harder to really report on what's actually happening, harder to convince people about who you are, and harder to make who you are memorable. Because all you'll really have is your writing, and your ability to connect online. Which, I suppose, is what we all started with, and are eventually, judged upon (<http://www.deepjiveinterests.com/2007/09/16/does-going-to-a-conference-make-you-a-real-blogger/>).

Tony has a low level of social capital and doesn't express much of a desire to build social capital in an offline capacity. This may have an impact on his ability to move up the distribution curve (if he desires to do so). This post also demonstrates that Tony is trying to demonstrate that he does not have to be a part of an elite society (the A-list social identity), but he can simply be himself. He can look at his writing (individuating identity) and still create a unique blogging identity for himself. He is stating that he does not need large amounts of social currency to validate his personal identity.

In a different post, Tony further demonstrates the individuating identity of tail bloggers and the notion that bloggers in tail of the distribution challenge the status quo.

...There's one thing that Jeff Jarvis, Jason Calacanis, or any other A-list blogger fails to recognize. And that's a whole other class of bloggers who blog for a very different reason that other bloggers blog. I refer to them as the blue-collar class of bloggers. They're not out there writing and contributing so that they can look smart and feel good about themselves when they get dugg.⁴ They're out there writing and blogging to make a few shekels for themselves and their families. Some are stay at home moms. Others are students. Others are individuals who are just trying to make a few ends meet. Others are just curious (<http://www.deepjiveinterests.com/2007/02/02/a-list-types-refuse-to-acknowledge-bloggings-blue-collar-class/>).

Tony is stressing the individual nature of the blue collar bloggers, such as stay at home moms, students, and individual writers, and he is challenging the assumption that a blogger must be a well connected professional in order to be a real blogger, that is, he is challenging the status quo among the A-listers. The blue collar bloggers do not fit the stereotypical mode of the professional A-list blogger, but each blue collar blogger has a personal identity and that identity is enough to develop a reputation in the blogosphere. In this view, being "dugg" (on Digg.com) and creating a large network is not what is important.

This post may have a positive or negative impact on his reputation depending on who the referent group is. The A-list will probably view this post in a negative manner because Tony is not focusing on the social identity of other technology bloggers. Other tail bloggers, however, will probably view this challenge to the status quo and the individuating tone of the post in a positive manner.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper provides a descriptive analysis of what may be going on in the blogosphere in terms of reputation and offers the long tail theory as an analytic lens (Gregor, 2006) to investigate and further analyze the problem. We propose the reputational characteristics of a blogger may vary depending on the context and depending on where along this curve the blogger falls. This paper posits that the salience of specific types of identity, the level of social

⁴ By "dugg" he is referring to a community activity at digg.com where users vote ("digg") on the content that appears on their home page.

capital, the importance of subjective norms, and the blogger's attitudes toward the status quo will all vary throughout the hit distribution curve and these factors have an impact on a blogger's reputation in a given context.

Our examples highlight situations where tail bloggers and head bloggers are engaging in different activities. However, our examples also suggest there might be an interaction effect between normative behaviors and social capital. As highlighted in the Arrington and Scoble example, social networking sites like Twitter and FriendFeed may be increasing Scoble's social capital with individuals outside of the A-list, but it may also be reducing his social capital within the A-list community. If bloggers like Arrington stop linking to Scoble because of his outside of the norm activity, will that have a greater impact on his social capital than the 67K additional followers he picked up from Twitter and FriendFeed? It is an interesting question that future research will have to investigate.

This research suggests that bloggers in the head and in the tail may be engaging in different actions and behaviors that are impacting their reputation. An empirical study will be required to validate and elaborate on our propositions. Nevertheless, this paper provides an initial step in the process by providing the long tail theory as a lens to investigate blogging and reputation.

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