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HOW BLOG IS USED AS AN EFFECTIVE PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOL BY STARTUP FACILITATORS

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Abstract

Public relations has been defined as a powerful tool in building relationships with the target audience. The rise of the Internet has augmented public relations with new media including blog. In addition, the explosion of startup culture in Finland has resulted in the establishment of non-profits facilitating startups and entrepreneurs called startup facilitators. Considered as part of content delivery, blog has been adopted as a public relations tool at startup facilitators. The lack of mutual understanding and guideline for this field leads to ineffective and time-consuming practice where the organization does not accomplish its mission in advancing entrepreneurs. How blog can be used as an effective public relations tool at startup facilitators was, thus, set as the main research goal of this study.

Qualitative research concentrating on flexibility and freedom of expression and non-numerical data, was used as method. Data was collected primarily with the help of semi-structured interviews with marketing and communications coordinators and managers at startup facilitators.

Generally, blog is adopted for the purpose of knowledge sharing, promoting startup facilitators and their accelerator programmes and events. The active use of blog is predominant, for startup facilitators to express their opinions, ideas and eventually achieve the position of opinion leader. It rewards the brand validation positioning the organization a reliable source for entrepreneurs when starting up a business. Blog content must be relevant in the sense of startup, entrepreneurship and technology and created on the base of a network. Coupled with the content, the choice of platform (website or Medium) refers to and brings the benefits according to the organization’s priorities. Measurement taking metrics read, reach and the average time on the page indicates how the blog is working and how it can be improved.

Keywords

Public relations, blog, startup facilitators

CONTENTS

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1 INTRODUCTION

Public relations has been considered as a tool for an organization to raise awareness, build good image and establish relationship with public. Bruning and Ledingham (2000) define the term as relationship management, which sums up the idea of the tool at an advanced extent (cited in Fill 2009, 565). The emergence of online media has equipped public relations with a wide range of new tools and channels. They have become an integral part of modern public relations practice that bolsters dialogic communication and enhances the effectiveness of public relations work. Among them, blog represents as a content delivery tool that insists public relations strength in storytelling, connecting, interacting and engaging with audience (Kotler & Armstrong 2016 b, 422).

The success of Angry Birds and Clash of Clans has paved the way for entrepreneurship and startup culture in Helsinki and Finland. The establishment and development of Startup Sauna and a number of non-profits facilitating startups is a testimonial to this lucrative growth. (Toivonen 2014.) Following this trend, many non-profit organizations, which are deemed as a part of the third sector beside trading and non-trading sectors, have been founded on the purpose of reinforcing the culture of startups and entrepreneurship. They can be called startup facilitators. Their work is stated as inspiring, empowering, facilitating the next generation of entrepreneurs and fueling startups to grow. Throughout years of operating, blog has been adopted as a part of their public relations and communications effort. They have absolute perspectives on the use of this medium. From the personal point of view, the researcher finds endless interest in blog and the startup ecosystem in Finland. The research process and outcomes are interesting. Thorough understanding on the utilization of the medium will assist the researcher in improving the work either as a freelance blogger or a content contributor in the ecosystem. This research, therefore, focuses on exploring viewpoints of social media coordinators and marketers at startup facilitators on employing blog as a tool for promoting entrepreneurship. The study’s scope is placed on startup facilitators and entrepreneurship societies in Finland.

1.1 Research problem

Entrepreneurial culture has been expanding and spreading out. In the same fashion, startup facilitators have positioned themselves as an integrative hub for entrepreneurs and startups to grow. In doing so, the adoption and execution of blog have assisted them in establishing and maintaining relationships with the community of entrepreneurs through two-way communications. Given that the explosion of entrepreneurship and startup facilitators in Finland has taken place recently, a standard or guideline for employing blog properly tailored to the field has not been available yet. The lack of know-how and mutual understanding directs the use of the medium to different paths, some of which potentially hurt the name of the organization or does not leads effectiveness or success. Thus, it is greatly vital for social media coordinators, communications managers, marketers and bloggers to understand how blog is being used and should be leveraged. Furthermore, the research generates new ideas on the use of the medium in contribution to public relations of those organizations. This means an improvement on their blog to better communicate the value of a startup facilitator or entrepreneurship society. As a consequence, the organization establishes and maintains goodwill and positive relationships with its target audience. Not to mention, it gives a boost to the community of startups and entrepreneurs and the ecosystem in return.

1.2 Research questions

This research primarily concerns the use of blog by startup facilitators in advocating entrepreneurship and startup culture. Hence, the main research question is: “How do startup facilitators employ blog as an effective public relations tool?”. Breaking down this core question, there are two sub-questions:

- How is blog being used for public advocating entrepreneurship by startup facilitators?
- What indicates the effectiveness of their blog performance?

1.3 Research objectives

The research is to explore, then conclude with some new ideas on how blog can be employed as an effective public relations tools by startup facilitators. With this intention, the research objectives are as follows: (1) Define the main concepts public relations, blogs, startup facilitators and the relations between them. The relations of the key concepts concern the use of public relations among startup facilitators and the adoption of blog to public relations. (2) Explore the practice of blog at startup facilitators in Finland from view of marketing and public relations. (3) Gather the collected data and conclude on new ideas on how the medium properly serves as a public relations tool in the scenario of startup facilitators.

1.4 Research methodology

The study is expected to gather data then generate new knowledge on the use of blog by startup facilitators. In other words, data serves as the base for the conclusion of new knowledge adding feedback to the contemporary knowledge of blog as a public relations tool. In this case, qualitative methodology fits the research orientation. The main question is lied on “how”, demanding non-standardized inputs. (Bryman & Bell 2007, 425).

In-depth semi-structure interview and email interview are the main data collection tools. The strength of interview is flexibility and freedom for expression while it provides the conversation with a clear orientation. (Bryman & Bell 2007, 474.) It allowed the researcher to fully understand how blog can be employed in an effective way and how measurement can be executed. Equally important, the length of time to obtain the desired data is to be considered when choosing the data collection method. In the hope of balancing the variety of input sources, the time length of the interview and hectic schedule of the interviewees, semi-structured email interviews are also conducted. The semi-structured email combines the features of semi-structured and email interviews by the researcher sending follow-up emails to the interviewees. The interviewees are from those organizations that focus on Finland; therefore, the outcomes are potentially applicable to the context of Finland’s ecosystem only.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This thesis contains five primary parts. First, a general introduction to the research elaborates the thesis topic, research problem as well as the motivations behind. The second chapter reviews the literature of the dominant concepts. The theoretical part discusses how startup facilitators practice public relations, how blog gets to public relations and the measurement process. The third section represents the implementation of research and data collection in correspondence to research aim. After that, empirical findings are presented, and data is interpreted in the fourth section. Lastly, the fifth chapter refers to the conclusions and researcher's point of view on the overall research and indication for further research in future.

2 PUBLIC RELATIONS BY STARTUP FACILITATORS

Marketing communications commences with the notion on communicating organizational values with stakeholders for building and maintaining good relationships. Hence, the importance of marketing communications is stressed on interacting, transferring messages to stakeholders through different means. PR is incorporated as a tool of marketing communications mix. It posits that public relations contributes to generating communicative and persuasive communications, subsequently establishing healthy relationships with stakeholders. (Kotler & Armstrong 2016 b, 398.) Additionally, the rise of the Internet and its following platforms and applications has bolstered the increasingly significant role of public relations (Smith & Zook 2011, 312). This chapter discusses public relations in detail as well as how it is used in the context of startup facilitators.

2.1 Public relations (PR)

What is PR?

Smith and Zook (2011, 312) simply defines public relations as the process of establishing, developing and maintaining good relationships with its publics, which is the community of people that are associated with the organization.

Breaking down the definition, public relations tasks center on maintaining preferable publicity, constructing positive organizational image and monitoring bad rumors on the organization and related issues (Kotler & Armstrong 2016 a, 490). However, the term is vaguer and more complicated than it seems.
From the perspective of Public Relations Society of America 2012, PR is considered as a strategic communication process that assists an organization in building relationships which share mutual benefits with its publics. According to this, the focus is placed on “strategic”, “communications” and “relationship generation”. “Strategic” implies planning process requiring public relations practitioners research, understand the publics in order to draft appropriate initiatives for communications. Then, “communications” refers to two-way communications comprising elements as listening, delivering messages, including ethical components (Heath & Coombs 2006, 6) and representing performance. Another definition also adds that this strategic communication process is purposed on interfering, persuading and influencing the public opinion. When these elements are properly represented, good relationships are generated between the organization and its publics. (Seitel 2014, 5.)

To fully observe the complexity of the term, Heath and Coombs (2006, 7) indicate five core attributes of public relations in their definition. It is that

> *Public relations is the management function that entails planning, research, publicity, promotion, and collaborative decision making to help any organization’s ability to listen, appreciate, and respond appropriately to those persons and groups whose mutually beneficial relationships the organization need to foster as it strives to achieve its mission and vision.*

In comparison to the definition provided by Public Relations Society of America 2012, the two authors’ perception share fundamental similarities such as planning, research, listen and respond properly. However, the fifth point on achieving the organizational mission and vision is fresh to other common definitions. Explaining this, the authors state that this management function supports its employees in accomplishing mission and vision through establishing quality relationships with stakeholders, only if the organization is goal-oriented.

Functions of PR

According to Heath and Coombs (2006, 8), public relations perform five main functions including strategic planning, research, publicity, promotion, and collaborative decision making. These five functions work in an interdependent relation described in figure 1.

Figure 1: Five functions of public relations (Heath & Coombs 2006)

Planning tasks include positioning the organization in response to the public interest and need, as well as designing the initiatives for further public relations activities. The planning phase is benefited from two other functions "research" and "collective decision making". Research assists in gathering data on the environment indicating corresponding promotional and public activities. Simultaneously, collective decision making contributes in the sense of burnishing opinions from organizational leaders and public demands. Post researching and collective decision making, planning determines publicization and promotion. Both publicization and promotion deploy media coverage to catch attention. Publicization is briefly assumed as pushing a product, service or promotional event into public to raise awareness. On the other hand, promotion employs media to attract public in a sustained way in certain period of time. Promotional effort ensures continuing attention paid to the organization. (Heath & Coombs 2006, 8-11.)

Unlike those two authors, Kotler and Armstrong (2016 a, 491) discuss six functions of public relations in modern practices. Sharing some points in common, Seitel (2014, 13) claim public relations to represent a wide range of functions. To start, abbreviation of public relations – PR – is usually mistook with press release, yet it is the first and foremost function of the field (Smith & Zook 2011, 312). Although it is named as either press relations or media relations, the task concentrates on handling the press. Broadly assuming, public relations perform writing expertise as a significant skill in driving traffic to the distributed content. Following the emergence of the Internet, public relations adopts and take on a new function as dealing with the social media presence of the organization. Moreover, namely government affairs, lobbying function refers to dealing with the government in terms of legislation and regulation. The three groups of authors also share three identical functions “research”, “counselling” and “publicity”. Seitel (2014, 13) takes the discussion further by identifying public relations function in accelerating marketing communications. Also, he reflects communicating with such relations as a function of public relations. They consist of community, consumer, employee, investor, and special public relations. Lastly, the author mentions crisis management as one of the key functions, in case of threats to reputation and image of the organization.

Advantages and disadvantages of public relations

According to Smith & Zook (2011, 329), the first and foremost advantage that an organization reaps from public relations is a cost-effective approach to communicate with its publics. There is no purchased space to present editorial writings. Fill (2009, 566) adds that it makes the tool stand out from advertising on television or magazine. The role of public relations is increasingly significant to the organizational marketing communications initiatives partly thanks to this aspect. It is claimed to help the organization accurately target and segment audience, reach them and gain visibility with low expenses. Despite cost effectiveness, resources allocated in accomplishing public relations copies of releases are costly. No matter a copy is produced by the organization or outsourced to other agency, the production takes a huge amount of time, research and effort to accomplish proper copies, initiatives and activities.

PR is usually considered to have a higher degree of credibility than other marketing communications means. According to Smith and Zook (2011, 329), the credibility level of advertisement is only one-third the one of public relations message. Explaining this, the decision makers of public relations purpose and content are at the organizational, managerial level or from the public relations department. It means sponsorship has not influence or impact on the content. The message, instead, concentrates on endorsing or advocating an issue or a point of view. (Fill 2009, 566.) Additionally, public relations copies are considered as accomplishment of professionals, journalists or editors who have absolute knowledge and expertise in the field. The sign of trying to push-to-the-market or sell a product or service is not clearly shown in the public relations. Hence, PR gains magnificent credibility in comparison to advertisement or any other marketing communication mix elements. (Smith & Zook 2011, 329.) Subsequently, PR gradually defines itself as a vigorous tool for relationship managing (Smith & Zook 2011, 338) and brand building that outweighs advertising. Consultants of the book “The Fall of Advertising and the Rise of PR” position public relations as “the most powerful marketing communications tool”. (Kotler & Armstrong 2016 a, 491.)

Despite its remarkable advantages, Kotler and Armstrong (2016 a, 491) call public relations a “stepchild” of marketing communications. The authors state that public relations associated tasks are briefly handling the presence and reputation of the organization to different ranges of audience. The assistance in target and segmentation is undeniable yet demands public relations practitioners more effort. The pressure is placed on dealing with a number of publics with different objectives and strategies.

Another disadvantage of public relations is the lack of ability to control the message. Public relations messages are uncontrollably widespread at different events to different groups of audience on different purposes. This is partly due to the pro high credibility of the tool. Since the message transmitted by public relations is more credible, it will be quoted or cited in speeches or later articles to enhance the credibility of the content. (Smith & Zook 2011, 329.) On the other hand, Fill (2009, 566) claims the involvement of different parties as the reason behind low degree of managing the level of spreading the message. Passing the public relations copy to several parties cause considerate impact on the diminution of the original context, style and content.

2.2 What are startup facilitators?

Before defining startup facilitators, it is essential to understand the non-profit sector to which startup facilitators belong. According to Howieson and Hodges (2014, 123), non-profits are usually perceived as a part or an approach of the third sector. This sector works in a wide range of fields such as civil society, welfare, charity aimed at support public or issues. The name “non-profit” itself is to distinguish those organization from those profit-oriented. Defining non-profits or non-profit organizations, Jha (2009, 1) controversially claims that those organizations that are not granted the rights to legally make profits to be non-profits. In fact, some non-profit organizations still make profits throughout their activities (sb, p. 4). However, the profit does not go to pocket of the organization’s executive board but the third parties or social groups (Josan 2010, 80).

Equally important, non-profits are motivated by social interest or value, and prioritize the improvement of life quality (Jha 2009, 2-3). Hence, they have provided the society with tangible products or services that are public-centric (Josan 2010, 80). It is argued that non-profits’ offerings are stressed on intangible service rather than physical goods. This is to say that, those benefits reaped from a non-profit are spontaneously service likewise and intangible such as awareness, behavioral change or social impact. (Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 582.)

The primary focus of this thesis is on the practice of blog by a specific sector of non-profits that focuses on advocating entrepreneurship. Non-profits are, therefore, generally assumed as those organizations whose work is on supporting life quality, innovation or an issue of society and their profit is spent on activities that are open to public. This research particularly addresses those non-profits that concentrates on enhancing entrepreneurship and startups culture. Many startup facilitators use different terms to define themselves in mission statements. Some directly call themselves “non-profits” (HealthSPA 2018, Hardward Startup Finland 2018), some refer to other terms such as “network” (Startup Sauna 2018), “society” (Helsinki Think Company 2018), “startup accelerator” (Levelup 2018), or simply states what they do as “facilitate” (Kiaus 2018a).

Despite differences in expression, they share certain similarities. First, these organizations are driven by the aim on enhancing and supporting entrepreneurs and startups in kicking off their business ideas to further development. Second, they are open for the third parties such as students, entrepreneurs, freelancers, etc. Third, they raise awareness and promote the issue through operating a great deal of events comprising meetings, bootcamps, mentor programs, accelerator programs. Briefly, those non-profits satisfying these three determinants in their mission statements shall be perceived as startup facilitators. AaltoES, Kiuas, XamkES, Helsinki Think Company, Tribe Tampere, Aalto Venture Program are examples to name a few.

2.3 How public relations is used by startup facilitators

How public relations is used by non-profits in general

Philip Kotler discusses two models of public relations for non-profits including different techniques and activities. The first one is the conventional model. (Josan 2010, 84.) In traditional public relations approach, the primary concern is on reinforcing the image and reputation of the organization. The organization, therefore, reaps the benefits from an organization-centric public relations strategy. They count preparation for problems, consistent policies and strategies as well as excellent communications expertise. (Andreasen & Kotler 2003, 470.)

According to Josan (2010, 84), the second model refers to public advocacy that is more appropriate in the modern context. The second model implicitly testifies the shift from organization-centricity to public-centricity, which is important to public relations approach of non-profits. Explaining this, Andreasen and Kotler (2003, 487) state that the expansion to the second model originates from the fact that practitioners have recognized the influence of their work to cause such changes in social behavior. Thus, public advocacy is the means through which non-profit organizations get closer to take action to social issues. The manner of advocacy starts with influencing social structures, norms, and values which will cause an impact on changing social behavior. With this intention, public relations professionals can take advantages of several tools including public education, media advocacy, influential books, lobbying and public debate. (sb p. 493.)

Public relations in the context of startup facilitators

Concerning public relations in the scenario of startup facilitators, Josan's comment about the second model – public advocacy – discussed above seems to be appropriate. Majority of non-profits established as startup facilitators or entrepreneur communities expose by causing an impact on the mindset, behavior and influence the society. In particular, various events have been organized open to public on the purpose of raising awareness and promoting the entrepreneurship and Finnish ecosystem. AaltoES (Aalto Entrepreneurship Society) is an exemplar. In the hope that they would change the Finnish perspective on entrepreneurship and further boost the culture among the country, a group of Aalto students established the organization. The non-profit makes use of public education to serve its goals. It organizes, for instance, Fall Up gathering students to raise awareness and interest in entrepreneurship. Targeting designers, the organization conducts a hackathon for designers to get involved in the entrepreneurial culture and ecosystem. Hel Tech, on the other hand, is a series of monthly meetups for entrepreneurs to connect and exchange sources. Having accomplished different projects and held tons of accelerator programs, the non-profit shapes the Finnish entrepreneurial mindset, reinforces startup culture and makes such contribution to the growth of the Finnish startup ecosystem. (AaltoES 2018.) This can be considered as a success story of the second public relations approach.

In the same fashion, a great deal of startup facilitators and communities have been founded and ran the advocacy. Kiuas, a part of Aalto, targets true entrepreneurs who want to kick off their business ideas and start their own business. Its mission is stated as fueling ideas from the early stage to the first revenue. The team claims its existence in the hope that they would motivate entrepreneurs and assist startups from the beginning. Kiuas takes action with different accelerator programs such as Kiuas Accelerator, Kiuas Start, Nordic Roadshows, Kiuas Bootcamp, etc. (Kiuas 2018a.) Besides, it employs publication in the journey of empowering the future generation of entrepreneurs. The team presents its blog on Medium, a platform for blog and publication. (Kiuas 2018b.)

In like manner, Helsinki Think Company, which is an open co-working space and community for entrepreneurs and startups in Helsinki, insists its focus on amplifying entrepreneurship. Also defining itself as entrepreneurship society, the organization digs into taking knowledge, skills, ideas and innovations to real changes. The non-profit stays open to different targets including students, graduates, freelancers, entrepreneurs, startups, researchers and activists. Helsinki Think Company, likewise other startup facilitators, provides lots of free workshops, accelerator and mentoring programs, bootcamps and events. (Helsinki Think Company 2018.)

Given these points, it could be said that public relations work by startup facilitators is exposing, presenting and supporting entrepreneurship. The advocacy is mainly completed by public education ranging from accelerator programs, mentoring to free events, workshops and bootcamps. Supporting the explosion of the entrepreneurial ecosystem, those organizations have extended to online media. In other words, they use social media including blog to spread the word.

3 BLOG AS A PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOL

3.1 What is blog?

Blog, abbreviation for “Web Log”, is an online form of personal diary in which its writer updates their real time status, express their thoughts and feelings about the latest issues (Gardner & Birley 2008, 9). For this reason, all blog posts are ordered chronologically with the newest updates on top followed by older posts. A post within a blog called a blog post contains one or some of different elements such as text, graphics, video and audio (Tuten & Solomon 2018, 14).

Blog is considered as a format of social media – the term that is usually associated with content marketing (Zahay 2015, 75). Explaining this can start with the four zones of social media, one of which social publishing (Tuten & Solomon 2018, 12). Social publishing features the distribution of content to the audience. In other words, content marketing, which is marketing approach for distributing content and converting the content consumption and influence into profit, plays a role in the existence of social publishing. Moreover, social publishing is editorial-likewise. This means it is the key to creating content, empowering the writer’s creativity and spreading their work to mass audience. It is called “user-generated content”. (sb, p. 214.) Fill (2009, 791) also mentions this feature in his discussion on blog. Thereupon, claiming blog as a format of social media is respectively appropriate. Although the focus of this thesis is on blog as a public relations tool, the point that blog is also a social media channel will not be disposed of. Instead, it will be used as a foundation for those points discussed following.

Concerning blog’s features, unlike traditional diary, blog is insisted for its publicity, which means all the written pieces are accessible, open to publics and generated on the purpose of informing or entertaining. Since the emergence of blog in 1990s, variety of blogs and blog writers have been reported receiving mass attention from media. The media attraction stands for two main reasons. Blog writers who are called bloggers from now on take blog as their personal diaries, hold a discussion on the latest social or political issues rapidly and keep their readers up-to-date with critical points of view. Or they reveal, share several stories of one certain area or industry. In this case, blog is more academic and critical as public affairs analysis. It can be either promoting blog that serves the marketing purpose or a commentary of experts or insiders giving an insight into an industry. (Kent 2008, 33.)

Commenting on blog and its features, Fill (2009, 791) states that blog is an indicator to writer's attitude, ideas and opinions. Added by the openness, content and messages in blog have shown the potentials of disseminating and influencing writers' ideas to mass audience (Cho & Huh 2010, 33). Thus, an organization that adopts and employs the medium is likely to expose its truest organizational character and its viewpoint towards a couple of issues (Charlesworth 2015, 127). Blog is now commonly used not only thanks to its mass reach but also its set of distinguishable characteristics. First, the medium is appreciated for its archive-oriented structure (Cho & Huh 2010, 31). Explaining this, Gardner and Birley (2008, 16) describe the database of blog as a great collection; whenever a new blog post is added, the collection is enriched and will function as a facilitator for later searches. This makes the look-up for older information task easier. Secondly, entering, distributing and managing content is an easy task when using blog. Content is simply input and added to the blog with a post, which subsequently opens multi-dialogues between bloggers and readers. Lastly, the linkage between different blog posts generates a flow of information, makes all the shared information a more arguable series and "eases responding to previous blog postings" (Herring et al. 2004; Huffaker & Calver 2005, cited in Cho & Huh 2010, 31).

Primarily, blog is categorized into traditional and news blog. Traditional blog, also called historic blogs, is perceived as a diary which chronologically records those issues, events that catches the blogger's attention. Historic blog saves some space for bloggers to fully express their feelings, thoughts and opinions, support and/or argue an issue. A blog usually depicts a core topic containing sequel issues. To put it another way, a blog has its own target audience who are following and ultimately influenced by the topic and/or the blogger's point of view. (Kent 2008, 33-34.)

In contrast, news blog is considered as an intermediary between readers and news. Bloggers usually link the original piece of news from another site, comment on the issue and open a conversation with their readers. Moreover, a news blog has a more solid focus on a specific topic, so its posts basically report real time events within a field. Because of this feature, news blog reaches a wider range of readers who are a part of a community interested in and subscribing a particular field. Professionals can employ this blog genre for observing and keeping updated with the latest trends, legislative changes, emerging issues and getting the most out of public relations. (Kent 2008, 33-34.)

Blog by startup facilitators

Traditional blogs find predominant use among startup facilitators. Hathaway (2016) perceives accelerating startups as providing "immersive education" in a certain period that lifts an early-staged company to further growth. Additionally, the success of a non-profit in doing this is defined as "they provide the right help to the right people", which demands serial skills to fully equip a startup (Roberts & Kempner 2017). At this point, traditional blog is a fit. As it helps present all knowledge, experience, stories the non-profit would like to share with its community. Non-profit organizations facilitating startups spend their focus on entrepreneurs and head to bring up the community. Vice versa, the community keeps an eye on these organizations seeking knowledge, inspiring storytelling and even critical comments of the organization on such issues or trends. It implies that the community of entrepreneurs are narrow target audience of the blog. Then, historic blog functions as a collection, in which writers from non-profits have space to elaborate the concepts, tell the stories and express their opinions towards all issues and emerging trends. Added by the chronological order and linkage between posts, they showcase the non-profit's competence in accelerating startups, connecting and engaging the community of entrepreneurs.

In addition to two primary main type of blogs, blogosphere has been witnessing a shift from traditional blogging site to exclusive platforms such as LinkedIn and Medium. The rationale behind this choice is lied on the existing base of the reader community. The Shortcut – a non-profit that supports the journey of immigrants and young-entrepreneurial-minded individuals to the Finnish entrepreneurial ecosystem – is now executing their blog on Medium (The Shortcut, 2018). Its blog employs the existing base of readers and relevant hashtags to reap wealthy traffic of readership. Besides, these professional channels make significant contribution to bolster promotion effort. (Hopp & Gallicano 2016, 128.) Arguing this, Samuel (2015) claims that constructing blogs on organizational site works better at showcasing the achievement and accomplishment. People behind blog can customize the site according to preference, which clarifies the organization’s interest and expertise. Majority of startup facilitators in Helsinki is maintaining their blogs on their official sites, which bolsters the visual effect, the coherence in image and theme, and highlights their interest areas.

3.2 Blog comes to public relations

Adopting blog

The discussion on the adoption of blog to public relations starts with the remarkable influence of social media over public relations practice. Must be remembered that blog is also a part of social media. To rephrase it, blog is a tool, a medium of social media. Despite a blur in the exact name (new media, modern media, online media, social media, etc.), the assumption is noted in different sources ranging from researches to academic books. (Wolf & Archer 2012, 92; Ryan & Jones 2009, 164; Zahay 2015, 75.) Social media plays a role in everyday life of lots of individuals. Observing this, organizations have changed their perspective on online media and taken them into account. An evidence of the shift is that organizations admit such features of new media as cost effectiveness, wider outreach and adhere them to the organizational strategy. (Alalwan et al. 2017, 1183.)

In particular, granted that new media have given organizations more opportunities to enhance their communications and bolster relationships with their publics (James 2008, 137), social media are claimed to be the key trend that affects and changes the practice of public relations in the past 25 years (Phillip 2017, 65). The Internet and online media increase the potential of reaching wider range of audience. Plus, public relations objectives such as showcasing the organizational accomplishment, communicating with its publics are significantly eased to achieve due to functionality of new media. (Taylor & Kent 2007, 141.) Adding to this, three years later, Josan (2010, 87) states that social media and likewise open networks strengthen connection and interactions among users, which sends a great support to bilateral communications between an organization and its target audience.

Following up with the influence of new media on public relations, blog enters the field and differentiates from other media as a cost-efficient and effective information-distributing medium. The medium enables an organization to delivery their message to mass audience and receive feedback immediately which are quick responses from publics. This feature strongly bolsters the connection, interactions and engagement between both parties. (Josan 2010, 89-90.) Equally important, Cho and Huh (2010, 31) perceive blog as a valuable emerging online tool for communications and relationship beyond connection and interaction. The two authors advocate the notion of Marken (2005) on the uniqueness of blog in facilitating communications. Particularly, blogs functions greatly in either assisting communications between the organization and its mass audience or fostering interpersonal conversations. Commenting on this, James (2008, 139) also states that blog, as a new medium, is “facilitating person-to-person or person-to-persons communications”, which implies on the dual capability of the medium.

By the same token, Phillip (2017, 66) explains how blog comes to public relations from the organizational perspective. Various organizations have employed the medium to serve its purpose of creating a good image and promoting the organization online. In the hope that the brand story is communicated to the audience, they rely on content and conversation. This implies that blog is an appropriate medium for the organization to fully and truly express itself through content (Charlesworth 2015, 127). Must be remembered that, the power of word-of-mouth is maximized, and the goodwill is established when visibility and traffic of the organizational site reaches a peak. This can be satisfied by blog and its content that supports search engine optimization. (Phillip 2017, 66.) Hence, there is a natural link between the impact of social media and the adoption of blog to organizational public relations. Under those circumstances, organizations that master the tool can be benefited with good public affects to expand brand image and credibility.

The adoption of blog, indeed, is undeniable due to fruitful and promising opportunities as mentioned. In a discussion on the use of Internet and emerging communications tools, Roger (1995) anticipated the rapidly widespread use of new media including blogs thanks to economic, time-saving, and rhetorical benefits in accessing publics (Taylor & Kent 2006, 141). Later, it was proved that public relations practitioners were aware of the values of blog and likely to adopt blogging to their area (Porter & Sallot 2003, cited in James 2008, 138). However, Jo & Jung (2005, 27) argue that the adoption was slow at the beginning, which was explained as the public relations experts' suspension in reaping the benefit of blog use. Four years later, the adoption of blog use showed slight differences. Public relations practitioners tended to adopt the tool to their profession; however, the medium was still not widely used yet as an official choice for speaking to publics. (Porter et al. 2009, 262-263.)

The slow adoption in adopting blog as one of the newest online communications tool in the first couple of years can be explained with such challenges. Despite the support in accessing mass audience, the medium is casted doubt on the accuracy of targeting. Some researchers have indicated that its ability to reach accurate target audience is skeptically considered as a shortfall in the scenario of communications between organizations and their community (Josan 2010, 87). Spontaneously, the idea links to a question on new skills acquisition. Discussing this, James (2008, 142) proposes two skills regarding technical and content. The need for proactively generating content, transferring messages, providing well-planned content related to the organizational image in a proper voice is the first implication. Secondly, public practitioners must take into account technical skills comprising web development, software operation, security, search engine optimization as well as web traffic analysis. A set of four skills recommended by Josan (2010, 87-88) also includes these two skills. Beyond them, the author claims the acquisition and mingle of those skills as the milestone for benefiting the organization from the use of blog.

After 2010, a great change in blog adoption started to appear. Public relations practitioners admitted the ability of the medium to outreach, generate and maintain engagement of the community of readers. Spontaneously, the role of bloggers was increasingly appreciated. Public relations experts named bloggers as “the new journalists”, “the reporters of the new media”. (Lahav 2014, 29.) This is a significant change in the perception on the role of blog and its contribution to public relations effort from the perspective of practitioners. It equally implies that professionals have been taking blogs into their daily tasks to create and maintain the goodwill the organization. This idea was supported by a study by a group of scholars a year later. Discovering the relationship between public relations practitioners and bloggers, four elements including trust, mutuality, satisfaction and commitment were discussed as factors to the relationship. Public relations practitioners shown high scores in all four variables, which refers to the sustainability in the relationship with bloggers and an upward trend in adoption blog to their work. (Walden et al. 2015, 530-531.)

Beyond the adoption of blogs to public relations, practitioners express their positive attitude as well as look forward to the future of blogs in relations to public relations. They understand how blogs benefit an organization with generating dialogic conversations with its publics. The tool provides a place where an organization can truly and fully tell the story and refer the tool as a reliable source of the organization. Subsequently, professionals believe in the long-term future of blogs as well as its contribution to public relations. (Philip 2017, 70-73.)

Active and passive uses of blog

According to Porter et al. (2009, 252), blog has been employed either passively or actively when it comes to the use in public relations. Concerning passive use, blog serves a gate through which practitioners directly listen to publics' opinions towards the organization. Through blog, professionals get involved in the discussion on organizational activities, follow up with publics' thoughts to swiftly gather information or feedback on issues related to the organization (Coleman 2005, 274). When researching the impact of new media on public relations, the passive use is approved one more time by James (2008, 138). Particularly, blogs are claimed to assist practitioners in digging into conversations with publics, which subsequently facilitates in collecting informal data such as word-of-mouth, and monitoring publics opinions. The passive use can be briefly called monitoring and environment scanning (Kent 2008, cited in Wolf & Archer 2012, 82).

Unlike passive approach, blog can be actively utilized as an organizational spokesperson, which Kelleher and Miller (2006) consider as "conversational human voice" on the behalf of the organization (Kelleher 2008, 301). The active use of blog could be explained as practitioners execute the platform to share knowledge, discuss relevant topics that would give values to readers. (Porter et al. 2009, 252.) Commenting on this, Sweetser and Metzgar (2007, 342) states that organizational human voice transferred through blog, in exchange, is a cornerstone for the organization to successfully generate and maintain a healthy relationship with its publics. Particularly, the valuable information distributed will be a pedal for enhancing relationship between target audience and the organization in exchange. Important to realize that, blog is referred as a credible information-retrieval source in public relations practice (Fieseler, Fleck & Mekel 2010, cited in Moore et al. 2015, 62). This apparently is a significant support to relationship management and public relations effort.

3.3 Strengths of blog

Kent (2008, 34-35) highlights three main strengths of blog when it comes to public relations use: Research gate, Interactivity and Issue framing.

First of all, blog can be considered as an organizational research gate (Kent 2008, 34-35). Expressly, an organization is enabled to retrieve information, to observe and monitor its environment, public opinions or target audience. This idea is previously proposed by McAllister & Taylor (2007) when the authors point out the opportunities for public relations resulted from the emergence of the Internet and new media (James 2008, 138). The organization can employ blog in scanning and learning the environment, the audience, and catching up with the latest news and trends. The medium is an enormous source for all types of information and data. Subsequently, the organization improve its accuracy and effectiveness in generating content and taking action toward its publics. (Wolf & Archer 2012, 92.) Arguing this, Phillip (2017, 73) states that the organization reaps the benefit of blog as a research tool only if the organization has concrete understanding on the medium, how it fits and contributes to the general strategy.

Second, blog's strength is placed on its high degree of interactivity. The medium presents a dialogic feature, through which readers directly interact with bloggers by commenting at blog post. (Seltzer & Mitrook 2007). Kelleher (2008, 302) referred to the use of a medium in organizational communications with its target group as a "conversational human voice". "Conversational" means two-way communications. The audience get involved in the discussion, express their opinion and jointly generate symmetrical communications. (Porter et al. 2007, 94.) In effect, interaction with the audience helps the organization raise attention and develop a good relationship with them (Taiminen & Karjaluoto 2015, 636). This matches the original aim of public relations and proves that blog has certain strengths that can cultivate the organizational public relations work.

Third, blog is highly appreciated for its strength in issue framing. To put it differently, the medium is a perfect choice when the organization aims at achieving thought leadership. (Tuten & Solomon 2018, 219.) Blog enables the organization not only to distribute content but also to influence, persuade its audience and become a head of opinions. One of the reasons can be said as blog's high degree of influence. It is referred to be the best influential medium standing out from any other channels. (Charlesworth 2015, 128.) This idea can also be explained by the second strength of blog - interactivity. Since the organization does not only express and shape the opinion on its own, its persuasiveness and influence over its publics is fairly enhanced. (Kent 2008, 35-36.) This positively affects the outcomes of relationship building, then supports main public relations aim in exchange. One thing to add is, it is claimed to make significant contribution to save the organization’s reputation in case of crisis.

3.4 Measuring the effectiveness of blog

From the managerial perspective, assessing the performance is not to be eliminated from each social media marketing campaign (Tuten & Solomon 2018, 344). Blog, no matter as a public relations or social media marketing tool, is no exception. Measurement provides marketers and public relations practitioners with an insight into the effectiveness of the medium, resulting from which they are enabled to learn and adjust their strategy and approach to serve their purpose the best.

Defining objectives prior to measurement

Concerning measurement, Tuten and Solomon (2018, 344) prioritize defining objectives and choosing the right metrics. In particular, the two authors states that measuring the performance of blog is not counting the number of likes, followers, but tracking whether the blog’s performance has met the organization’s objectives. In order to do so, those metrics must be “tied to the organizational objectives”. This means, one-size-fit-all key performance indicators (abbreviated as KPIs) do not work in the context of social media marketing in general and blog in particular. Also, each blog launch serves different purposes that metrics must enable experts to measure the work. Commenting on this, Flores (2014, 151) explains the sequel consequences of setting a social media campaign without defining objectives. Expressly, two-way communications between an organization and its target group has been eased out since the emergence of new media. This spontaneously means the role of the audience has shifted from information recipients to participants. They are a part of the conversation on every channel and reacts instantly. This huge involvement of the audience means an organization would fail its audience with a poorly planned campaign. In like manner, a startup facilitator has to prepare a well-designed plan with a clear goal and objectives in order to communicate and remain the conversation with its community of entrepreneurs by the use of blog.

The choices of objectives range from the early stage to particular desired actions. One of those models that illustrate the objectives an organization can set in implementing social media is AIDA. AIDA is a classic model that reflects the journey of persuading the audience in the first days of marketing communications including public relations. AIDA includes 4 phases through which the audience’s involvement and engagement increase and tends to convert into action (figure 2). Following AIDA model, persuasion starts with catching attention (1), then evokes the audience’s interest in the product or service (2), turns those interest into desire (3) and lastly converts the desire into real action (4). The model is originally for advertisement with advertising nature as the theoretical ground. Though, the model does not only match the traditional advertising work but also fit marketing communication in the scenario of the Internet and new media booming. This is thanks to the pure nature of promoting, creating goodwill to the target audience. (Flores 2014, 40.) It also matches the process of public relations in maintaining preferable publicity (Kotler & Armstrong 2016 a, 490) and building and remaining good relationships with publics (Seitel 2014, 5).

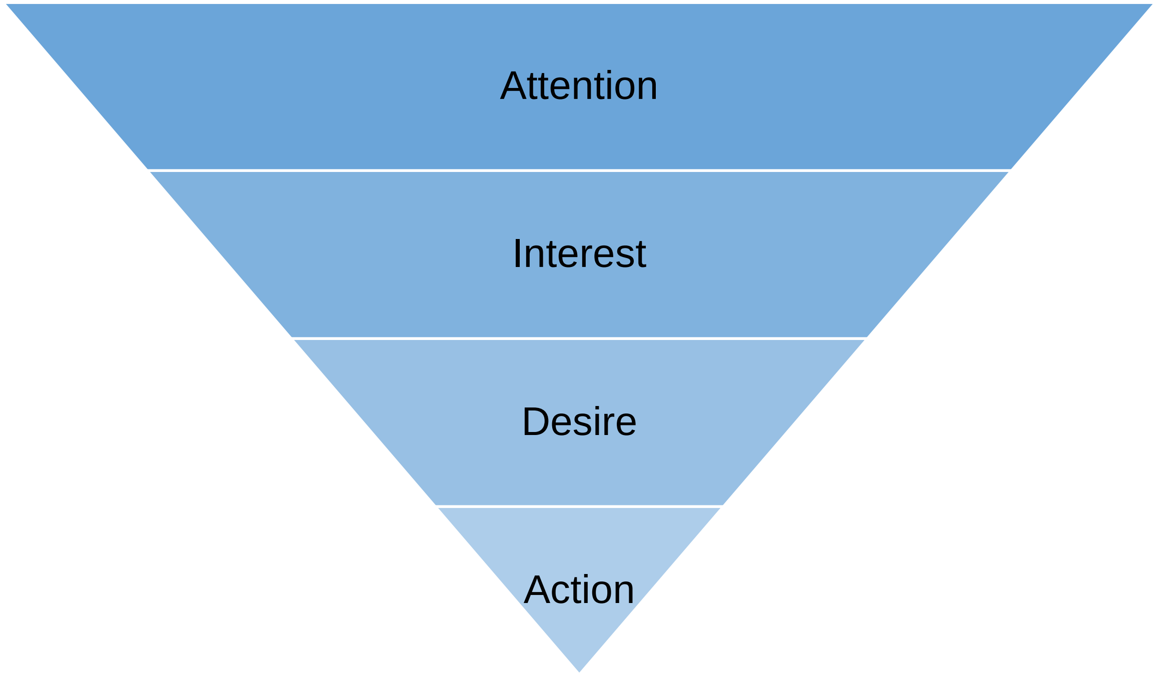

Figure 2: AIDA Model (Flores 2014, 41)

Unlikely Flores, Tuten and Solomon (2018, 349) perceive the range of objectives based on the hierarchy of the organization, which is illustrated in the social media ROI pyramid in figure 3. In other words, the implementation of each social media campaign including the use of blog goes along the organization’s objectives. Within an organization, each decision maker at a different level assesses social media marketing performance at a certain extend. This consequently affects the metric and KPIs they choose. However, it does not matter which objective is set, the two author claims that the decisions always contain 3 issues below:

1. Motivating the target audience to take action such as view, support the content.
2. Influencing the audience’s attitude toward the organization’s brand name.
3. Accomplishing the two objectives above while saving the organizational resources.

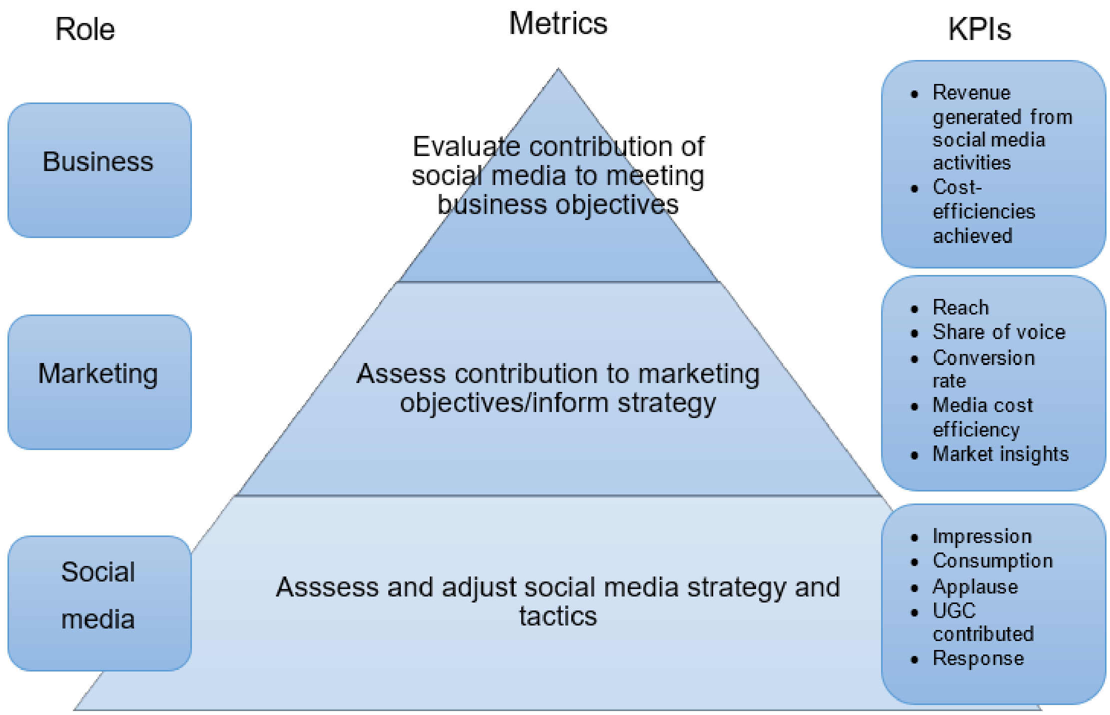

Figure 3: Social Media ROI Pyramid (Tuten & Solomon 2018, 350)

The "Social Media ROI Pyramid" model proposed by Tuten and Solomon (2018, 350) reflects different scopes of objectives in correspondence to different levels of decision makers within an organization, which influences over KPIs. However, when it comes to the case of startup facilitators, this model does not totally suit them. First, startup facilitators, as mentioned previously, are of non-profit sector whose work focuses on public value (entrepreneurship and startup culture) and is not to legally generate profits for the managerial board. It implicitly says that the top of the pyramid "business" that stresses on commercials and generating profits is not relevant to the structure of the type of organizations focused in this thesis. In addition, KPIs at the business level mentioned in the pyramid are solely on cost and prices, thus has no relations to the public relations work of startup facilitators which is advocating the entrepreneurial culture through accelerator programs, mentoring, free events, workshops and bootcamps.

Out of these two models, the classic model AIDA proves to be a more applicable model for setting an objective among startup facilitators' plan for blog. The model covers four essential steps of communicating the organizational values to the audience and getting them to take the desired action. It does not only match the process of public relations itself but the idea of the adoption of blog to public relations. In the discussion on marketing, public relations and blog, Scott (2009, 50) states three serial approaches blog can be used as a public relations tool. They incorporate monitoring the audience, getting involved in the conversation with the audience by leaving comments on others' blogs and framing the idea by creating blog posts. Except the first stage, the last two shows a transformation in the use of blog in correlations with the audience. They match the AIDA model's phases, especially “attention” and “interest”. This model, therefore, can be used in the practice of a startup facilitator setting objectives for the use of blog as a public relations tool.

Defining metrics

When it comes to assessing marketing performance, return on investment (ROI) has been naturally the common ruler. However, it is not the case of social media marketing. As discussed previously, the objectives drive the metrics for measurement the performance of a medium. This is the key point why ROI is not the core KPI. The indicator is claimed to be qualitatively positive but quantitatively negative. It means the investment in an online channel results in relationships with the target audience, but financial returns are not visible and measurable. (Charlesworth 2015, 59-60.) To put it differently, Hoffman and Fodor (2010, 42) states that the nature of ROI is for short term accomplishment such as sales, revenue in a period of time, which is not the case of startup facilitators. Building relationship with the audience takes time and is for long run. This also matches the pure idea behind public relations in which blog communicates the organization's value through its content. Given those circumstances, ROI is not the first and foremost indicator of blog performance, especially in the context of startup facilitators whose work is open to public and focuses on the public advocacy of entrepreneurship.

An approach to deciding and managing metrics is the social media marketing metrics matrix. The matrix categorizes metrics into three types based on their characteristics as in table 1. Each characteristic can also be viewed as a scope of sub-objectives that match different hierarchical level of the decision maker. (Tuten & Solomon, 353.)

Table 1: Social Media Metric Framework (Tuten & Solomon 2018, 354-355)

Category/ Characteristic	**Quantitative Measures**	**Qualitative Measures**
Activity	Number, frequency, and recency of posts by type, channel Content design: call to action used, type of headline and number of words, average word count of post, interactive design element, hashtag use Summary views: post rates, content type mix, response rate, average response time	Creative messaging and positioning strategy Resonance/fit of campaign appeal Social media involvement Content alignment to brand image and voice Relative value/audience-centricity of content
Interaction	Number, frequency, and recency of impressions/reach, registrations, bookmarks/favorites/likes/rating, comments/posts/mentions/tags, links/trackbacks/clickbacks, downloads/installs/embeds, subscriptions, fans/followers/friends, share/forward/invite/refer, reviews/testimonials, traffic/visits/views, time spent with post, UGC contributed, echo effect/virality	Sentiment Engagement Influence effects Recommendations Buzz/virality
Performance	Engagement Cost/prospects	Attitude toward the brand

	Lead conversion rate Average new revenue per customer Cost efficiencies across marketing functions Earned media values Shifts in average site traffic/search engine ratings Share of voice Return on investment	Brand loyalty Customer satisfaction Service quality perceptions

Activity metrics reflects the organization's input to social media. It measures the level of commitment of the organization to activities on social media such as content, formats, tactics. The measure indicates the effectiveness of a tactic, which helps in further adjustment. Interaction metrics provides an insight into how the audience response to the online content. The metrics discloses the audience's attitude and even relationship with the organization. Performance metrics focus on the financial return on investment in social media. It brings materials for the discussion between marketers and CFOs (chief financial officers) on marketing budget, effectiveness, fund, etc. (sb, p 353.)

The first two groups metrics can be integrated to the practice of blog at startup facilitators due to a bond between blog use and the organization. However, the last scope of metrics does not totally fit the scenario of startup facilitators. The metrics highlights the return on investment that is, as mentioned earlier, for only short term. The idea behind the practice of blog as public relations tools is to convey positive message to the audience and establish good relationships. Furthermore, in the discussion on public relations in non-profit sector that startup facilitators belong to, Andreasen and Kotler (2003, 491) state that the work of public advocacy is to influence over the target group's behavior. Startup facilitators, in fact, have been running accelerator programs and events to raise awareness and shift interested people to take the desired action such as being an entrepreneur and/or starting up a company. The whole of process of public relations and advocacy takes time to engage the community of entrepreneur without stressing on revenue and cost. The mis-match in the stress of public advocacy by startup facilitators and the third group of metrics henceforth is why startup facilitators can best adopt the first two scopes of metrics to their measurement of blog.

Besides the social media metrics matrix, adhering measurement to the marketing funnel and customer journey is an approach to define the appropriate metrics. The reason behind this means is that, each organization is at a stage on the marketing funnel that sheds the light for their objectives. Also, customer journey is a series through which customer’s attitude and commitment with the organization become greater. Each stage is measured with different metrics. Hence, the context and phase of the organization’s growth are clues for setting the right scope of KPIs. (Tuten & Solomon 2018, p 347.) The match is presented in figure 4.

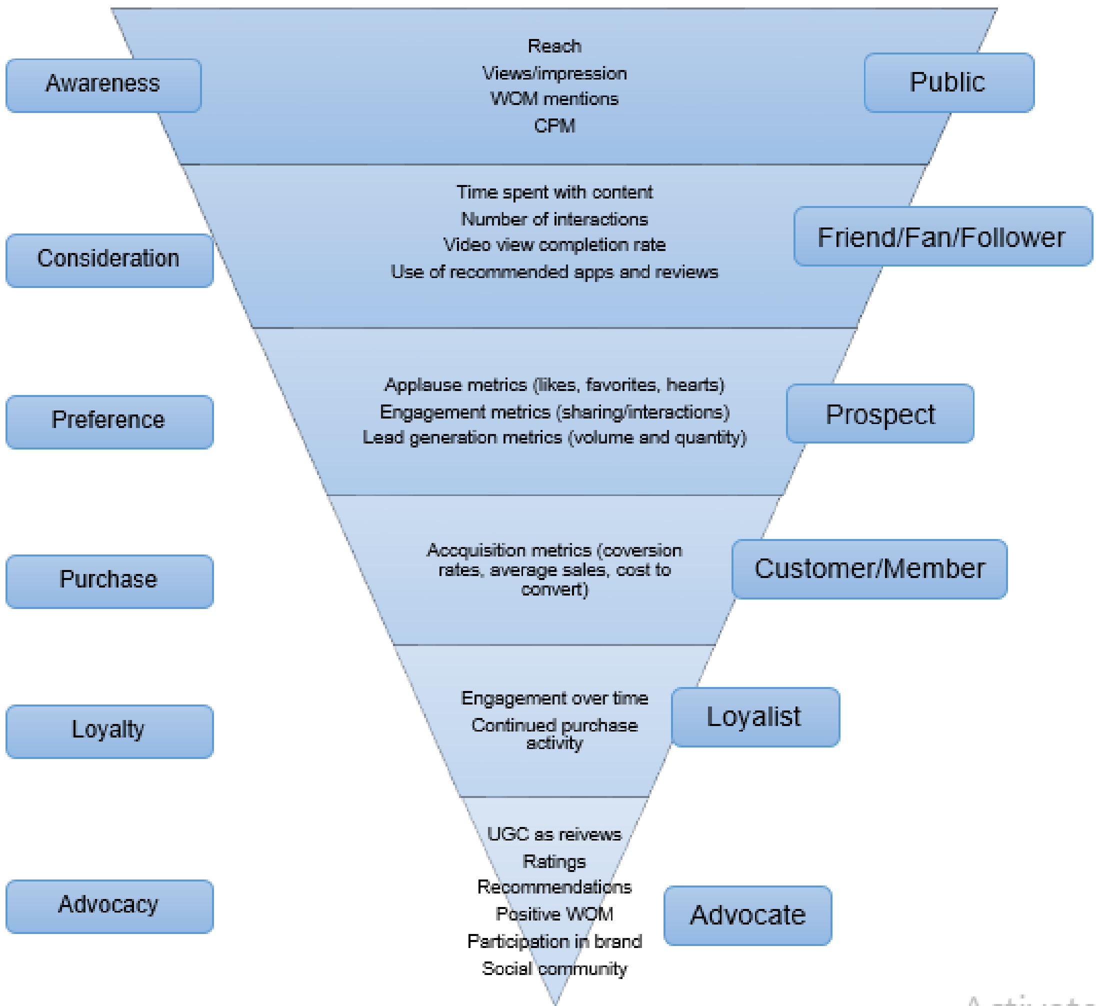

Figure 4: Matching marketing funnel and customer journey with KPIs (Tuten & Solomon 2018, 347)

Generally said, this model shows potentials in the practice of startup facilitators. Since ultimately public relations and advocacy is purely a part of marketing communications through which no matter it is a for-profit or non-profit deliver its message and value to its target group and influence their behavior. (Andreasen & Kotler 2003, 491.) Coupled with it, the model's root relies on the marketing funnel incorporating serial steps an organization walks its audience from general public to an advocate. Thus, with slight modification, this approach is applicable to the scenario of startup facilitators.

3.5 Summary

Emerging as an element of the marketing communications mix, public relations (PR) assists the organization in establishing, developing and maintain healthy relationships with its publics (Smith & Zook 2011, 312). The whole process comprises conveying positive messages, generating good publicity, monitoring and handling bad rumors of the organization. Public relations's focus is placed on three components “strategic”, “communication” and “relationship establishment”. By accomplishing positive image and relationships, PR makes such contribution to achieving the organization's mission and vision. An organization that employs public relations is benefited with cost-effectiveness and a higher degree of credibility compared to other communications approaches such as advertisement.

The research concentrates on the practice of public relations of non-profits advocating entrepreneurship. Non-profits are motivated by social interest and value, thus provide intangible offer like social impact or behavioral change. A non-profit organization that satisfies all three following factors can be called startup facilitator or entrepreneurship society. 1. The organization is stated as a non-profit. 2. It is open to the third parties including entrepreneurs, students, freelances, etc. 3. Its work features the advocacy and support to the startup culture and entrepreneurship in Finland. A few examples can be listed as AaltoES, Kiuas, XamkES, Helsinki Think Company, Tribe Tampere, Aalto Venture Program.

In the modern context of startup facilitators, the practice of public relations is pubic-centric, which covers influencing over the social behavior, making such changes and bringing values to the society. Public advocacy appears as a means to achieve these objectives with such tactics as public education, media advocacy, lobbying. (Andreasen & Kotler 2003, 470, 487&493.) Startup facilitators practice it by organizing events, workshops, meetups to inspire and grow the idea of entrepreneurship among young individuals, publishing content, blog, and providing accelerator programs, mentoring section to fuel the entrepreneurs and startups to take off.

Blog, abbreviation of “Web log”, presents an online channel for personal diary and is also a format of social media. Blog posts are in a chronological order, which means the latest update is placed on top and followed by older and older posts. The internal linkage between posts make the whole blog a complete arguable set of content. (Cho & Huh 2010, 13, 16&31.) Traditional and news blogs are the two main categories. Traditional blog is the online personal diary ordered chronologically. News blog, in contrast, presents as a news deliverer. (Kent 2008, 33-34.) Traditional blog shows more relevance to startup facilitators. For the purpose of accelerating startups, facilitators provide “immersive education” (Hathaway 2016) and “the right help to the right people” (Roberts & Kempner 2017). The pool of knowledge, skills and tools is transferred to entrepreneurs through the collection of content that blog features. The choices of platform range from historic blog on the own website to exclusive platforms with an existing audience base including Medium and LinkedIn.

The adoption of blog to public relations started under the dominance of online media. Online media make public relations objectives such as representing the organizational achievements, reaching mass audience, establishing relationships and two-way communications with the audience easier to fulfill. Under those circumstances, blog enters the world of PR as a cost-effective and time-saving channel. In addition, the channel empowers the brand to tell stories, express its attitudes and opinions (Charlesworth 2015, 127). In PR, the use of blog can be either active or passive. The active use means employing the medium to generate two-way conversation and messages to audience, while the passive use relies on taking blog to observe and learn about the audience, the industry and the environment. As a PR tool, blog is considered powerful in 1. Researching, 2. Issue framing, 3. Interactivity.

Measurement is undeniably important to the practice of blog. Measuring the performance gives an insight into the health of channel and helps in adjusting the strategy to reach the organization’s goals. (Tuten & Solomon 2018, 344.) First and foremost, defining objectives is necessary as analysis is impossible without a goal. Metrics can be coped with the classic model AIDA, which covers four steps (awareness, interest, desire, and action) to persuade the audience from general to narrow. Another approach is matching the objectives with the organizational hierarchy, which determines key performance metrics (KPIs) in the Social Media ROI Pyramid. (Tuten & Solomon 2018, 350.) However, this approach involves a business level closely related to revenue and profit. To put it differently, it does not fit the context of startup facilitators which are non-profits and open to public. On the other hand, AIDA model matches the nature and process of public relations. Equally, the route of AIDA model is applicable to the use of blog as a PR tool in getting involved in the conversation with the audience, raising awareness and transforming to be the opinion leader. (Scott 2009, 50.)

Following objectives is defining metrics. Tuten and Solomon (2018, 354-355) suggests the Social Media Metric Framework that incorporates three groups of metrics namely Activity, Interaction and Performance. Each represents one aspect and characteristic of the use of an online medium. Activity and Interaction center on how the organization use the tool and reaction from the audience and are appropriate to the practice of blog at startup facilitators. Nonetheless, the Performance group pays attentions to the cost, revenue, return on investment, which is not relevant to the context of startup facilitators. Another framework is integrating the marketing funnel and customer journey into KPIs. The model fits the case of startup facilitators in the sense that PR is a marketing communications tool and the audience eventually go through these serial steps from a general audience to an advocate. Relying on this framework to determine which stage the audience are at and defining the metrics for blog measurement is acceptable in the scenario of startup facilitators.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research methodology

The research design is considered as a navigator of the research in general. It is driven by the aim and research questions and orientates the whole research method and data collection process. (Ghauri & Gronhaug 2010, 54.) This research is taken following qualitative research. Qualitative research is the one through which the researcher observes the practice understanding if the practice of the phenomena is compatible or contradictory to the existing theory and knowledge (sb, p. 15). Expressly, to gain understand and insights into the studied issues is the main motivation. Qualitative research is conducted when prior knowledge of the subject is limited, and the researcher wants to explore, study and understand the respondent's perspectives. (sb, p. 196.)

The ultimate purpose of this thesis is to explore how blog has been used as a public relations tool in the sense of advocating entrepreneurship among startup facilitators in Finland. At the end, the outcome is expectedly clearer and more concrete understanding as the current knowledge is less sufficient (sb, p. 56). The collected data is initially put in the context of the motivation to discover, thus, "comes to terms with the meaning" (Van Maanen 1979, cited in Ghauri & Gronhaug 2010, 196). Featuring the fullness and the depth of the collected data, it is impossible that the researcher obtains it through a standardized approach that relies on number and quantitative base (Saunders et al. 2000, 381). By the same token, throughout the qualitative research, the researcher observes attitudes and opinions towards the use of blog and measurement. The researcher focuses on the richness of interviewees' perspectives and gains an insight into the studied subject – blog as a public relations in terms of advocating entrepreneurship. The collected data is the root of the generation of new knowledge of how to effectively employ blog to serve a startup facilitator's public relations purpose. With this intention, qualitative research is the best methodology directing the whole research.

4.2 Data collection method

Associated with qualitative research is qualitative interview (Bryman & Bell 2007, 404). Qualitative interview highlights the freedom in expression in words, tone and attitude and the flexibility. The term, henceforth, is also called in-depth interview and includes unstructured and semi-structured interviews (sb, p. 474). In-depth interview, 'a purposeful discussion between two or more people' (Kahn and Cannell 1957, cited in Saunders et al. 2009, 318), benefits the researcher with a full set of data and understanding on the respondents and their perspectives (Ghauri & Gronhaug 2010, 126). Alongside structured and unstructured interviews, semi-structured interview is an approach that balances and differs from the other two. In semi-structured, a list of questions is prepared in advance, but the respondent is free to express their attitudes, motivations, reasons, and opinions. Each respondent answer to a different scope of questions depending on the context, flow of information and the interviewee themselves. Also, additional questions may be given upon the interview. Given these factors, semi-structured interview is respectively categorized as non-standardized. (ibid.)

One-to-one semi-structured interviews were conducted as the means perfectly matches the nature and purpose of this thesis. Semi-structured interview provides the researcher with a set of in-depth and value-laden data (Ghauri & Gronhaug 2010, 126). The research determines and understands the respondents' attitudes, opinions and the reasons behind them, which is what the researcher seeks through an exploratory qualitative research. (Saunders et al. 2009, 323-324.) One-to-one interview maximizes the advantage of freedom for expressing and observing and helps the researcher gather meaningful and detailed data (Quinlan 2011, 290). A noticeable drawback of one-to-one interview is time-consumption.

In order to overcome the one drawback of one-to-one interview, email interview is an alternative. Email interview is categorized as an asynchronous interview that belongs to online interview. This means the interviewee receives the list of interview questions via an email yet does not have to provide their responses in real time. (Quinlan 2011, 291.) Email interview is not under the impact of time constraint. That is to say the interviewee can provide their answers to the interview questions at their convenient time. It helps in the sense that the respondent has enough time to provide adequate answers without the pressure of time. Not to mention, this means fits those interviewees with a busy schedule and cannot reserve a time slot for a face-to-face interview. (Hawkins 2018, 494.) Email interview gives the researcher access to the interviewees who cannot schedule a face-to-face meeting due to their hectic working schedule but is interested in the thesis. Also, the method is cost efficient, which enable the researcher to retrieve the information from the interviewee that is physically distant (Meho 2006, 1285). The researcher, subsequently, does not have to travel to different cities where those startup facilitators are located, which saves lots of time and resources. Conducting email interview as an alternative along the primary method (face-to-face semi-structured interview) means the researcher cannot avoid the difference in the quality of the data. Hawkins (2018, 495-496) claims that short answers given via electronic mails without the integration of voice, tone, facial express will raise a challenge in data interpretation for the researcher. Arguing this, Meho (2006, 1291) states the quality of data is not necessarily poor as it depends on the respondent. In some cases, a brief and precise answer gives a full bit of data.

Understanding the benefits and challenges in using the mix of the method, the research conducted 3 face-to-face interviews and 1 email interviews to ensure the variation and fullness of the input. The ideal targeted respondents are marketing coordinators, communications managers and social media marketers of startup facilitators in Finland. The selection of interviewees is based two main criteria. First, they are working in accelerating or supporting entrepreneurs and startups. Second, their titles and responsibilities range from marketing communications to social media marketing and content writing. It must be remembered that working in the field and taking responsibility for online communication means the interviewees have sufficient knowledge that they are able to provide meaningful data the researcher looks for. The research employed the network in the ecosystem and strived to reach out potential candidates via email.

An email including the background of the researcher, the research purpose, its potential contributions to the interviewees' work, invitation to the interview, schedule and confidentiality was sent over to 8 potential interviewees from 7 non-profits and 1 media company on January 13th, 2019. On the non-profit side, the researcher received total 4 responses and conducted interviews with 3 respondents from the non-profit side. They are Kiuas, Tribe Tampere and TS (the respondent from this organization preferred to stay anonymous). The interview with Tribe Tampere was an email interview with follow-up emails due to the hectic working schedule of the interviewee. The choice of media company is to back up the data from the non-profit side and benchmark the organizations from two different sectors working in the same field. The media company named ArcticStartup also participated in a face-to-face interview. Data collection period was from January 21st to February 6th, 2019. After agreement on the one-to-one interview, the list of questions in English was sent in advance. The list is attached in the appendix 1.

4.3 Data analysis strategy

The collected data is qualitative data. The emphasis of qualitative research is concerned with words and expressions (Bryman & Bell 2007, 401). Must be remembered that, qualitative data is mainly different from quantitative data in the sense that it is not numerical and non-standardized. Hence, qualitative data relies on the meaning of the words added by the tone and attitude during expression. To put it differently, the interpretation and analysis of the collected data is based on the concepts but not frequency or numerical standard. (Saunders et al. 2009, 381.)

The research commences with an exploratory purpose. The collected data is treated as the root for the generation of new ideas and knowledge of the use blog as a public relation at startup facilitators. The whole process is labeled “grounded theory”. (Ghauri & Gronhaug 2010, 206.) Grounded theory also enables the researcher to determine the relationship of the main concepts, which can be a hypothesis for further research. Coupled with the context that the prior knowledge is limited and the intention of the researcher, grounded theory is the relevant data interpretation approach.

5 RESEARCH RESULTS

In total, the researcher held four interviews. On the non-profit side, three interviews including one email interviews with Tribe Tampere and two face-to-face meetings with Kiuas and TS were conducted. Since the input was insightful of the organizational operation, the respondent from TS preferred to stay anonymous and the organization is addressed by the abbreviation of the organizations' name TS. The three respondents are addressed as R1 (Tribe Tampere), R2 (Kiuas) and R3 (TS). The interviewee from media company focused on startup and entrepreneurship ArcticStartup shall be regarded as R4.

The interviews covered three main themes. The first theme was stressed on the practice of public relations by those startup facilitators. The concern of public advocacy of entrepreneurship was raised with questions focusing on what and how those organizations have done to generate goodwill, publicity of entrepreneurial culture and establish good relationship with its target public. The second theme was to explore the adoption of blog to the organization's public relations and the interviewee's opinion on the medium. The last theme – blog's effectiveness measure – helped significantly in theorizing. The outcomes were the process of determining objectives and metrics as well as the procedure of measuring the performance of blog.

5.1 The practice of public relations by those startup facilitators

The trait of startup facilitators

Commencing with the target publics, one of the highlights to indicate of the organization type, all four respondents stated the primary focus is on entrepreneurs. Must be remembered that entrepreneurs are technology-oriented and focusing technology and high growth. The scope of entrepreneurs comprises entrepreneurs, potential entrepreneurs, "entrepreneurial-minded people", "first-time entrepreneurs", and "aspiring entrepreneurs". The idea of potential, aspiring entrepreneurs or entrepreneurial-minded people can be elaborated that it is not necessary that those people who come to the organization already know that they want to be entrepreneurs but maybe they discover when they are coming to the organization. Another common pattern is that, though the main target group is entrepreneurs, none of four interviewees claimed solely entrepreneurs. Some startup facilitators also deal with investors, supporters, big corporations in fields of innovation, management and disruptive innovation. This group is regarded as startup-related. The target publics, in addition, counts students and graduates. That being said, the organization literally is open to everybody also known as public.

The work of startup facilitators incorporates assistance to entrepreneurs at different stages and on different angles. Mainly, facilitation is provided to those entrepreneurs who have determined their ideas, formed their teams and are ready to take off. In this case, startup facilitators play a role in providing the entrepreneurs with necessary tools, accelerator programs, and one-on-one mentoring. Through the events and programs, the organizations connect entrepreneurs with investors and corporations that are interested in disruptive innovations and reinforce knowledge sharing. R2 stressed “it’s more like the first step actually take when you want to become an entrepreneur”. Furthermore, the support that startup facilitators give can be considered as fueling the engines for startups. Expressly, the center is on those startups that are not at the idea stage but have built their product/service and look to scale up and expand their business. R2 also added that AaltoES – the entrepreneurship society that Kiuas used to belong to till the beginning of 2019 – is more focused on the inspiring phase.

Another notable idea on supporting startup comes from R3. R3 highlighted that TS is a community and focuses on people. Their support to startups, hence, is “an unconscious way”. It means the organization is established as a community to bring diversity to the startup ecosystem. With attention to diversity and people, the organization inspires, empowers, trains and provides people with the expertise that allows them to join startups. It serves as a springboard, matching talents with startup, which has “happy consequences on startups” and “a powerful impact on supporting them”.

Public relations and public advocacy of entrepreneurship in Finland

Public relations function is stated under different terms and formats at startup facilitators. The mutual pattern is, however, the respondents implicitly referred to promoting the organization and its offer to the target publics. The direct function of public relations is to get the target group to apply for its program, start up a company and succeed. It means promoting the organization and its activities in a sustained way. From the perspective of a media company, public relations function is slightly different. It is executed either in-house or under collaboration with PR firms. PR firms assist the organization in spreading the words out when it comes to ArcticStartup's major event – its annual conference Arctic15. Promotion is done as "pitching us or our conference to different bigger media outlets; international media helping us with media coverage for the conference, helping us with some major announcements". Although the ultimate function of public relation is promoting the organization and its activities, an organization handles different events with different kinds of audiences, which means it should think about whom it is talking to and what it is needed when practicing public relations. Alongside, social media management is of function of public relations at startup facilitators.

Digging into public relations correlated with advocacy of entrepreneurship, the emergence and influence of online media tend to dominate. Two respondents agreed that initially providing what the audience need then placing the promotion part online through digital marketing and social media channel is the key. Public relations nowadays are not as traditional public relations where press release and announcements are the most effective tools. As the audience gather and consume news from different sources and medium. It means to communicate the issue, phenomenon to the audience, the organization needs to employ all communications channel including its owned media.

No respondent knew about peer and likewise organizations as well as their public relations activities in advocating entrepreneurship. However, two of them believed that the nature of the program and the organization would differ the organization. R2 emphasized that the way startup facilitator Kiuas is doing to accelerate entrepreneurs is already different from those organizations focusing on the inspiring phase. Granted that "the program itself is different", Tribe Tampere has also been implementing public advocacy of entrepreneurship in a separate way. The startup facilitator gathers entrepreneur-minded people and entrepreneurial actors under “its umbrella” to boost the startup culture, shares the stories of startups and provides the opportunity to get involved in the projects established at the organization. R3, comparatively, stated “the natural fit”, “community” and “hitting everything” as what make TS unique. In that sense, public relations and advocacy at the organization is more flexible and more of storytelling, which means every member is an ambassador and has the power to say. On the contrary, R4 did not note any difference but only advised that the company applies tailor-made message in its announcements as a part of public relations strategy. Each message is tailored to each particular media outlet or person they pitch and they “do everything possible” to make them available to journalists, media outlets.

5.2 The adoption of blog the organization’s public relations

Adopting blog as a public relations tool

The majority of respondents affirmed that blog is an important channel and content delivery tool. As the content of blog is created “consciously” (R3) and good content is significantly important in communicating the organization’s values to its community of entrepreneurs. Startup facilitators decided to adopt blog or maintain its blog as startup media where they share entrepreneurial stories, advices and tips, useful information. Valuable content is distributed on blog. Compared to press release – another common tool in public relations, blog is aimed for “people who are interested to learn something specific” rather than journalists and media outlets who are usually in close relations with the organization’s PR. Also, blog makes the access to information easier and available to the audience.

Important to realize, adopting blog to the startup facilitator’s communications, the tool makes such contribution to validating the brand of the organization. To clarify, delivering valuable content proves that the organization has knowledge and expertise in what it is doing, and it is a reliable source for anyone interested in entrepreneurship or startup.

R3 shared another new interesting point of view. At TS, blog is primarily adopted for the purpose of storytelling. Expressly, micro-blog such as Twitter could not feature long stories. Instead, blog combined with stories digs into “the reasoning behind” and “says it for you”. By the same token, the use of blog gives the voice to the community, which means people are free to express their perceptions, stories and attitudes. It is can also public relations.

In addition, the medium is also employed for updating events, what the organizations have been up to on a regular basis. In particular, R4 claimed the practice of blog is to separate the company’s media business from its annual startup conference. As the conference has several announcements including entrepreneurial celebrities’ participation which may cause an effect on the community of entrepreneurs, blog shows its perfect fit.

The choice of platform where blog is presented includes the startup facilitator’s own website and Medium. Half of the respondents relied on the organization’s website, while the rest referred to Medium, an exclusive platform with existing reader base. Each has significant contributions to the idea behind public relations strategy of the organizations. SEO (search engine optimization) benefit is strongly appreciated when blog is placed on the organization’s website. They stressed that SEO is the main reason. The easiest way to level up the rank on Google is to build content. If the content is on Medium, the benefit of keyword and SEO belongs to the platform but not the organization. Also, R4 recommended that AS’s blog is hosted by WordPress, a platform for building website and blog, which includes SEO tool and makes blogging task easier without a hand from any specialists or experts. Alongside SEO, blog on the organization’s website helps in the journey of the audience. In other words, “when you click to our blog, you are already on our website”. This makes it easier to navigate to the website and the experience of audience smoother.

On the other hand, those who referred to Medium proposed different ideas. Adhering to the notion of community and freedom in expression, Medium is the right match. “We’re a community and we want to mean it. We need many people speaking on the behalf of the organization" (R3). The platform highlights the contributors and contributed content to an organization/publication by linking the profile of the writer directly to the article. For this reason, Medium unleashes the freedom to expressing matching the objective of the organization. Fairly different from other interviewees, R1 explicitly preferred not to address the organization's content shared on Medium as a blog. R1 said "I think we don't have a blog at all". Because "the team blog, it's more like not so professional way to create content". R1 perceived the organization's blog as a "collection of useful articles".

As a public relations tool, all respondents indicated the active use of blog in advocating entrepreneurship in Finland. Blog is where the organization express its opinions, reasons in details and provides educational content on a specific topic to its audience. The community of entrepreneurs retrieve such information as stories, advices, useful articles are influenced by the thoughts of the organization. It can be called adding some "extra spice". Furthermore, another suggestion is sharing content to different channels reaching a wider range of startup communities and societies. In effect, content is published in the network. Another fresh idea is that blog use shall be called active when it is coherent to the reality at the organization. "How you act, what you are doing" and making everything at the organization match with the image of its blog is the ultimate key to getting blog to be a part of public relations.

Interestingly, the passive use of blog will help turn it into active use. Kiuas is the only case that takes both active and passive uses of blog as a public relations tool. The startup facilitator is run by young people and freshly independent from the parental organization. Thus, it is seeking its own way and its own voice. Under those circumstances, observation assists the organization in shaping the voice and image of its blog.

Blog in public advocacy of entrepreneurship

Blog plays a role in communicating with the community of entrepreneurs. The medium is a bridge between startup facilitators and entrepreneurs. Through blog, the organization reach out its target audience and raise awareness. The channel contributes to informing and making announcement to the entrepreneur community. Furthermore, sharing knowledge and valuable content is reinforced by the practice of blog. It eventually means the name of the organization and its blog become a good source for entrepreneurs or those interested in startup.

Regarding strengths of blog as a PR tool in advocacy of entrepreneurship, respondents highlighted the ownership of the medium. “You own the media. You are the boss.” Unlike external media expressing their opinions toward the organization, blog enables the organization to express its own opinions. Also, the medium is content delivery tool allowing long and concrete content. A well-planned content strategy turns blog a valuable platform and consequently make the organization “look professional” (R2). Forthwith, the audience are influenced by the content and take the information they retrieve to the practice of their business and/or apply for the accelerator programs of the startup facilitator. Equally important, it positions the organization as an opinion leader and gives a feeling. Effectively employing blog in opinion leadership drives the organization to relationship building with its audience.

Blog implementation

Concerning frequency of update, it is quite a controversial discussion. Half of the interviewees said that there should be at least two articles per month. However, R4 called a blog “dead” if the organization post only once or twice per month. At ArcticStartup, twice per week makes the job in its blog – its media business. In its unique case, the blog catered for its annual grand conference is scheduled seasonally. Only the 6 months, especially the 2 months, before the event, 2-3 posts are updated weekly. For the rest of the year, the company creates approximately 3 blog posts based on the data collected from the event. Unlike the other three, R3 stated that at least one blog post is live per week. It adheres to the schedule of events happening throughout the week at the organization. Address the point on tying the organization’s blog to its events, an editorial calendar would greatly help. It provides a big picture and structure. The rest is deciding which kind of content fits which event. By doing so, in spite of changes or extra events, the blog is still “on the path”.

Discussing topics for blog, one common pattern is that blog posts should be in correlation to the organization, its programs and events. Alongside, articles that cover startup (e.g: what it is like to be a startup), entrepreneurs (e.g: how it is to be an entrepreneur) and technology (if the community show interest in new technology, e.g: AI, marketing automation, augmented reality) are considered appropriate. Alumni stories are also valuable content and resources for sharing knowledge. Their stories concern various aspects such as how they started the project, what challenges they faced and how they overcame them. That being said, while they tell their stories, they share knowledge of different topics that are of interest of the audience.

In order to create valuable content and credible blog, a big picture with three components “goal”, “yearly calendar of events” and “content” is the guide. The coordinator must match them and create chunks or units of content, avoiding repetition on the content. The audience are another the clue. The organization should learn from comments from its readers, “coping the question with the comments and writing a blog post that answers the question”. In like manner, keep an eye on the latest trends is highly recommended. At this point, media company seems to reap more benefits from its operation and experience than the non-profits. The company has been in the field for years, its understanding on the audience and their needs for content would be precious input to building its blog. Not to mention, the company is well-established that it receives press releases. Observation to catch up with what is being discussed is at ease to the company.

Moreover, bloggers work in the organization, thus understand the organization, its events and community. “It’s very easy to have them coming up with the topics. Because they want to share something that they believe valuable for the community.” Equally important, it is emphasized that a reader persona should be the first step to begin designing the blog. R4 took an example of AS’s three groups of audience (newbies to entrepreneurship and the ecosystem in Finland; those who already knows about the company; fans and supporters). Each group is at a different stage on the funnel with specific features and needs. Hence, the company provides different types of content to them. That being said, the role of outline a reader persona who would read the blog is inevitable important.

5.3 Measuring the effectiveness of blog

Matching objectives with metrics in measurement

Measurement starts with defining objectives, what startup facilitators expect to gain through the practice of blog. Respondents disclosed that the ultimate objective of is to build relationship with its target group and gradually get the audience to take the desire action. “You generate leads by creating some really interesting pieces of content on the blog. It can be a nice article, or an article with a video, podcast, or any pieces of content that you want to be published on blog. And from that, you can get their attention to you. If people like you, they subscribe. When they subscribe, you send them another piece of information and another and another till the point that they start buying from you.” – said R4. The desired action can be applying for the accelerator program or purchasing (the case of ArcticStartup). Throughout the journey of the audience, the audience can be divided into three groups (1) newbies who are aware of entrepreneurship and would like to learn, (2) readers who have been around for a while and (3) fans and supports who are engaged to content of the organization. Each group is assigned with a different metrics following the level of awareness and commitment to the organization. Newbies, for instance, can be measured by subscription rate and engagement. The second group, on the other hand, can be tracked by engagement and sales, while the focus of the last group is to maintain engagement. Engagement level is ultimately indicated by conversions. Shares, likes, and comments are real time indicators as long as they are organic.

The most recommended metrics are reach, read and the average time spent on the page. The correlations between the three metrics is the cornerstone. It indicates whether and how many people read the article, if the article and the topic is interesting and addresses their problem, and whether challenge is lied on the content or the message when the piece of content is shared on other social media channels. Correspondingly, the valuable and engaging content keeps the audience on the blog and website longer, which leads to engagement and desired action. Again, it fits the route of objectives.

R3 commented that strictly following the statistics, however, is not ideal. “This story wins, this story loses. We are not utterly concerned, because if it’s relevant, then it’s relevant.” A parameter on the relevance of the topic to the audience is suggested. The organization can consider if the blog post is related to the organization, startup, entrepreneurs and the community and if it gives any value either in short term or long term. The idea behind the relevant parameter is not to “kill any ideas”. Followingly, the concentration is placed on the content and message.

A successful blog trait

As a PR tool, a successful blog in advocating entrepreneurship must be without empty tags. It means when the audience click to the link, they should receive the content that is promised on the title or headline. The sufficient provision of informative and valuable content triggers the transformation into action. As credibility and validation of the brand of the organization are satisfied. A network of related topics can be built to retain the audience on the blog and engage them to the content. In that sense, the audience “go deeper, deeper and deeper” till they find the organization interesting and decide to take action. Addressing the problems and offering the content that the audience don’t even know what they need is the key. The design of blog, henceforth, should be appealing and easy for the readers to navigate through the network of content. By the same token, blog should be dynamic and frequently updated. Once or twice per week is recommended. In addition, the content should be truthful. It respectively makes blog a tool that truly serves the ultimate goal of public relations.

6 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Discussions and conclusions

This research is conducted on the purpose of exploring and understanding how startup facilitators in Finland employ blog as an effective public relations tool. The final outcome is expected to give more insights into the practice of blog which serves as a guideline for those organizations. To answer the research question, the researcher seeks understanding on how blog is being used for promoting entrepreneurship by startup facilitators and what indicates the effectiveness of blog.

Throughout the research, the concepts of public relations and blog have been reviewed in a correlation. Also, general assumption on the practice of both terms at startup facilitators is generated. Qualitative research is conducted in the hope to obtain the point of views of startup facilitators. Data collected from semi-structured interviews helps in understanding how marketing and communications coordinators perceive those concepts and the connection between them. Equally important, metrics and indicators are disclosed regarding setting a so-called standard for a successful blog in startup facilitation field.

In Finland, startup facilitators have been well determined. The first and foremost focus audience of those organization are entrepreneurs including potential, first-time, aspiring entrepreneurs. Also, the organizations target startup-related group concerning investors, supporters, corporations in disruptive field. Students are of target publics as well. The majority is startup facilitators are non-profit organizations yet facilitating entrepreneurs and startups is not limited to the non-profit sector only. Hence, facilitation can be considered from different perspectives. Must be remembered that, startup facilitators focus on those startups that have refined their ideas at least. Then, the term facilitation is sufficient in the sense of fueling startups to grow and expand. It means hosting accelerator programs, events for startup connecting with investors and supporters, and providing mentoring, knowledge and tools. The research also presents a fresh point of view on startup facilitators. Organizations that indirectly impact the grow of startups such as training labor, bringing diversity and qualified personnel to startup can be considered as supporters to startup.

The practice of public relations at startup facilitators centers on two of the five main functions of PR proposed by Heath & Coombs (2006, 8). At those organizations, public relations serves the purpose of promoting the organization and its programs (accelerators programs, workshops, trainings, events). It eventually advocates entrepreneurship and startup culture in the community. Henceforth, it can be concluded that public relations mainly functions in “Implementing publicizing” (attracting attention and informing for an event) and “Implementing promoting” (attracting attention and informing overtime).

Public relations, from the perspectives of the respondents, is viewed in a strong relation to the nature and reality of the organizations. The advocacy of entrepreneurship directly arises from the activities of the organizations. Each assists entrepreneurs with a different scope of activities, through which the startup facilitator differs itself. In effect, word-of-mouth and storytelling are included as promoting the organization and advocating the entrepreneurial mindset. Coupled with it, public advocacy of entrepreneurship is regarded under the influence of digital marketing. It requires the organizations to leverage available and relevant channels to spread the word. This validates the idea of adopting blog to public relations and entrepreneurship advocacy.

In advocacy of entrepreneurship, the importance of blog has proved in sharing valuable content to the community of entrepreneurs. Rather than public relations, the medium is addressed as part of communications. Expressly, sharing knowledge and telling stories are best featured by the use of blog. The medium is employed in terms of a platform for entrepreneurs to access information, learn about startup and the ecosystem. The audience receive intangible values from the organization through valuable content on the topic. As a result, startup facilitators reap the benefit of brand validation and conversion into desired actions.

The location of blog depends the priority of the startup facilitator. The own website is the perfect choice for those striving to be on a high rank on Google for the focus keyword. In order words, blog serves SEO (search engine optimization) purpose by adhering its content to the keyword strategy. Also, having blog on the website makes the experience smoother and easier for the audience.

Nevertheless, those organizations that prioritizes the value of ideas and freedom for expression can employ Medium. In this case, the presence of contributors and ownership of ideas are highlighted. Additionally, Medium is perceived as a professional platform for reading and digestion. A collection of articles on the channel may make the content provided by the startup facilitator sound more professional than blog written by bloggers.

Since blog is adopted on the purpose of sharing knowledge, the active use dominates. Through active use, startup facilitators express its opinions, attitude in correspondence to providing knowledge, tools, advices and useful information. The extra spice blog adds to the association with the organization name leads it to the position of opinion leader. Ideally, opinion leadership convert the audience into support and desired action. It, again, fulfills the objectives of startup facilitators: promoting entrepreneurship and reinforcing the expansion of startup culture. The passive use of blog, on the other hand, is not mainly taken into consideration. Instead, it is a part of blog building procedure. Startup facilitators observe and learn its audience aiming at improving its blog posts in future.

Scholars claim blog’s strengths as on research gate, opinion leadership, and interactivity. The research shows that the most recognized strength is the power to deliver content and influence the audience. Blog is a bridge between the organization and the community of entrepreneurs that distributing announcements, information about events, valuable pieces of content. A well-planned blog rewards the organization with brand validation and potential of conversion.

To the end that blog becomes a communication channel for valuable content, startup facilitators should follow a couple of principles. Frequency should be first considered. One blog post published per week would remain the stable regularity, especially for those employing blog for announcements and event updates. Topics that suit the audience who are entrepreneurs or likely to be entrepreneurs are related startup, entrepreneurship and technology. Must be remembered that the articles should provide concrete knowledge rather than abstract and inspirational quotes. Promoting programs and events can be covered with articles digging deeper into the reasoning or story behind. Alumni stories uniquely bolster both sharing knowledge and communicating the value of the programs and events.

An editorial balancing the startup facilitator’s goal, yearly event calendar and audience is highly recommended in building a blog. It helps marketing coordinators and bloggers assign the most appropriate content unit to each period of the year, which is a pedal to achieve the goal. Moreover, as there is a strong bond between their programs, events, public relations strategy with the goal of startup facilitation, startup facilitators should never miss out listening to their audience. Observing the needs, trends and reacting quickly by generating blog post instantly is the engine for the blog. What the audience leaves on their comments is glues and the core inspiration bloggers shall take. The best practice is the audience are segmented based on their stage on the marketing funnel. Content is then customized according to their features and specific demands.

Segmentation does not only empower blogger to improve blog but also orientates measurement of blog. Despite getting applicants for the accelerator or selling tickets to startup events as the ultimate goal, the objectives for each segment should not be the same. Instead, they are corresponding to the phase on AIDA model. Newbies, for instance, are at the “Awareness” stage, while fans are at “Desire” and/or “Action” phase. Accordingly, metrics are different such subscription rate and engagement are more relevant to the Awareness stage whereas engagement is the foremost measure for fans and supporters. Equally important, marketing coordinators should pay attention to three metrics: reach, read and the average time spent on the page. The metrics and its correlations indicate why and how the blog is and is not working as well as whether the blog has balanced the three components mentioned earlier (goal, yearly event calendar and audience) and addressed the entrepreneur’s needs. Another parameter whose focus is on content and ideas is the relevance. Simply, the blog and its articles are assessed on the criteria such as relevance to the organization, startup, entrepreneurs and the community, values in short term and long term.

After reviewing how the medium is currently practiced, the researcher created a checklist for a successful blog tailored for startup facilitators:

- No empty tags. Content must be concrete and mindful providing real knowledge and necessary tools that can influence over entrepreneurs. The content is the takeaway to the entrepreneurs’ businesses.
- A network of content. A well-planned blog content strategy must create a “loop” that the audience deep-dive into. To put it different, the readers find not only what they need but also what they don’t know they need.
- Once or twice per week as frequency.
- Appealing and easy-to-navigate design.
- Being truthful.

6.2 Limitations and suggestions for further researches

The research has finally explored the practice of blog at startup facilitators as well as perceptions of those organizations on the concepts of public relations, facilitation and blog. A tailored guideline has been created in the hope that it would support startup facilitators in building a healthy channel that shares valuable content, influences its audience and converts into desired action. However, limitations are inevitable throughout the researching process. The unavailability of prior theory on public relations as well as the practice of blog in the research scope is the motivation of the researcher yet the limitation. The integration of those primary concepts is the researcher’s personal assumption of based on the general knowledge and observation. Not to mention most of the term of startup facilitators has not been well defined for a while. Those organizations participating in the interviews perceive public relations and blog different ways and are on their own way to contribute the growth of startup ecosystem in Finland. The research results then provide the answers to the research questions; however, the limitation is on validation of the knowledge and collected data. By the same token, public relations has been transforming in the digital era and blog is increasingly widely perceived as a digital marketing and social media tool. Future researchers, therefore, can take into consideration solely centering on blog as a digital marketing tool. Another suggestion is future researches can be conducted to understand the issue from the perspectives of the entrepreneurs. The researches can follow either qualitative orientation (explore their opinions toward the phenomenon) or quantitative direction (examine if blog is effective in delivering content and values of startup facilitator to entrepreneurs).

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Appendix 1

INTERVIEW QUESTION LIST

The practice of public relations by those startup facilitators

- Who is the organization’s target public (general, society, entrepreneurs, potential entrepreneurs, students, etc.)?
- What is the specific goal/mission of the organization? (inspire, connect, facilitate, etc.)
- Which of five main functions of PR is executed at the organization?
- What has been done to advocate entrepreneurial culture?
- How does the organization promote entrepreneurship and turn interest into action?
- Which specific PR activities differ the organization from other startup facilitators?

The adoption of blog to the organization’s public relations

- Why did the organization decide to use blog?
- How is blog used and presented to the target audience (owned media or Medium)?
- How does the organization use blog (passively or actively or both)?
- How does blog help in communicate with the organization’s community?
- What is the greatest strength of blog as the organizational PR tool?
- What is the most valuable contribution of blog to the advocacy of entrepreneur?
- How does the organization run its blog on regular basis?
- Where does the inspiration or ideas for content come from?
- How do you generate the content that matches entrepreneurs?

Measuring the effectiveness of blog

- How does the organization choose the key metrics?
- What are the objectives of the organization?
- Which metrics is the organization using? Why?
- How do the chosen metrics match the organizational objectives?
- Describe a blog that is successful. /Share your opinions on the trait of a successful blog.

Appendix 2

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES