12-2012

Consider the Source: Receiver-Assigned Attributions of Credibility to Influential Bloggers

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Recommended Citation

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Aaron Michael Sachs entitled "Consider the Source: Receiver-Assigned Attributions of Credibility to Influential Bloggers." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Communication and Information.

John W. Haas, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Elizabeth M. Hendrickson, Virgina W. Kupritz

Accepted for the Council:
Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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Receiver-Assigned Attributions of Credibility to Influential Bloggers

A Thesis Presented for the

Master of Science

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Aaron Michael Sachs

December 2012

Dedication

This Master's thesis is dedicated to my wife, Ashley, for encouraging me to push through the times I doubted myself and finish strong. Your love and your patience have kept me strong.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my committee: Drs. John Haas, Elizabeth Hendrickson, and Virginia Kupritz—thank you for all of your guidance, your patience, and your grace over the last year and a half. Without each of you, this thesis would not have happened.

Dr. Karen Freberg – Thank you for being so encouraging and for helping me along in my pursuit to understand influence and credibility in the social media world.

Brian Solis and Beth Kanter – Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research and for being willing to volunteer your blogs as a means for me to collect the data needed for this study.

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine credibility as it pertains to blogging. While studies have traditionally considered credibility in the context of the material being created, this study examines source credibility in the context of the personality creating the material. Therefore, this study functions primarily as an exploratory study and seeks to present an understanding of source credibility from the perspective of the individuals participating in blogging communities cultivated by influential bloggers. An interview questionnaire was specially developed for this study. Ten participants were selected for this study. Eight of them are females, two of the participants are males. All but one of the participants are Caucasians.

The study's results show that support for attributions of credibility differing based on receiver gender and ethnicity does not exist. However, there was a difference in the types of credible behavior attributed to the bloggers in this study. Responses concerning the male Hispanic blogger indicate credibly behavior oriented toward providing depth of information, whereas responses concerning the White female blogger indicated an inclination toward a community-centric blog focused on providing a broad range of resources. Due to the limited sample size of this study, the ability to make general statements and infer statistical significance is limited, thus relegating this study to being only useful for exploratory purposes. This study's results, data interpretation, implications, and possibilities for future research are discussed at length.

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Chapter 1

Introduction and General Information

The advent of social media is a phenomenon that has reshaped the cultural landscape dramatically during the last decade. Facebook, Twitter, location-based services, blogs, and social purchasing sites like Groupon and Livingsocial have enabled users to share their experiences with other individuals using these services on a scale previously unimagined and unattainable by the lone individual. Collectively, social media use has increased exponentially from 2005-2011: Facebook now has nearly 700 million users (Eldon, 2011), Twitter has 175 million accounts registered, and there are approximately 32 million Wordpress (Wordpress.com, 2010).

Along with this rise in use, thought leaders have emerged to guide and advise both businesses and consumers how to best use these tools. These individuals have established their positions as thought leaders largely through their own social media use combined with previous experience in other fields such as marketing, advertising, and public relations. They now use blogs as a means to publicly demonstrate expertise. These influential bloggers have helped to shape and guide social media use, particularly with respect to best practices for business and professional use.   The goal of this study is to explore how individual private consumers view these bloggers' source credibility. More specifically, this study aims to contribute to the body of research that examines social media influence by extending the work done by Freberg (2011) examining personality characteristics of social media influencers. This study begins with a literature review that discusses Freberg's research, source credibility, social media influencers, and blogs. Following the literature review, the hypotheses presented along with the study's proposed research methods.

Literature Review

The literature review begins with an examination of Freberg's research on social media influencers, followed by a review of literature regarding source credibility, source credibility, and concluding with a review of literature on blogs. Freberg's research is foundational to this study, as the research diverges from previous studies on influence by attempting to develop a model that would be able to predict an individual's ability to be influential based on personality characteristics. While this study will not extend the predictive elements of the research, it does seek to extend academic understanding regarding consumer perceptions of credibility in online contexts that do not possess the aspect of physical immediacy, or other such indicators leading to the perception of credibility.

Freberg's research (2011) examines the current phenomena surrounding social media in the contexts of reputation management, social media influencers, and personality characteristics, with the primary goal focusing on providing corporations with a more complete understanding as to how to better manage their online reputation. Freberg examines the concept of social media influencers, noting that these individuals are extremely powerful and possess a substantial reach—that is, the ability to have their messages disseminated and interacted with by significant amounts of consumers instantaneously via the web (2011, p.1). In order to better understand how these individuals are perceived, Freberg used the Q-sort methodology developed by Block. Block's (1978) Q-sort methodology has traditionally been used in psychological disciplines (Nunnally, 1994) to quantitatively measure subjective attribute assignments to individuals, groups, or corporations. The study examined perceptions across 32 participants by presenting them with a biographical sheet of four different influencers (Brian Solis, Charlene Li, Deirdre Breakenridge, and Jeremiah Owyang) and showing them a YouTube video clip that featured the

influencer. After presenting the participants with the media pieces, Freberg conducted the Q-sorting procedure with each of the participants. The procedure consisted of having a list of 100 attributes for the participants to sort, then giving each participant a questionnaire with Likert-type scales designed to address credibility and trustworthiness. Also, a prompt that asked participants to provide, according to Freberg (2011, p. 10), the first three words that came to mind regarding the influencer, was included in the questionnaire.

After conducting the study, Freberg examined correlations between the Social Media Influencer Prototype and the individual prototypes she constructed. The prototypes were constructed by grouping scores for the individual social media influencers, as well as the social media influencers as a whole, and processing the mean scores through a requeuing process. As Freberg states, all of the correlations were significant at the p<.01 level. She notes that the average correlation for the individual social media influencers was .88, and the overall average correlation between the individual social media influencers and the social media influencer prototypes as .94. The most characteristic items describing social media influencers were intellect, social media skills, responsibility, power, and trustworthiness. The items that least described social media influencers in the study were anxious, lacking in self-confidence, self-pitying, indecisive, and submissive. Freberg also conducted a one-way ANOVA on the credibility and trustworthiness items and found that social media influencers were not rated differently for either credibility ($F(3, 31) = 1.51$, $p=.234$) or trustworthiness ($F(3, 31) = .070$, $p= .976$).

Freberg notes the study's limitations—namely that the study was conducted using a convenience sample, that the sample was not necessarily representative of the overall population, and that the answers from the study were self-reported. However, the researcher states that the

study is useful in providing evidence for a social media influencer prototype consisting of intellect, strong social skills, responsibility, power, and trustworthiness. According to Freberg, the study is also useful for predicting the potential influence of a spokesperson, or an individual's potential influence as a social media influencer. However, further research into the area of social media influence and the predictive capabilities of this study need to be examined, as the area of research is still nascent and growing.

Credibility

The very nature of credibility is subjective—a person or piece of information does not have the inherent quality of being credible, but instead is endowed by receivers with this quality based on the receivers' judgment of the source of the information, hence "source credibility" (O'Keefe, 2002). As this study will be concerned with receiver assigned attributions of credibility to bloggers, it is paramount that a useful understanding of credibility be established and properly examined to ensure a sound operationalization of the concept for this proposed study.

Credibility finds its roots in Aristotelian rhetoric, which includes three primary concepts: *ethos, pathos,* and *logos*. Ethos, according to McCroskey and Teven (1999) is the ancient conception of credibility which was idealized as a speaker's intelligence, character, and goodwill. The researchers note that historically, the 1960s to the 1980s saw a significant number of studies aimed at developing tools to measure ethos (credibility). McCroskey and Teven conclude that sufficient measures were developed to measure intelligence and character, but not goodwill, hence the development of the "Perceived Caring Construct." This construct holds that

understanding, empathy, and responsiveness impact the perception of an individual appearing as caring, and therefore, credible.

Historically, however, credibility as a concept is identified as having two distinct dimensions: Expertise and trustworthiness. O'Keefe (2002) notes that expertise has also been operationalized by researchers as competence, expertness, authoritativeness, or qualification, and has typically been measured using semantic differential scales. The trustworthiness dimension, however, has been operationalized as character, safety, or personal integrity, and has similar scales representing this dimension. O'Keefe states that the items measuring trustworthiness are designed to assess whether or not a source will be inclined to "tell the truth as he or she sees it." With a basic understanding of the contributing factors to credibility, the literature review will now examine the two factors more in depth.

Expertise

Expertise has been represented in literature by a multitude of terms, with "competence" being one of the primary conceptualizations that has contributed to the larger idea of credibility. Expertise, or competence, as noted by O'Keefe (2002, p. 182) and is one of two dimensions contributing to the overall idea of credibility. The following portion of the literature review will consider how expertise in its various conceptions have been operationalized and examined in other studies.

Expertise, or competence, has been studied in numerous contexts with regard to communication. The healthcare field has incorporated research on communication competence as a means of assessing bedside manner for healthcare professionals, how patients feel about the communication they receive from healthcare professionals, and how healthcare professionals

communicate about terminal illness with patients (Schirmer, Mauksch, Lang, Marvel, Zoppi, Epstein, Brock, Pryzbylski, 2005; Rider and Keefer, 2006) and has done so by operationalizing expertise as both a concept, as well as a set of skills in which an individual can possess and become more proficient.

Similarly, expertise/competence has been operationalized in other fields such as organization communication, marketing, and business. Weiner and Mowen (1986) concluded in their study that previous research tended to confound expertise with trustworthiness, therefore giving an inaccurate reading of how expertise affects perceptions of credibility. Weiner and Mowen found that levels of expertise were able to strongly influence perceptions of a product's quality. and they conclude that the greater a source's perceived expertise, the greater the impact the source had on receivers.

Trustworthiness

Like its counterpart "competence," trustworthiness is another theme emergent from the myriad studies examining credibility. For the purpose of this study, trustworthiness, and the other names under which the concept has been examined, such as character and personal integrity (O'Keefe, 2002, p. 183), are examined to better understand how the construct fits into the larger concept of credibility.

With regard to the proposed study, trustworthiness bares a strong connection with source credibility. For information to be relayed from news media to a greater public audience, it must be perceived as trustworthy or reliable. Without the element of trustworthiness, or reliability, the information can be damaging, misleading, and will lack credibility. As a concept, trustworthiness has been studied in a number of contexts. Lui and Standing (1989) conducted a

study in which they examined how trustworthiness compares with the expertness of a communicator. The study examined a persuasive message concerning AIDS as delivered by a priest, a doctor, and a neutral source. The researchers discovered that the speaker classified as the "trustworthy" source was perceived as more credible than the "expert" speaker. The researchers also found that the "expert" speaker only scored slightly higher on credibility than the neutral speaker. As a result of the experiment, the researchers concluded that affect may play a stronger role in attributing credibility to a source than cognition.

Teven (2008) studied trustworthiness during the 2008 presidential elections in conjunction with five other elements of credibility: Believability, likeableness, deceptiveness, competence, and goodwill. The researcher found that trustworthiness is directly impacted by believability. The study also found that believability also impacts perceptions of goodwill and competence. However this research was limited by what the researcher notes as merely a "snap-shot" of credibility perceptions during the election process, whereby the credibility could be altered by circumstances, candidate behavior, and misstatements during the process.

Source Credibility

Much of the literature on source credibility comes from research examining concepts of persuasion. Within the persuasion literature, it is argued that credibility affects the likelihood of an individual to be persuaded (Pornpitakpan, 2006) and there are numerous factors that impact the likelihood that a source will be deemed as credible. For example, O'Keefe (2002) cites factors such as education, occupation, experience, nonfluencies in delivery, speaking rate citation of evidence sources, position advocated, liking for the communicator, and humor as all having some sort of effect on credibility judgments.

When information on a communicator's education, occupation, and experience has been provided, judgments of expertise are significantly affected (Hurwitz, Miron, & Johnson, 1992; Ostermeier, 1967; Swenson, Nash, & Roos, 1984). This information, for example, has been manipulated in Hewgill and Miller's (1965) study, in which messages concerning nuclear radiation given by a high-credibility communicator (professor of nuclear research) and a low-credibility communicator (high school student). As O'Keefe (2002) notes, research also indicates that if a speaker introduces nonfluencies such as vocalized pauses, or articulation difficulties, the likelihood of that communicator being perceived as credible is lower than if a communicator keeps nonfluencies to a minimum.

It is expected then, that all of the above factors also play a role in judgments of communicator credibility in online, as well as offline environments. Yet, much of the existing source credibility research, as it pertains to online sources, focuses more on the credibility of the information rather than that of the communicator. This oversight seems significant when we consider blogging routines. For example, many blogs operate without any reviewing process, or traditional gatekeepers (Metzger, 2005), and research indicates that information can be manipulated, anonymously published, and lacks a universal standard for publishing practices (Fritch & Cromwell, 2001, 2002; Johnson & Kaye, 2000; Metzger, Flanagin, Eyal, Lemus, & McCann, 2003; Rieh, 2002). Johnson and Kaye's (2002) study argues specifically that the credibility of an online source can be impacted by the ability to publish information anonymously, but note that blogs do have some measure of a peer review process that relies on other bloggers to correct errors.

Yet, in order to understand credibility, it is critical that it be examined in a fashion that allows researchers to explain and describe phenomena. Measures to do so have been developed

by researchers such as McCroskey (1966) and Berlo, Lemert, and Mertz (1970, with these instruments being two of the most widely used measures. McCroskey (1966) developed two means of measuring credibility: one 12-item semantic differential scale and one 15-item semantic differential scale. The 12-item scale examines two factors: authoritativeness and character. The 15-item scale examines five factors: Sociability, extroversion, competence, composure, and character. According to McCroskey, the 12-item semantic differential scale received alphas of .93 for authoritativeness and .92 for character. The primary concern with this scale, according to Rubin (1994b), is the content validity of the scale. She notes there are questions as to whether or not "all the dimensions of credibility [are] represented in the scale. The following portion of the literature review addresses blogs and their relationship to this research.

Blogs

A blog, according to the popular content management system Wordpress.org (2010), is "an abbreviated version of 'weblog,' which is a term used to describe sites that maintain an ongoing chronicle of information. A blog features diary-type commentary and links to articles on other Web sites, usually presented as a list of entries in reverse chronological order." Wordpress.com, the blog hosting site and parent site of Wordpress.org, (2010) states that there are 32 million Wordpress sites as of November 2010. Because of the nature of being both a hosting site, as well as content management system, these numbers deserve clarification. Of the 32 million sites, 15.1 million blogs are hosted through Wordpress.com, while 17.4 million sites use the content management system to build websites through which the blog is published (Wordpress.com, 2010). While the number of blogs pales in comparison to the number of users

on other social networks, blogs are perhaps more influential in purchasing decisions than other social networks. In a study conducted by Jupiter Research, it was discovered that blogs are more trusted as sources of information regarding purchasing decisions than blogs (Marketingcharts.com, 2008). While relatively small in comparison to the major social media giants, blogs still play a vital role in gathering information and providing individuals with places to consume relevant content and interact with peers.

For example, annual studies by British marketing firm Base One have illustrated the changing nature of business to business (B2B) interactions online. In their 2010 study, Base One found that among B2B buyers, 25 percent of buyers up to age 30 used blogs during the Stage 1 phase of the purchasing process. Among each source, Base One looked at the level of influence of multiple channels during the purchasing process and found that blogs were rated as "very influential," ahead of word of mouth, supplier websites, direct mail, and industry press. Blogs provide an important role of "first contact" with products and are increasingly trusted over other channels.

Research examining blogs has increased significantly across multiple academic disciplines during the last decade, as the platform has become more readily implemented as means of expression and as sources of news and information. Blogs have been extensively researched in educational contexts (Godwin-Jones, 2003; Williams, 2004; Ray, 2006) and in political contexts (Drezner, & Farrell, 2004; Drezner, & Farrell, 2008; Coleman, 2008). However, given this study's focus, contexts examining blogs as they relate to human behavior with a specific emphasis on receiver-assigned source characteristics are of particular interest.

Much of the research on blogs and credibility are concerned with the informational side of source credibility. That is, the research looks at the authenticity of the information emanating

from blogs rather than the information's author. The goal of this study is to explore how individual private consumers view these bloggers' source credibility.

Social Media Influencers

The individuals researched in this study are those commonly referred to by the social media world as "influencers." Research concerning this group is primarily limited to the professional world, with much of the research appearing on blogs or in whitepapers. Solis and Breakenridge define social media influencers (SMIs) as "passionate and skilled professionals who know how to communicate, engage, and create dialogue for all the right reasons" (2009, p.94). Beyond their ability to communicate, influencers understand how to go beyond the traditional forms of influence such as controlled messages, and create genuine connections between consumers and brands. It is their secondary goal that consumers make purchases (Solis, 2009).

With regard to social media, many companies aim to connect with SMIs, as they may allow a company to reach a class of consumer not traditionally accessed, or who may be aware of its products or service due in part to the expertise and trust that an influencer has within a given market (Rosen, 2010; Stratmann, 2010). Numerous blog posts have focused on attempting to reach these individuals with the intent of gaining access to certain consumer groups (Guzman, 2010; Owen, 2010; Evans, 2010). Themes consistent throughout these posts are that to engage influencers, companies must show that they a) know how to engage the influencer (e.g., do not try to buy their voice, otherwise leading to a lack of authenticity) and b) know how to engage the audience that is attempting to be reached through the influencer.

In light of this study's reviewed literature, the following research questions are proposed as a means of guiding the exploration of receiver assigned source characteristics on influential bloggers:

RQ: Do attributions of credibility differ based on the blogger's gender?

RQ: Do attributions of credibility differ based on receiver gender?

RQ: Do attributions of credibility differ based on receiver ethnicity?

RQ: Do attributions of credibility differ based on the blogger's ethnicity?

Chapter 2

Methodology

Prior to beginning the study, influential bloggers were identified. To determine who the influential bloggers for the study, online rankings from Advertising Age's Top 150 marketing blogs (adage.com, 2011) were consulted. These rankings serve as an industry standard and are indicative of blogs with a far reach and influence, and serve as the guides for selecting bloggers. For purpose of this project, the bloggers selected include Brian Solis, and Beth Kanter. The researcher, already familiar with Mr. Solis and Ms. Kanter through reading their online and offline publications, selected these bloggers due to their perceived expertise and their substantial digital footprints. Screenshots and biographies excerpted from the bloggers' websites are provided in Appendix E to provide a snapshot of the bloggers examined in this study. To gain a better understanding of how this study assesses receiver assigned source characteristics, this study's design is explained in depth in the next section.

Participants

The participants for this study are blog readers and commenters who are familiar with the work produced by Brian Solis and Beth Kanter. Familiarity ranged from having read the blog only a couple of weeks and months, to interviewees being long-time readers (3+ years). Respondents' age ranged from 23-55. Nine of the interviewees are Caucasian, one respondent is American Indian/Pacific Islander. Two of the interviewees are males, eight are female. The participants were divided into two groups—Brian Solis readers, and Beth Kanter readers. The group compositions are as follows: five White females, ages 23-53 were interviewed regarding

Beth Kanter; three White females, ages 25-50, and two males, ages 26 and 56 were interviewed regarding Brian Solis.

Measures

An interview guide was crafted for this study with the purpose being to assess participant attributions of credibility toward the professional bloggers. The interview guide was structured in such a manner as to elicit responses highlighting salient behaviors indicating the level of a blogger's perceived credibility. These responses were then contrasted with participant responses regarding the bloggers being researched for this study. The guide is arranged with the first portion addressing participants' general blog reading habits, the second portion addressing participants' perceptions of credibility in connection with reading blogs or producing blog content, and the last portion addressing participants' perceptions of credibility as they pertain to Brian Solis and Beth Kanter.

Procedures

The participants received a message via Facebook or email in response to their comment on individual blog entries that briefly explains the project and asked if individuals would be willing to take part in the research. The interviews (Appendix A) were recorded through a third party application for all interviews. Participants were informed at the beginning of the interview that the conversation would be recorded. The interview takes approximately 20 minutes to complete. Prior to beginning the research, each of the bloggers granted permission to the researcher to gather participants from the blogs, providing that no requests for sponsorship or

endorsement of the study were included in the post (e.g., "Brian Solis has granted me permission to interview you.").

Analysis

Individual interviews were recorded by the researcher and were transcribed in order to facilitate coding the interviews via thematic content analysis. The transcripts were edited in order to maintain participants' confidentiality while attempting to preserve as much of the original verbatim responses as possible. After transcription, the participants' responses were analyzed using the domain analysis technique.

This method, developed by Spradley (1979), dictates that verbatim responses are taken from the participants and sorted into domains for analysis. These domains, or "cover terms," are comprised of individual verbatim responses, or "included terms." Included terms are assigned to the cover terms using a semantic relationship (e.g., "_____ is a reason to visit a blog").

With regard to this study, many responses received multiple answers. For example, a respondent may have responded with "I visit blogs for entertainment, for professional research, and to see what my friends are writing." In this case, the researcher considered each of the reasons listed as a separate included term as a reason to visit a blog.

After conducting thematic analysis, it was established that redundancy was reached after 10 of the initial participants had been interviewed. As the nature of the sample was purposive, and required that the respondents were currently reading Beth Kanter's or Brian Solis' blog, it was not unexpected that redundancy would be reached in a relatively short amount of interviews. It became clear that redundancy had been achieved when the respondents were giving related responses regarding their experiences with blogging, reading blogs, their perceptions of credible

blogging behaviors, and their perceptions of credibility as they pertained to the bloggers researched in this study.

The analysis found that there were 328 included terms resulting in 16 cover terms. A complete analysis of the included terms, semantic relationships, and cover terms is provided in Appendix C. The following section highlights the results of the analysis and presents the domains distilled from the interviews.

Chapter 3

Results

This study's purpose is to contribute to the growing body of research on blogs and source credibility, with specific emphasis on understanding the behaviors that successful bloggers employ that result in the perception of credibility and the attributions readers assign to bloggers that denote the perception of credible behavior. The following section reports the results that were collected.

In the previous section, the method for analyzing the interview data was presented, highlighting the distillation of cover terms (domains) from included terms and semantic relationships. An example of the domains, semantic relationships, and included terms is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 - Example Included Terms and Cover Terms

Included Term	Semantic Relationship	Cover Term
information relevant to my field	Is a reason to	Visit a blog
some of the reading feeds that I've set up	Is a reason why the participant	Reads a particular blog or follows a particular blogger
the useful content	Is a reason to	Keep reading a particular blog or blogger
a person is transparent about who they are	Is a way of	Thinking about "blogging" and "credibility"
life experience	Is a reason for	Thinking that a blogger is credible
can't even spell something correctly	Is a reason for	Thinking a blogger is not credible
information is accurate	Is a kind of	Salient blog feature respondents look for
reference links or reference points	Is a reason to	Believe that a blogger "knows what they're talking about"
plugged in just social media in a search engine	Is a reason to	Start reading Brian Solis' blog
someone in my network read her posts and shared something	Is a reason to	Start reading Beth Kanter's blog
new concepts	Is a reason to	Believe that Beth Kanter is credible
deeply immersed in his subjects.	Is a reason to	Believe that Brian Solis is credible
the way he handles critiques	Is a feature that	Is most salient to participants reading Brian Solis' blog
have a more global perspective on technology.	Is a feature that	Is most salient to participants reading Beth Kanter's blog
to provide context to reports or findings.	Is a reason to	Return to Brian Solis' blog
have a relationship	Is a reason to	Return to Beth Kanter's blog

Domains

The following section discusses the domains that arose during the study's data analysis stage. Each of the 16 cover terms will be discussed and provide example included terms associated with the respective cover term. A discussion on the domains gleaned from the interviews follows this portion of the study.

Visit a blog

A large amount of responses to the initial interview question centered around visiting a blog for professional reasons, namely for research for clients or research for one's profession. Responses include, "I'm just looking for information that's relevant to my field or something that I find interesting," "I often look for blogs because you can get a different sense of trends when you're looking at something that is so time oriented," "I have a client that is in the glass manufacturing business… and I'll do research on shower design," and "[S]ince I work in the nonprofit technology sector, I'm usually looking for something related to either something I'm working on or something related to my organization."

Other responses centered around more personal use, such as, "I'm looking at either things that are interesting, things that can help me in my daily life, or sometimes I read a blog to explore something I know nothing about," "[I]f there's a particular news story that I see on Twitter or on CNN or a news site, I'll sometimes go to the blog of the person that wrote it and just kind of look at what they do," and "It's usually friends' blogs or things that friends are posting."

Reads a particular blog or follows a particular blogger

In this theme, participants tended to include personal recommendations or relationships as the primary reason for reading a particular blog or blogger. Responses concerning recommendations

include, "I follow a few things on Facebook, and use that kind of as a jumping off point to find and identify new people," "I guess I'll say this, part of it is word of mouth," "I also read the blogs of other individuals, professionals I know," and, "Well, I know with some of them, it is word of mouth things that I've seen on the Internet or on Facebook and, once you get started with a blog, it's usually something that pertains to what I'm doing or makes sense to me."

Other responses tended to cite content curation sources, keyword searchers, and social networks as reasons to read a particular blog or follow a particular blogger. Participant responses include, "What I do now is I have a couple, I guess, trusted content curation sources, "I have an RSS feed reader," "If I am doing research like I was just talking about, it often is a matter of search results to begin with. I'll start out with just some keyword searches to see what comes up," "I guess it would just be searching for keyword topics if I'm researching something or I'm looking for information that I might use just a search engine," and "I just observe what people are talking about on Twitter, saying, 'Oh, you've got to read this blog post from so and so.'"

Keep reading a particular blog or blogger

One of the primary reasons that participants returned to a particular blog or continued reading a specific blogger's material had to do with the quality of the content, moreover, the quality of the author's writing. Responses include: "I go to blogs for sound content, but I go because people have a certain unique voice and are willing to give back to the community," "If the information is reliable [and] by that I mean if I they have reference points I will look up those reference points or links or whatever, and if it's entertaining," "I would say the useful content," and "Quality content is definitely probably the most important thing."

Thinking about "blogging" and "credibility"

Respondents illustrated various ways of thinking about credibility and blogging. Some responses had to do with specific behaviors that bloggers engage in such as sourcing information: "So to me, they have to externally source some information but they also have to show to me that they are deep enough in the subject that they can provide some context and some interpretation on top of that thing," "Somebody who knows their stuff, someone who has some facts and figures of some relevance to back up the comments and the content of their blog," "Well, credibility means is it accurate, can I look it up, is it able to be proven to a degree," and "As I came away from that, I felt, personally, it is the ability of a blogger to define a subject, to be deep in the subject, and to artfully mix opinion and perspective with data, or examples, or anecdotes from other sources."

Other responses included the style of the blog, including: "But, some of the political blogs, especially some of the kind of fringe ones, I don't really consider them credible, especially the ones that are written more like diary, like opinion blogs," "Are they someone who checks their facts, or are they just spreading rumors," and "I usually think of someone like Tosh.0 who is posting things that's not very credible in their blogs or they're making some spoof."

Responses also illustrated that for some participants, the connection between blogging and credibility was largely concerned with blogger transparency: "They're transparent in terms of if they have any financial relationship with any organization or sector that they tend to be blogging about, I want to know that up front," "I think of expertise, experience, transparency, and authenticity. I think of those as, basically, when I think about credibility, you have to have a long term presence, and a long term presence in, basically, that particular area of interest."

Thinking that a blogger is credible

Responses regarding the perception of credible behavior clustered around several key behaviors. The first behavior respondents discussed was sourcing information. Participant responses concerning sourcing included: "I like it when they say something or they have an issue and they post the article in the thing, like, this is what I read and this is where it's from, and then this is what supports or doesn't support, kind of back it up with facts," "As I stated, is if they have web links or references that I can look up to determine if what they're saying is true and it's not junk science," and "When I can see that they're pulling from an official source, from an official research source, and I can tell they're not just extrapolating data in a way that interprets it to their best benefit."

Another behavior that participants attributed to credible bloggers is transparency, which is illustrated in the following responses: "When I see things like they will call out when they've edited a post, they will call out what their edits are, what their updates are rather than just editing the post and reposting it as if it were the first time," "If they have a bio that is clear and explains who they are and what the purpose of their writing is, that's helpful," and "So bloggers that are willing to open the doors into inside of who they are, put in more of a human face, I think is more credible."

The last major characteristic of a credible blogger, according to participants, is experience. Reponses include: I think life experience has an awful lot to do with making a blogger credible or not credible," "Expertise in the area, and that can be defined in a lot of ways; I think that can be defined in perhaps a regular position of employment," and "Experience. I mean, obviously, experience matters a lot."

Thinking a blogger is not credible

In contrast to the previous theme which included behaviors and characteristics of credible bloggers, participants also discussed non-credible behaviors and characteristics that they have seen. The most discussed included terms focused on citing relevant information: "A blogger is not credible if they don't seem to be citing any information," "They're not linking out to other people, other blogs, other resources and/or they're not citing where their content coming from, or contacts, I should say," "If they're talking about a topic, if they're not relating to any source above data or information or even other people, the sources from which they're basing their opinions on then that's not credible to me," and "I think I answered the credible question in my last question, in terms of the keeping your transparency and citing and linking out to their sources. If they're not doing those things then they're not credible to me."

In a similar vein discussing bloggers that are transparent, participants also discussed the lack of transparency influenced their perception of a blogger being credible: "Sometimes, actually, if there's too much advertising on a blog, I think it's not credible because I feel like maybe they are getting money from advertisers to promote a certain product or to promote something over something else," "If you're having someone who's paid by that source, how credible is their research when they're getting funded by that company," and "And not being credible is, I think, blogs that aren't willing to be transparent."

Salient blog feature respondents look for

Participants were asked about the most important things to them when they read a blog. Responses were categorized as salient blog and of those features, the ability to digest the

information quickly came to the fore and included responses such as "I don't want it to be scrolling, scrolling every entry," "I like to have it like a little blurb, and then if you want to read more, you can read more," "I think that the biggest thing, I guess, I would say that they're quick and to the point," and "I'm often working on a very compressed timeline both personally and professionally, so I highly appreciate the scanability, being able to quickly understand what the gist of the post is and make a decision about whether that's something that is worth it to me to spend the time reading."

Other notable features mentioned included responses concerning the ability to extend the conversation through comments and sharing, "The second thing that's important to me is that not only is information cited but that comments are allowed on a post," and "I think that's also really important to have the opportunity to extend this conversation with friends and followers;" as well as blogger's writing ability: "I will say that the quality of the writing does make a difference to me," "I look for clarity of thought, clarity of expression."

Believe that a blogger "knows what they're talking about"

Participants indicated that there were several behaviors and characteristics that indicated a professional level of knowledge and expertise. Responses include: "I have to say their voice in connection with the links and the other information that they share," "I guess they're able to take a topic, stick with that topic, and write it well and fluidly," "That they're experienced, that they're not fresh off the street, that they've been doing this for a period of time, whether it's comments about remaking your life or changing habits in your life, or if it's comments about how to get non-profits up and running with different social media tools," and "The thing that makes me feel

like an author knows that they're experience or knows the subject matter just comes, again, from their writing style."

Start reading Brian Solis'/Beth Kanter's blog

Participant responses concerning reasons they started reading Beth Kanter or Brian Solis indicated that personal recommendations were the primary reason for choosing to read one of these bloggers. Participants responded with phrases such as "It was recommended to me and that I would find it interesting and I do," "I actually had a friend of mine recommend that I start reading him and check out some of his stuff," "There's kind of a circular effect there, but I would say why I got pointed to her in the first place is that she's already a respected member of my professional community," and "It was probably someone in my network read her posts and shared something or commented on something and I found it interesting."

Believe that Beth Kanter is credible

The question "how credible do you think Beth Kanter is" was posed to the participants who read Beth's blog actively and the researcher asked participants to elaborate on their attribution of Beth's credibility. Participants noted the level of information that Beth shares: "What makes her blog credible and an important resource is that she's putting tons of information out there, "She's sharing lots of information," "She's providing lots of images and resources and links," and "She provides just a lot of information and a lot of context in each post, so that it seems like her priority is to give you information." Participants also indicated that Beth acts transparently: "She's not above changing her methods," "She's not above saying she doesn't know," "She's extremely transparent," and "She wouldn't close down conversation, for example."

Believe that Brian Solis is credible

A similar question of "how credible do you think Brian Solis is" was posed to participants who are active readers of Brian's blog. They were also asked to elaborate on their answers. Responses indicated that Brian's level of sharing lends him credibility, with responses such as, "I think as someone who works to help us all understand how the technology associated with social media allows people's behaviors to change for the area where he has done a lot of work, I consider him highly credible," "His professional reputation is highly linked with his ability to aggregate and interpret content on a field that a lot of people care a lot about," "With the knowledge that he's sharing very openly, whether it's his papers, with Altimeter, or whether it's his insights from his presentations or webinars, I think he is very credible," and "He's sharing this knowledge with everyone." Participants also mentioned Brian's level of work in his field: "He's done a lot of work with the private sector in doing, using social media as a way to market, as a way to better manage your company, things like that," "He's a rather prolific blogger," "He's done several books," and "He's deeply immersed in his subjects."

Is most salient to participants reading Brian Solis' blog

Participants were asked what features they felt "sticks out" to them the most when reading Brian Solis' blog. The included terms were categorized as "most salient features." Responses indicated level of knowledge is a salient feature: "I would say his depth, the real depth in his blog," "How knowledgeable and intelligent this fellow is," and "He's very intelligent."

Is most salient to participants reading Beth Kanter's blog

Similarly, participants who read Beth Kanter's blog were asked what features they felt "sticks out" to them the most regarding their experience reading Beth's blog. In the same manner as the previous theme, responses were categorized as "most salient features." Responses varied, with some participants focusing on community atmosphere Beth has created. For example, "She has a great sense of fun," "It's very welcoming, it's inclusive," and "It has a sharing and dialogue oriented element to it that's very different than if it was a textbook treatise that just came out in chapters." Other responses highlighted the informational aspects of the blog, with responses such as "What stands out to me is not just the information you'll get from her in each blog post, but each blog post is almost like the center of a hub of spokes," "I would say what sticks out to me the most is the length of them," and "One thing that got to me was just the travel, that she seemed to have a more global perspective on technology."

Return to Brian Solis' blog

Participants were asked what keeps them coming back to the Brian's blog. Responses indicated that the ability to continue growing in knowledge keeps participants returning: "Based on what I've read from Brian thus far, Brian has established himself as a thought leader in his category who will challenge me to always be ready to evolve my world view," "He can pull something out of the universe and provide context with it that I know will challenge my thinking and will make me be a little more sophisticated, a little more informed about that particular topic, that particular idea," and "I always liked learning about new things and growing, because I figure, well, there might be something I might be doing on another project in the future that may be related to that."

Return to Beth Kanter's blog

Similarly, participants were asked what made them return multiple times to Beth's blog. Participants noted the resources that Beth curates on her blog as being reasons to keep returning, with responses such as, "I like so much what she has done in the past and it's been valuable to me, it's helped me grow and learn more and become better at communicating and I hope that through the conversations I've had on her blog I'm also contributing to that for others that are part of that community," "Because of the business that I'm in and the topics that Beth covers, I believe that reading her blog helps me stay abreast of what's new and upcoming in terms of communication tools in our sector," "Because I'm in the client service business, it's really important for me to know what our clients are reading and hearing and thinking about and many of them follow her as well so there's an added incentive," and "What I really like about her blog is that it's often a great place to look for resources."

Chapter 4

Discussion

The goal of this study is to explore how individual private consumers view these bloggers' source credibility. The following discussion is organized by each research question and post-hoc analysis. Additionally, implications, study limitations, and areas for future research are discussed. The research questions posited at the beginning of this study are:

RQ: Do attributions of credibility differ based on the blogger's gender?

RQ: Do attributions of credibility differ based on receiver gender?

RQ: Do attributions of credibility differ based on receiver ethnicity?

RQ: Do attributions of credibility differ based on the blogger's ethnicity?

Research Question 1: Do attributions of credibility differ based on the blogger's gender?

Research question one explored whether or not attributions of credibility differ based on the blogger's gender. All but one participant self-reported that they do see a blogger's gender as having an effect on their perception of a blogger's credibility. When asked the question, participants often responded emphatically that gender did not matter. One female participant noted, "My first instinct is that it doesn't, although I'm aware that we are often unaware of our own biases so I'm just running through my head to see if I am gender balanced in my reading. I probably do read more women than I do men and I can't say if that's because what they're talking about just happens to be interesting to me." The female participant was the only respondent to indicate awareness of potential biases. A male participant noted that he is wary of female bloggers, stating, "I think the hard thing for me with credibility to women is because you see so many people on Twitter that follow you because you mention social media or something. A lot of them, in my experience, some people who follow me and claim to be social media experts are

women. There are pictures of women. Some of them are just spambots, some of them people with automated auto follow blogs that they hear the word social media and they automatically follow you." The male participant was the only participant to note that a user's profile picture on one social network influences his perception of women bloggers as a whole.

It is worth noting that the participants who interviewed regarding Brian Solis tended to focus more on his knowledge and the degree to which he researched a topic, whereas participants who were interviewed regarding reading Beth Kanter seemed to focus on the sharing atmosphere Beth created for her blog's reading community. While the overall perception of credibility did not differ (all respondents indicated that they believed the bloggers to be credible), the contrast between the characteristics that were most salient to the blog readers did differ. However, the difference in characteristics (level of knowledge versus sharing-centric atmosphere) is curious. Further study will be needed to see if the difference is directly related to the bloggers' gender, or if the characteristics are indicative of a style that each respective blogger has focused on developing.

Research Question 2: Do attributions of credibility differ based on receiver gender?

The second research question explores whether or not receiver (blog reader) gender has an effect on the perception of a blogger's credibility. No evidence was found for credibility differing based on receiver gender, as only two out of the six males messaged responded to the researcher's request for an interview and there was not a discernible difference between male and female responses concerning credibility. That being said, both males did mention Brian's intelligence and level of knowledge as one of the indicators of credibility for them, as did the females.

Research Question 3: Do attributions of credibility differ based on receiver ethnicity?

The third research question explores the degree to which receiver ethnicity has any effect on bloggers being attributed as credible. Similar to research question two, no evidence was found for attributions of credibility differing between receiver ethnicities. This is likely due to the fact that all but one of the participants who responded to the researcher's solicitation for an interview were Caucasian. Only one of the participants self-identified as not being Caucasian. The lone participant identified as Native America/Pacific Islander. The lack of a homogenous sample leaves room for future research to broaden the scope of ethnicities included in that research.

Research Question 4: Do attributions of credibility differ based on the blogger's ethnicity?

Research question four examines the impact that the bloggers' ethnicities impact attributions of credibility to the bloggers being studied. The bloggers are identified as Hispanic (Brian Solis) and Caucasian (Beth Kanter). According to the participants' responses, both bloggers were attributed as being credible. Yet similar to the discussion of research question one, the behaviors identified as being credible by the participants differed between the two bloggers. Again, responses pertaining to Brian Solis tended to focus overwhelmingly on the depth of knowledge exhibited in his postings, whereas responses pertaining to Beth Kanter were largely concerned with her creating a community culture centered on the amount of information she shared. More research will need to be conducted to be able to discern the degree to which these two blogging styles are related to the bloggers' genders or ethnicities, or if the difference in style is strictly characteristic of the individual bloggers.

Themes

Three primary themes were distilled from the interview data: Citing sources, transparency, and sharing. Participants repeated these three behaviors as being characteristic of a blogger they deem to be credible. The "citing sources" theme was characterized by participants looking specifically for blog authors to link to sources outside of the original blog. Participants also mentioned the source's ability to be verified independently of the citation occurring on the website—that is, they want to be able to visit the original source for themselves. Responses discussing transparency tended to be more multidimensional than the responses discussing an author's citing (or not citing) sources. Transparency included responses discussing the authors' biographies on their websites, allowing conversation to take place on the blog; allowing comments on blog posts, the authors' relationship with their respective companies, and the authors being open regarding any relationship they may have with the subject they blog about (e.g., if they are being paid by a web-based application company to blog about the web-based application). With regard to sharing, participants discussed the ability of the blogger to provide their respective audiences with sources that they can implement and test on their own time, hence a "sharing" theme.

Intergroup Variance

The participants in this study were overwhelmingly Caucasian females. While this aspect of the study will be discussed in the next section as part of the limitations of the current study, participants were not homogenous in their answers, and did provide a degree of variance. Among the white females interviewed for this study, five of the eight females have occupations in the communication/public relations field. Their responses mentioned the same types of

credible behaviors. The other three females had occupations outside of the

communication/public relations fields—one operating in a business capacity, one studying law,

and one working as an administrative assistant. Their responses provided the most variance,

with two of the females offering the perspective that they did not believe blogs can be considered

"credible," due primarily to the amount of personal opinion they observed in blogs. The other

female admitted that for her, blogs that deal in subjects with an observable outcome (e.g.,

physical training and diet) are credible to her, as she has been able to delve into the content

described on these blogs and observe results first-hand.

Future research and limitations

One of this study's limitations is its sample size. The lack of a large sample hampers the

ability to make any of the findings generalizable and makes this study useful for descriptive and

exploratory purposes. In order for the study to have predictive capabilities, future studies

examining credibility and blogging will need to develop a measure and distribute it to a much

larger sample, preferably a sample that is representative of the general public. As it stands, only

two males were interviewed out of the participants who responded to solicitations for interviews.

This also poses an issue in that gender is not evenly represented in this study. Future studies will

need to consider a more representative breakdown of participant gender. The lack of an ethically

diverse sample also poses an issue. Given that this study's participants were overwhelmingly

Caucasian, the research was not able to yield any significant results regarding the impact that the

receivers' ethnicities may have had on the attribution of credibility.

The use of two bloggers also presents a challenge. While the two bloggers do exhibit

behaviors and practices that lend them the perception of credibility, it would be useful to open up

future studies to include more than two bloggers. This would be useful for comparing different types of bloggers and determining if credible practices/behaviors/characteristics differ by blogger type (which would need to be operationalized), or if credible behaviors appear standardized across bloggers blogging from various disciplines (e.g., do "Mommy Bloggers" engage in the same type of behaviors as corporate bloggers, or casual bloggers?). The following section will discuss the study's implications.

With regard to the perceptions of credibility, all receivers attributed credibility to the bloggers in this study. From the responses in the interviews, it is clear that the bloggers had differing styles of blogging with Solis focusing on in-depth explorations of various topics, and Kanter focusing more on curating verifiable resources for her readers. This dictates that future research explore not only different blogging styles in connection to credibility, but also explore the possibility that there may be differing styles of credibility altogether.

Implications

While the research is far from being able to produce a generalizable result, it does give an insight into the ways in which perceptions of credibility are changing. It was noted in the literature review that credibility has historically been operationalized as trustworthiness and expertise. The results of the study however, indicate that the social sharing aspects of content are at the fore of the participants' attribution of credibility. The implications for the emphasis of sharing are that concepts such as corporate social responsibility are playing an increasingly important role with regard to credibility.

On a smaller scale, this study speaks to the behaviors bloggers should exemplify in order to be perceived as credible. The behaviors and characteristics distilled from this research include

sharing, transparency, the ability to write well, the ability to be clear and concise, creativity, and the ability for blog posts to be scannable. A post-hoc analysis of the study's results follows in the next section.

Post-hoc analysis

While the research concentrated on attributions of credibility differing among gender and ethnicity, participants mentioned a key behavior with regard to blogging: the act of sharing. Participants repeatedly noted that they look for blogs in which knowledge is shared freely and in which they possess the ability to extend the conversation on the blog to their own online social circles. The responses indicating an orientation toward sharing were mostly concentrated among participants who were over 30 years of age. All of the participants under 30, with one exception, included relevancy and as a recurring theme in their responses. As the goal of this study was not to examine generational differences with regard to attributions of credibility, it is unclear as to the explanation for the difference in the age groups identifying with varied behaviors in connection with blogging. This is another area for future studies to explore.

Conclusions

In an age where individuals are now brands, it is critical from both an academic and professional perspective that source credibility, as it pertains to online tastemakers, continue to be examined from the point of view of the individuals and collectives consuming the material produced by those tastemakers. This study examined attributions of credibility and their connections to both receiver and sender ethnicity and gender. No evidence was found for attributions of credibility differing with regard to receiver ethnicity or gender. However, the

bloggers' styles of the credible behaviors and characteristics did differ, although it is unclear as to whether or not these differences are connected with ethnicity or gender.

Additional research is needed to make further distinctions regarding the differences observed in this study. Future studies will need a sample that is more ethnically and gender diverse. Future studies should also examine the connection with credibility and age, as it pertains to online sources.

This study's primary goal, exploring how individual private consumers view these bloggers' source credibility, has not previously been examined and thus, functions in an exploratory role. The results of this study do not enable the researcher to make generalizations regarding the blog commenters and readers participating in the two blogging communities chosen for this study. However, the study presents results that need further examination by other seeking to understand source credibility from the perspective of the personality(s) creating content on blogs. It is the hope of the researcher that this study will serve to propel future research examining online source credibility from the perspective of the individuals and communities consuming the media generated by blogs.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview Guide

Thank you for your willingness to speak with me about blogging and credibility. I would like to start off by asking you a few general questions about your blog reading habits.

1. How often do you read blogs?

2. What sort of information do you typically search out when you read blogs?

3. How do you decide what blog to go to, or what blogger to read?

4. What keeps you coming back to that blog?

Transition - I would like to ask you a few general questions about credibility and your experience with blogging or reading blogs.

5. When you hear the words "credibility" and "blogging" what comes to mind?

6. What do you think makes a blogger credible/not credible?

7. What are some of the most important things to you when you're reading a blog?

8. Out of those items, what is the one that lets you know "He/she knows what he/she is talking about?"

Transition – I'd like to ask you some questions regarding your experience reading Beth Kanter's/Brian Solis' blog

9. When did you start reading Beth's/Brian's blog?

10. Why do you choose to read Beth's/Brian's blog?

11. How credible is Beth Kanter/Brian Solis? Explain your response

12. When you read his/her blog, what sticks out to you the most?

13. How does Brian's/Beth's gender influence your thinking about their credibility?

14. What keeps you coming back to Beth's/Brian's blog?

15. Is there anything else that you'd like to add, or is there anything that you feel I've missed?

Thank interviewee for his/her time.

Appendix B

Participation request

Dear (respondent's name),

I am requesting your assistance in research I am conducting as a graduate student in the University of Tennessee's School of Communication Studies.

My research is concerned with how people perceive bloggers as being credible--specifically, Beth Kanter. I would like to interview you to discuss your views on blogging, credibility, and the behaviors you see Beth Kanter performing that you think make her credible.

Participation in the research is voluntary. This interview will be recorded via Skype, but the identity of every participant will be kept confidential. No identifying information will be included in any final form of the study. There are no foreseeable risks associated with partitipation in this study.

If you choose to participate, please respond to this message. If possible, please include possible times that would be convenient for you to be interviewed. The interview is expected to last approximately 30 minutes.

Regards,

Aaron Sachs
asachs@utk.edu

Appendix C

Participant Interviews

Participant 1 Interview

Researcher: Ryan, I'd like to thank you for taking time out of your schedule to interview with me regarding blogging and credibility. I'm going to start off giving you some general information about the study. All the data is going to be kept confidentially in room 293 in the communications building at the University of Tennessee. Should you have any questions about the data, you can just contact me at asachs@utk.edu or contact our compliance officer at the university.

Alternatively, if you feel uncomfortable at any point during the interview, feel free to stop me. It's not going to affect the results. There's no punitive measures for not completing the interview. With that, we'll go ahead and get started.

I'm going to start off, how old are you?

Participant: I'm 55.

Researcher: OK. I'm going to ask you a few general questions about your blog reading habits. How often do you read blogs?

Participant: Every day.

Researcher: Every day. OK. Thank you. What sort of information are you typically searching for when you read blogs?

Participant: Usually research or information, entertainment.

Researcher: How do you decide what blog to go to or what blogger to read?

Participant: Usually based on recommendation.

Researcher: Recommendations hold the highest, I guess, sway with deciding what blog to go to?

Participant: Well, sometimes I can just be tooling around on the net and just happen to come across one. I have WordPress, so I like to look at those, but mostly, recommendations.

Researcher: When you decided on a blog or a blogger to read, what keeps you coming back to that blog?

Participant: If the information is reliable. By that I mean if I they have reference points I will look up those reference points or links or whatever, and if it's entertaining.

Researcher: OK. I want to ask you a few general questions about credibility and your experience with blogging and reading blogs. When you hear the words credibility in blogging, what comes to mind?

Participant: Well, credibility means is it accurate, can I look it up, is it able to be proven to a degree. Blogging is usually people's opinions and how they feel about that information.

Researcher: When you think of those two together...

Participant: I'm not always so sure that a blog is necessarily credible, because more often than not it's just people's opinions. But if they have links to their reference points, I will look those up. But as a general rule, I'm not so sure about if blogs can be considered credible unless they, like anything else, prove it, they have some accurate links to their information.

Researcher: When you talk about accurate links, can you elaborate a little bit on that for me?

Participant: Well, accurate links, OK, I click on that link and it supports or does not support what they're saying. For example, if they say that all car crashes are caused by drunk drivers, they always end up in a fatality. Well, personally I know that's not true. But if they're giving me links to check this out, then I will go to these links and see if the statistics verify what they're saying.

That's what I mean is it credible blogging or is it just their opinions blogging.

Researcher: Thank you. What do you think makes a blogger credible or not credible?

Participant: As I stated, is if they have web links or references that I can look up to determine if what they're saying is true and it's not junk science.

Researcher: When you say junk science, can you elaborate on that a little bit?

Participant: Junk science is usually, it's a term that is used for research that is very biased and very limited. It says, "OK. This is what we've come up with." It might be a dozen points of reference that prove their point or prove their opinion, but it cannot be duplicated in pure scientific research based on that scientific method.

Researcher: To sum that up, when you're considering credibility, you're looking for just good, solid proof, good evidence of what they're trying to support.

Participant: Yes, that's correct.

Researcher: Thank you. What are some of the most important things to you when you're reading a blog?

Participant: Well, that the information is accurate and that it's entertaining. We've read enough white papers to kill a horse. I would rather at least have some kind of entertainment value to it, usually a good sense of humor. Brian, I think, has a very good sense of humor.

Researcher: Thank you. When you're reading a blog, what are some of the things that indicate to you that this blogger actually knows what he or she is talking about?

Participant: Again, it's the reference links or reference points or references that they use and not just Wikipedia or something like that. But something like if it sends me to the Library of Congress or sends me to a credible site then I'm all for that, that's pretty much how I base it. Otherwise I just look at it and say, "Oh, this is interesting, it's entertainment value."

Researcher: Thank you. Next I'd like to ask you some questions regarding your experience reading Brian Solis' blog. When did you start reading Brian's blog?

Participant: About a month and a half ago.

Researcher: Why did you choose to read his blog?

Participant: It was recommended to me and that I would find it interesting and I do.

Researcher: As far as Brian and credibility, how credible do you think he is?

Participant: I think he's pretty credible. I've looked up quite a bit of his information. He's very entertaining, but it seems fairly solid. I've not come across anything that I haven't been able to verify.

Researcher: Excellent. When you read his blog, what sticks out to you the most?

Participant: How knowledgeable and intelligent this fellow is. He's very intelligent. I like the way he handles critiques to his blog's comments. I find him very interesting and I enjoy him.

Researcher: I apologize, the next question may seem a little bit strange, but how does Brian's gender influence your thinking about his credibility?

Participant: It doesn't. I don't consider gender in anything, except maybe dating or marriage, but that's about it.

Researcher: What keeps you returning to Brian's blog?

Participant: As I stated before, it's interesting and entertaining and he's just intelligent. He's a very intelligent fellow.

Researcher: All right. That brings me to the last question, so what I'd like to do now is just to open up the time and space for you to say anything you'd like to say about the interview. Specifically, is there anything you'd like to add or is there anything that you feel like I've missed?

Participant: No, there's nothing to add and I don't think you've missed anything. I just find his writings very thorough, very well researched, and yet very entertaining. He doesn't seem to have any problem with counterpoints or people questioning what he's written. He's very good. He's very good.

Researcher: Excellent. Well, if that's all you've got, that's all that I have. I'd like to thank you again for taking this time out of your day and your schedule to interview me about blogging and credibility.

Just to remind you again, if you have any questions about the data, feel free to contact me at my email which is asachs@utk.edu and thanks.

Participant: You're welcome.

Participant 2 Interview

Participant: Hello?

Researcher: Hey, Brooke. How are you?

Participant: Oh, good. My head was way up too loud, though. [laughs]

Researcher: I think I've got the same problem.

Participant: OK.

Researcher: Turn [inaudible 00:14] .

Participant: That's better. That's a video about [inaudible 00:21] .

Researcher: Not a problem.

Participant: Hi, how are you?

Researcher: Good. How are you? Vacation going well?

Participant: Good. I just got a nasty email from a guy that I'm doing research with.

Researcher: Oh, not good.

Participant: I'm like, "Oh. This must be what [inaudible 00:38] ." If you want to be relieved of your duties, and I was like, "I told you I was going out of town this week. You told me you didn't care how many hours I put in, so I didn't think it would be that big of a deal to not be doing work this week. But, my bad."

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant: UT professors.

Researcher: All right. Well, if you're ready, we'll go ahead and get started.

Participant: Sure.

Researcher: First, I just want to let you know that this is being recorded, just so I can transcribe it and analyze the data. Have you got any questions about the recording or any of the data or how it's being used? You can contact me at asax@utk.edu. Also, the data's going to be stored in room 293 in the communications building. It's going to be stored securely and confidentially. It's not going to be shared with anybody else. If for some odd reason you don't feel comfortable during the interview, just let me know. We can go ahead and stop it. It's not going to affect anything.

If you've got any questions about how the research is being conducted, you can contact our compliance officer at the university, and she'll be happy to help you out. So, before we begin, do you have any questions for me?

Participant: No.

Researcher: OK. All right. First, I'm going to start off and I'm going to ask you what's your age?

Participant: I am 23.

Researcher: 23, OK. I'm going to go ahead and start off by asking you a few general questions about blogging and credibility. It's going to be just some questions about your blog reading habits. The first question is how often do you read blogs?

Participant: Maybe two or three times a week.

Researcher: What information do you typically search out when you're reading blogs?

Participant: I usually don't search out information. It's usually friends' blogs or things that friends are posting. I don't really follow blogs or seek newsworthy information through blogs.

Researcher: You've hinted at this. Let me just go ahead and ask the question, though. How do you decide what blog to go to or what blogger to read?

Participant: It's usually be if a friend who's pointed me to a blog or it's actually the friend's blog that makes, keeps update about their life. Those are the ones I usually read.

Researcher: What keeps you coming back to it?

Participant: Usually, my friends post a link on their Facebook. Like, they updated their blog or they ran a nice blog article or something they thought was cool, and they'll share the link. That's usually how I go and read it or find it.

Researcher: I'd like to ask you a few general questions about credibility. In your experience with blogging, when you hear the words "credibility" and "blogging," what comes to mind?

Participant: I usually think of someone like Tosh.0 who is posting things that's not very credible in their blogs or they're making some spoof. That's an example of non-credible sources, but I usually don't go to blogs for...Like if I'm looking for some new article or information about something that's happening in the news, I'm not typically looking for blogs when I look for that information. I don't think they're very credible sources at all.

Researcher: -On that note, what do you think makes a blogger credible or not credible?

Participant: I think it depends on the type of information that they're given and what their job is. Like if I was looking at a friend's blog who was blogging about something going on in the White House, I probably wouldn't think it's very credible, because she's not involved in anything in the White House. But if she's blogging about something in her day to day life, I would think she's a pretty good source on what's going on in her day to day life. It's pretty credible.

Researcher: When you're reading a blog--whether it's a friend's blog or something that they've posted--what are some of the most important things to you when you're reading?

Participant: I don't really know if there's anything important when I'm reading. I think if there's something I'm looking for. I think that the biggest thing, I guess, I would say that they're quick and to the point. Regardless of the type of blog I'm reading, if there's a lot of fluff, I tend to lose interest. I think blogs are a good way to get quick, concise information out. So, if I'm having to really strive to figure out what point you're making, I think it defeats the purpose of a blog.

Researcher: When you're reading a blog--whether it's a friend's blog or whether it's something that they've posted on their Facebook--what's the thing that lets you know that this person knows what they're talking about with regards to the subject matter?

Participant: I think that the most important thing--I said this earlier--was who the person is writing the blog, and what they're writing about. So if I was reading on the rare occasion a news article or a blog on some sort of newsworthy topic, and it was written by a correspondent from CNN, I would think that that would be pretty credible, because that's their line of work, and they're going to be held accountable for things they publish. If it was just some low blog schmo or some average Joe writing about his opinion on a newsworthy topic, I probably wouldn't think it was very credible. If he's, like, a plumber giving his input about something going on in Congress or the Senate or something of that nature, I think it really depends on who's writing it. Like what their job is or who they are and what they're writing about.

Researcher: Would you sum that up in saying that credentials are probably the thing that you're looking for, then?

Participant: Yeah, but I definitely think it also ties into what the subject matter is, because if it's a doctor writing a medical blog article or a blog post, I would say that's pretty credible. But, if it's a doctor who has great credentials, but is not necessarily writing in his subject then I don't think it would be a very credible blog or a very credible source.

Researcher: I'm going to ask you some questions specifically about reading Beth Kanter's blog. How long ago did you start reading Beth's blog?

Participant: I read her blog from May 14th to May 21st.

Researcher: Why did you choose to read her blog?

Participant: Because you told me to. [laughs]

Researcher: Fair enough. When you read her blog, what sticks out to you the most?

Participant: I think it's a different blog than I've read before, but something that stuck out to me that I haven't really seen in other blogs is her use of guest blogs, where she'll repost a blog as--not as her own. She'll repost it as a blog post on her own blog, and talk about not necessarily her opinion, but a little bit of background about why that guest blog post was important and why she decided to include it in her own blog, if that makes sense.

Researcher: This may be a little bit of an awkward question, but how does Beth's gender influence your thinking about her credibility?

Participant: I think for her specific blog that she's writing, her gender, her blog tended to focus more on being revolving women--revolving around and involving women, like the women she was working with and her specific projects. I don't know if it made her more credible source as to what was going on with women, because she seemed to be, at least from the week I read, more of a...like she was a third party responding or writing about things she had seen, not necessarily things she experienced. So I don't think that her gender really influenced her credibility at all, but it does help that she's a woman writing about things that are happening to women.

I think that that helps as far as her writing and the way that she portrayed certain things. I think that it helps her that she's a woman, but I don't know if it necessarily helped her credibility.

Researcher: So what kept you coming back to Beth's blog?

Participant: I think that she did a very good job about writing concisely and getting her point across. Also sharing relevant articles, like the things that she was sharing didn't necessarily have to do with exactly the types of blog she normally posted, but they were relevant. It was nice to get someone else's perspective other than Beth's. I think in the week I read there was two guest posts. I got to see a little bit more of the type of things that people are posting in her field or people who are talking about the same things she's talking about, and not necessarily just what her opinion is on every single thing or how she sees every single thing she was writing about. She is able to bring others in and provide their feedback as well.

Researcher: That brings me to the end of the interview. I've got one last question and this is basically just to open up some time and space for you to talk. So, with that, is there anything that you'd like to add or is there anything that you think I've missed?

Participant: Well, you're the thesis writer, so I don't know if you've missed anything for your thesis, but I would say one thing that definitely made...What I do think that made Beth seem pretty credible is the fact that this is the field she's working in. Like the things she's blogging about. Like I said before, the type of things that she's doing and the type of things that she's seeing in a day to day basis. Also, when she talks about other people, she didn't always just say what she thought about them. There was one blog post where she was talking about two different women she had met where she had given a presentation someplace, in Rwanda, and how they were using social media to help further their goals and help fund their education through their business endeavors.

She actually interviewed those women and posted the direct interview, so you heard the women talking, and not just Beth quoting what they said or alluding to her impression of the interview. You got to see exactly what was said, exactly what Beth said, which was pretty cool. It seemed a lot more interactive of a blog, which I think helped with the credibility, because it was almost like you were doing some of the research yourself.

Like there was a link to relevant articles and things you might also like to read that maybe she didn't necessarily post or write. It almost like it was a more interactive, which helped, because when you feel like you've done something to get the information you're receiving, it seems a little bit more credible than when you're just given a blank slate and someone's telling you how they see it.

So, I think that helped her blog seem more credible.

Researcher: Excellent. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Participant: I think that's it. I think I've dropped enough. [laughs]

Researcher: All right. Well, thank you so much for being willing to do this. I really appreciate you taking some time out of your evening and your vacation to do the interview.

Participant: You're welcome.

Researcher: Just again, as a reminder, if you've got any questions about the data, don't hesitate to contact me. My email address at the university is asachs@utk.edu. Again, we're going to be keeping the data confidentially in room 293 in the communication building. So if you've got any questions, just feel free to shoot me an email or contact me via cellphone or whatever. That being said, thank you and hope the rest of your vacation goes well.

Participant: Thanks. Hope so, too. I will see you soon.

Researcher: All right. See you, Participant.

Participant: Bye.

Participant 3 Interview

Researcher: Good. I think I've got it working now.

Participant: OK.

Researcher: Great, cool. I'm going to start off and say thanks for being my interview regarding blogging and bloggers and that sort of thing. I'm going to start off by asking you just a few general questions. Firstly, let's go ahead and get age out of the way. How old are you?

Participant: I'm 24.

Researcher: 24. How often do you read blogs?

Participant: Every day.

Researcher: Every day. What sort of information do you typically search for when you're looking at various blogs?

Participant: Mainly the stuff I'm looking at every day is health and nutrition, so I'll look at...Like, if I want a recipe that's gluten-free for celiac or if I I'm bored and I want to work out later, I'll look at a run. Then, if there's a particular news story that I see on Twitter or on CNN or a news site, I'll sometimes go to the blog of the person that wrote it and just kind of look at what they do.

Researcher: OK. You said part of that is if you see an article on a site, you'll end up going back to the original news site or to that author. How else do you typically decide what blogger you're going to read?

Participant: I think a lot of it's based on my interests, and also through my friends. If they're interested in something, they tell me about it and I'll look for it. Things like that.

Researcher: OK. Do friends try...Are they the reason you keep going back to a blog, or what? What usually keeps you going back to a blog that you found?

Participant: Usually I just, I like...I'm interested in what the person's writing about. My run blogs, I go to a lot, because I like to run, the same with the nutrition ones. Then, the news ones, I like to go to because even though the stories change, generally, I like how the person writes. My work has a blog, and so I'll go to that to keep up to date on immigration stuff. That's another reason I look.

Researcher: OK. I'm going to ask you a few general questions about your blogging experience. This is just kind of personal. I'm going to start off by asking you about credibility. When you hear the words credibility and blogging, what typically comes to your mind?

Participant: With the blogs that I generally read, it's pretty credible because it's like running a certain distance in a certain time, or making something like a recipe. But, some of the political blogs, especially some of the kind of fringe ones, I don't really consider them credible, especially the ones that are written more like diary, like opinion blogs, I usually don't read those.

Researcher: OK. In your mind, what is going to contribute to a blogger or a blog being credible or not credible?

Participant: For me, it's just the information. When I look for a blog, I look for things that are pretty to the point, that also cite things. I guess it's a condensed kind of Cliff Notes version of something that I'm interested in, and I don't want them to just tell me like in a diary form about their experience. I like it when they say something or they have an issue and they post the article in the thing, like, this is what I read and this is where it's from, and then this is what supports or doesn't support, kind of back it up with facts.

Researcher: OK. A blog or a blogger who typically is going cite sources is going to be viewed as more credible.

Participant: Right. I don't know if I'm a minority, but for me, I tend to ignore a lot of blogs that are just people that are whining. I just don't care. I'm more focused on blogs that give me information and that are helpful to me, not someone just rambling opinion.

Researcher: When you say whining, can you explain that a little bit further for me?

Participant: Yeah, they just like...There will be a news story about, I don't know, some current event, and they tend to take that and take some tangent off of it, and go into all this detail that may or may not be true. There's no sources to really back it up. Their grammar probably isn't very good. It just is this rant that's almost like the comments section under a news article. I don't really read that, because it's not very positive and it's not very informative. It tends to get pretty negative.

Researcher: OK. You mentioned grammar being kind of a key factor in that. Is that something that typically tips you off as to whether or not the blog is going to be credible or not credible?

Participant: Yeah, grammar and sentence structure. If someone's writing in passive voice a lot, I know that that's not a very good writer. If someone is using improper grammar, that's not a very good blog to me. I don't think they're very credible if they can't even spell something correctly or use the right acronym to describe something. I'm trying to think of what else would make it not credible. Sometimes, actually, if there's too much advertising on a blog, I think it's not credible because I feel like maybe they are getting money from advertisers to promote a certain product or to promote something over something else. I tend to be a little wary of those.

Researcher: OK. Now when you're reading these blogs...I know you mentioned grammar. You mentioned sentence structure. You also mentioned advertising. What are the most important things that you're looking for? What are the things that stick out that when you go to a blog, you have to have when you look at it or read it?

Participant: I just, I like to have something like...I guess we're assuming that this blog has already spiked my interest? It's something I'm interested in?

Researcher: Right.

Participant: OK. I like to have a clean layout. I don't want it to be scrolling, scrolling every entry. I like to have it like a little blurb, and then if you want to read more, you can read more. I

like to get my information on a blog really quickly. I want to be able to scan it and see when the new post was, when the next newest. I like it in, I guess, time order, which I think most of them are. Then I like it to look clean, smooth. I like it to be on topic. I don't like it when bloggers rant about things. But, I also like it to be creative because a blog, to me, like, yeah, it's personal and I know that ranting can be seen as part of a blog, but for me, part of a blog is what makes it different from a news story is that they kind of have something a little bit more unique or creative on it. So they'll pull a recipe. They'll make it themselves or that they've done the workout they're talking about or they're, I don't know, they're Syrian and they're in Syria, like something like that. It's more than just straight facts.

Researcher: So, I guess, rephrase that...Would you say that one of the more important things is that the person themselves have actually done what they're talking about?

Participant: Yes.

Researcher: OK. Now, out of those things, out of grammar, advertising, the layout, you already mentioned this a little bit, but I'm going to...I'm sorry if this is repetitive. What's the one thing...If you can boil it all down between all these different blogs that you're looking at, whether it's a cooking blog, whether it's a workout blog, what's the one thing that lets you know, hey, this person knows what they're talking about?

Participant: I guess they're able to take a topic, stick with that topic, and write it well and fluidly. I guess I'm trying to think about what...Like you know how you write an essay? You don't just type random words. You have a general outline. There's a theme, maybe a theme, there's a general theme to it. That's something that I look for. If someone can demonstrate that in a blog form, so their posts are generally the same. Their writing form is generally the same. That's something that I look for. The most important, I guess, is that there is an overarching theme. That it's not just someone deciding to blog a paragraph on this, a paragraph on this, and they're just angry or whatever it is.

Researcher: Again, to kind of rephrase it. You're looking more for consistency, whether it's the theme, their writing style, whatever their topic is going to be, just that ...

Participant: Right. They can change their point of view. It's just more consistency. If it's a political blog, feel free to go conservative or a liberal, like whatever, but as long as they are making it a political blog. I don't want them to talk about their kids. I don't want them to tell me about how they took their dog to the vet. That's not helpful to me if I'm looking at politics.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah. I completely understand. I'm going to make a transition to a little bit more meatier stuff, and this is about the two bloggers that I'm researching, Beth Kanter and Brian Solis. I'm going to ask you some questions regarding your experience with the blogger that you're reading.

Participant: OK.

Researcher: Let me start off by asking you which blogger have you been reading? Do you read Beth or do you read Brian?

Participant: I read both. I thought I was supposed to read both. [laughs]

Researcher: OK. Approximately how far back did you start reading...Let's start with Beth. How far back did you start reading Beth's?

Participant: I read probably about a month to three months back, and then I also looked at her archives and read her top 10 posts or whatever she had. Then, I read all the blurbs on her books that she put out, because I wanted to see who she was.

Researcher: OK. This may seem a little bit obvious, but I'm going to ask this anyway. Why did you choose to read Beth's blog?

Participant: [audio cuts out at 10:32]. [laughs]

Researcher: OK. Fair enough. How credible, in your opinion, given the stuff that you talk about, would you say that Beth is to you?

Participant: She seems pretty credible, with the books that she's written and her research. The outreach she does is pretty neat with I guess...Rwanda was the one, and she was also in Cameroon...I can't remember what else she was, but she was kind of jet setting for a while. In terms of writing, though, I felt like some of her writing was a little elementary, just in terms of grammar, not that she had incorrect grammar. The vocabulary she used I felt was a little elementary, but at the same time, I thought maybe she did that so she could reach a more basic audience because a lot of her blog posts are rudimentary in themselves. They're about how to get rural technology, rural communities to get basic technology.

I felt like she was writing to a crowd that wasn't that familiar with technology to begin with. I wasn't offended.

Researcher: Fair enough. When you're reading Beth's blog, what sticks out to you the most?

Participant: One thing that got to me was just the travel, that she seemed to have a more global perspective on technology, and she seemed to...I think it was Pakistan that she went to. She seemed to target places where it was developing third world countries. She really had a sense of trying to bring equality through technology. That's what it looked like to me.

Researcher: OK. Now this may seem a little odd, but do you think that Beth being a woman had any influence on your perception of her credibility? Do you think that she was more credible because she is a woman or the opposite?

Participant: I don't know. I think that reading it, she's targeting her audience well, but I think that, all in honesty, being a woman and doing what's she's doing for these NGOs, global NGOs, I think, in a way, that's an asset because she's talking to women who are in a very patriarchal society, so they might be more likely to reach out to her. But on her blog, her picture -- the bio picture -- I thought it was a really dumb picture. That discredited me. The cowboy hat and the clunky jewelry, that didn't seem very professional to me. It seemed like someone who was a stay at home playing dress up. I was really...I was kind of, like, "Why are you wearing that?" [laughs]

Researcher: OK. Now, what kept you coming back after the few months that you've been reading her blog?

Participant: I just came back because I had to do it for you. If it wasn't for research, I probably wouldn't read her blog, just because that stuff doesn't really interest me. The part that interested me the most, I guess, about her blog was her outreach to developing countries. What I think what I would take away from it is that she talked about the NGOs she helped in those countries. I think I would be more likely to then go to those NGO websites.

I don't want to say her advertisement of it but maybe her...Advertising an NGO is not the correct terminology...Her, I guess, awareness, of those NGOs I thought was beneficial, and they made me aware of NGOs that I wouldn't have been aware of.

Researcher: OK. So it's not necessarily her blog, rather, but the NGOs that she tried to turn you on to that you'd be more likely to visit.

Participant: Yeah.

Researcher: OK. Let's switch over to Brian. When did you start reading Brian's blog?

Participant: About the same. I started reading both of them this week, but I went all the way back and I read his speaking, his bio, all his books. I looked at reviews of his books. I looked at who he worked with I looked at his company. Just to get a sense of, I don't know, I'm kind of...When I read somebody, I like to research that person to see where they're coming from, to get a sense of what their bias is or if they are. That's what I was looking at.

Researcher: OK. Now how credible in your mind do you think Brian is given the criteria that you mentioned earlier?

Participant: He sounds pretty credible. I put him on the same platform as Beth. He's done a lot of work with the private sector in doing, using social media as a way to market, as a way to better manage your company, things like that. I like the way how his blog was set up. How I told you it gives you a little blurb about each blog, and then you go down, so you're not reading one whole blog, and then a whole blog. It looked a little bit more professional than Beth's blog did in my mind.

Researcher: OK. Now when you read his blog, what stuck out to you with Brian?

Participant: He seemed more interested in using social media to bolster your company and to use those savvy consumers to figure out where your company needs to go, especially if you're product is a consumable product, like clothing or something, it's branding almost. It was interesting, he focused, at least to me, it looked like on hiring people for your company that specialized in that, and trying to demonstrate how hiring someone specialized in social media is good for your company. So I thought that was neat.

Researcher: OK. Now so do you think that Brian being a man made you feel like he was more credible or less credible?

Participant: Honestly, he kind of seems slightly less credible to me than Beth did for two reasons. One was his picture that he has where he's like sideways, winking at you. That's a weird one. it was really creepy. It's right on the home page, like it's about Brian and he's got his glasses down peering. That looked really smug to me, and I just think it was a turn off. Then the other that made it a little bit less credible was his opinion, which I think it's a little more of a personal thing. Blogging is you can do whatever you want, but for me, his opinion was engage or die or whatever that book is. It was an ultimatum, like an either/or. To me, it was like that's not black and white. He was all "It's black and white, black and white. This is the way it's going to go. This is the way it's going to go." I was just kind of like, "I don't think we're going to Armageddon, man. You need to chill out."

I just thought he was very pushy about his exact implementation, when I felt like...He's entitled to do that because it's his blog, but for me, it made him less credible.

Researcher: OK. What would keep you coming back to Brian's blog or rather, what kept you coming back over the last however many weeks, months you've been reading?

Participant: Yeah because you told me to, one, and then he has some interesting stuff about how companies can use social media to kind of harness their consumers. It was kind of funny how he phrased it, because it wasn't just for his consumers. It was like he knew that the consumers are going to be savvy, so he wanted to out savvy them, and I was like, "I wonder how they're going to do that?" I kind of read it, because he got a little black and white, and I was like, "OK. Let me read it."

Researcher: That's pretty much all the questions I have for you, but I want to open this time up for you to say anything you want to say. If there's anything that I've missed or you want to add to it, things that I may not have covered in my questions, I'll turn it over to you.

Participant: OK. I'm trying to think. Sorry. I keep moving. I'm uncomfortable with what I'm sitting on. I don't know. I guess for communication, I don't know. Some of it seemed...I don't know if this is an issue that you work in, but those blogs to me both seemed to be very rudimentary. Reading them, to me, it was nothing new, like what they were saying, and it almost seemed a little outdated.

So I was wondering... I think that's my generational bias, though, because I feel like I've grown up with seeing companies do this.

Researcher: Right.

Participant: I wondered did companies hire Brian and Beth and they transformed their companies. I wonder how many companies are still kind of duds when it comes to technology? That don't really know how to harness people? It seems like they would have at least some new hires or maybe their kids would be involved. As a CEO or president of a company, if there was a way for me to reach out and connect to consumers, I would do it. Brian seemed to hint that some companies were putting their arms together and being, like, "We're not going to do it."

And I was like, "I don't know if I see it, companies being that negative towards technology."

Researcher: On that note, what's your view of companies right now? Do you think a lot of them are doing a good job with the social media that they do have in place?

Participant: Yeah, I think so. They're really good. Facebook has all my celiac stuff. They know yoga. They know how to target me very well, but again, to me personally. I'm not the consumer that would reach out. I'm the consumer that goes on "Consumer Reports" and things like that, like reads reviews. I don't buy a book unless I review it first, unless it's like "Harry Potter."

Researcher: Right.

Participant: I'm not going to go out of my to send a Twitter to Proctor and Gamble or send a Twitter to, a tweet or whatever to Victoria's Secret. I'm just not that person, and so I just kind of see it as "Oh, that's cool. I'm glad they're getting into another way to advertise in social media." But sometimes I think it's kind of annoying, like when I get emails from companies five times a week. Almost like I don't care. Stop doing this. I'm not going to answer you. [laughs]

I don't know. Maybe I'm not the best reach out consumer, but I pay attention. I just like to do...I actually research. I'm not a person that's going to talk to a tweet about something. I just don't do that. [laughs]

Researcher: OK. Is there anything that you feel like I've missed or I've kind of gone past in the questions I've asked you?

Participant: I don't think so. I think it's hard to do what you're doing because a blog means so many things to so many different people. I feel like my opinions, I'm always qualifying, being like, "But that's my personal opinion. I know a blog can be whatever you want it to be." I think that's kind of hard, but I feel like you did a good job of letting me qualify what I meant, because I'm not trying to say that I think all blogs should be this or that I believe all blogs should be that. It's just I guess what I'm drawn to for blogs, though. I think it's kind of tricky. Like good job for trying to pin that down, have definition.

Researcher: Well, thank you. Thank you. Well, do you have any questions or anything for me before we end?

Participant: No, good luck with it. [laughs]

Researcher: You can email me if you've got any questions or if you want to know what we're doing with the data, I'll be more than happy to let you know. It's going to be stored securely over our communication department.

Researcher: Awesome. Well, thanks for your help. I really, really appreciate it.

Participant: No problem.

Researcher: All right. Thanks, Caitlyn.

Participant: All right. Bye.

Participant 4 Interview

Researcher: So Chris, I'd like to thank you for being willing to speak with me about blogging credibility. I'm going to start off by asking you a few general questions. I'd like to give you some information first. First, all of your information is going to be kept confidentially in the office at the comm building at the University of Tennessee in room 293. If you've got any questions, you can call the UT compliance officer or you can contact me asachs@utk.edu.

And so, we're going to go ahead and start off. I'm going to ask you first, what is your age?

Participant: 26.

Researcher: OK. And how often do you read blogs?

Participant: Almost every day.

Researcher: All right, and what sort of information do you typically search out when you read blogs?

Participant: I'm typically looking for information relevant to my field or my education. I'm going for my MBA right now, so I'm typically looking at business articles. I read the Harvard Business Review, the Atlantic blog. I keep up with Seth Godin, people like that. Primarily, I'm just looking for information that's relevant to my field or something that I find interesting. Sometimes it's tech blogs. Sometimes it's social media. I'm a digital marketing manager, so a lot of what I have to look at is, OK, how is social media applicable to my job field and things like that.

Researcher: How do you decide what blog to go to or what blogger to read?

Participant: I really try to... I base it on their credibility, for one. I don't just look for people that look like they're blogging for the sake of keywords. You can tell when people are doing that these days, but I try to look for a site that... If I'm going to a blog for the first time, the first thing I look at, of course, is site layout, site design. Are there a bunch of ad banners everywhere? Because if there are, you can tell why they're blogging. If it's just somebody like Mark Schaffer, where it's just a very nice, well laid out blog, very professional looking, no ads. You can tell, "Well, this person's blogging for professional reasons, probably to get paid in other ways other than making money off of that."

I would say those are the ways that... Those are the things that I look for. And then as far as content goes, I just look for someone who knows what they're talking about. Are they reusing articles? Are they just restating articles from Mashable or are they really talking about original ideas and original thoughts?

Researcher: OK, thank you. What keeps you coming back to the blogs that you read?

Participant: Well, what I ended with. Original ideas, original thoughts, people that are clearly frontrunners in their fields. I like people that are on top of things. There's a photographer that I follow, I don't really follow his blog so much as I follow his Instagram feeds and stuff like that, but he does video blogging and he does some other stuff. Part of the reason I track him, A, is

because he engages me. B, because he does some really unique film photography and some really neat professional stuff. It's within the field and sometimes he gets selected for product releases and product party promotions and things like that that you don't normally get to see outside of following someone who's a blogger in that field like that.

That's what I mean by someone who's a frontrunner in their field.

Researcher: And so, moving on, I'd like to ask you a few general questions about credibility and your experience with blogging or reading blogs. When you hear the words "credibility and blogging," what comes to mind?

Participant: Credibility and blogging, I think they can be fairly synonymous. I think you need to be careful about who you decide to consider to be a credible author. I think they have to cite sources. It's like anything else. If you're reading a journal, some medical journal or something like that you want the author to have cited sources. I would expect bloggers to do the same thing. They can do it through hyperlinks. That's what I try to do, even with my own blogging, is... Say I'm talking about a subject matter for my work, which is Abedra. I'll blog and I'll say something about the... If I say something about the EPA, I'm going to have a link at least to the EPA's website, if not to that specific article where I pulled that information from.

I think that authors that, and in some cases Brian Solis or somebody, he might be working with Klout or somebody like that. He might have more of a standpoint of, "I'm just going to be the first one to be releasing this information or talking about the information we've discovered," but they still have to have sources cited somewhere in the article.

That's where credibility comes in for me. When I can see that they're pulling from an official source, from an official research source, and I can tell they're not just extrapolating data in a way that interprets it to their best benefit like, for instance, the Atlantic had something about how there was a direct correlation between religion and underaged pregnancies in the south. The correlation there, yeah it was similar, but were they for the same reason or was that just more of a coincidence than a true correlation?

And then, again, just going to the Knoxville Social Slam, this is what brought this up to me. Thomas Webster, who's a big, or Tom Webster, Webbie2010 or 2001 or something like that on Twitter. He talked recently about how a lot of time the most correlated data tends to cluster. It doesn't tend to create a trend pattern.

It was really interesting what he said. I could be misquoting him on that, but basically what we normally associate as being correlated isn't always necessarily a correlation effect. But correlations are more in clusters than they are in an actual set trend line. So if you see something trending upward, yeah, it might look like, "OK, you can put the Y axis there."

I just got out of a stats class for my business stuff. You can put the axis there and you can follow it, but it's not going to give you necessarily a true inference as to what is really in correlation. But true correlations or clusters of information, not the other.

So when the Atlantic extrapolates that, obviously I have to question, "OK, well they're using one bit of research data and they're trying to pull something out. I think to make more of a political, social point than they are anything else." So things like that.

Researcher: So citing sources. Is there anything else that comes to mind when you think about what makes a blogger credible or not credible?

Participant: Experience. I mean, obviously, experience matters a lot. Granted, you could have one blogger, if you want to consider even people tweeting microblogging, or Facebook posts. You could have someone's firsthand experience. Obviously, that credibility is going to be more important than any time in the field. An example being the riots in Egypt and places like that. But, for the most part, for someone who's consistently blogging you want someone with... And I think experience. And then the ability to tell... I think their bias is also an important part of their credibility. What's their in? Brian Solis with Klout, it's like OK, yeah, he talks about Klout a lot, but he also is paid by Klout.

If you're having someone who's paid by that source, how credible is their research when they're getting funded by that company? That runs into that level of credibility, too.

Researcher: I apologize if these questions seem a little bit repetitive. They're just designed to help me get the best answers.

Participant: Sure.

Researcher: I know you mentioned some of these things in the last question, but order some of the most important things to you when you're reading a blog.

Participant: Most important things to when I'm reading a blog? I think the author's writing style is really important. Good grammar, to be honest. There is nothing more frustrating than reading through a blog that has interesting content but terrible grammar. If they can't get their, there, and they're right or your and you're or something like that, it drives me insane. I tend to actually lose some credibility on someone who's not taking the time to proofread their work. Now, that said, I've blogged and made grammatical mistakes here and there, but even then I think that some authors do a bad job of just posting a blog and saying, "Oh, there's a blog. Go read it," and hoping that people won't care about the mistake. Or maybe they don't realize what they're doing wrong.

That's important to me. I would say that the content itself needs to be engaging. It just doesn't need to be all text. Some of it needs to be visual. I try to use that, even in my professional work blogging. That is that I actually have... What am I trying to say? You always have at least a picture or a video included and at least one or two off site links just so...

Or even intrasite links, depending on your company or your business or what you're doing. Like a reference to a previous blog or something that takes the person on a journey with the blog so they're not just looking at that because people get bored when they read blogs. I think that if you're not spending time to engage your audience in ways that go beyond just, "OK, I'm going to write a 500 word blog post on what's going on with Twitter these days." It's not really going to be that beneficial and people aren't going to find it engaging.

Researcher: So grammar and engaging content are the two most important things for you?

Participant: Yeah. Oh, absolutely. It would be a good way to sum it up.

Researcher: Out of those items, what is the one that lets you know that the author knows what they're talking about?

Participant: The one that the author knows... Sorry.

Researcher: Let me rephrase it. What are the characteristics that let you know that a blogger is experienced or is an expert and knows their subject matter?

Participant: The thing that makes me feel like an author knows that they're experience or knows the subject matter just comes, again, from their writing style. It's not so much about the grammar here as it is about what they're writing about, their level of opinion. That's a hard one to answer. But really, I think it just comes from, OK, well you take all these characteristics that I've described so far and you combine them into, "OK, this is what they're saying. This is clearly their point in saying this." And if it resonates with me, then I'm going to find it to be something that I'm like, "OK, well that... Yeah, I've seen that." That sort of thing. Like not really a blogger, but a comic writer, Scott Adams, "Dilbert."

He has done an excellent job of creating a blog that... Not a blog but a comic strip that you can read and you go, "Oh, that's really funny because I've had that happen to me." In fact, lately, it seems like a string of his strips have just been my everyday life.

That sort of thing is the type of thing that makes me go, "OK, I can really relate to that person. I can really say I like them."

Researcher: Excellent. Thank you. I'd like to ask you some questions about your experience reading Brian Solis' blog. When did you start reading Brian's blog?

Participant: Probably a year or two ago. It was just because he's a good author. He obviously has some influence in... I guess it was about a year ago, actually. But yeah, it was just because he seemed to be a really good author. Really engaging.

Researcher: This is maybe one of those questions that seems repetitive.

Participant: That's OK.

Researcher: Why did you choose to read him?

Participant: At the time, I was going through a new business doing social media and I wanted someone who I knew was doing social media consulting. I knew I wanted someone who was truly the top of their field, heading research, heading information. I actually had a friend of mine recommend that I start reading him and check out some of his stuff. And so, yeah, I got into him that way.

Researcher: OK, excellent. And how credible do you think that Brian Solis is?

Participant: I think he's fairly credible. I think sometimes his blog and some of the pictures of himself come across as slightly pretentious, maybe a little uptight. And then, of course, as I've already mentioned the Klout thing. I know he's working with Klout on projects so he's consulting for them. He's probably getting paid by them. So sometimes I have to question what his true angle on Klout is, given all of that. But beyond that, he knows his stuff and he can definitely write really well.

Researcher: You mentioned his pictures seeming pretentious. Can you elaborate on that for me?

Participant: Well, his last blog picture that I can remember is him in a tuxedo with a martini glass and a monocle. What's not pretentious about that? This is the image he gives off.

Researcher: When you read Brian's blog, what sticks out to you the most?

Participant: That's a good question. I would say his depth, the real depth in his blog, I think, is important. I see a lot of social media bloggers out there that are claiming to be gurus and they're just repeating stuff off the Mashable and they're repeating stuff of other blogs, but Brian Solis, because of his connections and because of his level of knowledge and whatever else that he has that allows him to blog the way he does. IT just seems like his articles are really in depth and really smartly written and he knows what he's talking about. You can just tell by the way he writes. He just knows what he's talking about.

Researcher: How does Brian's gender influence your thinking about his credibility?

Participant: You're playing the sex card on me. [laughs] It really doesn't. Anymore, male, female? I don't think it really would influence my decision about him, male or female. I don't know. That's so tough. I think the hard thing for me with credibility to women is because you see so many people on Twitter that follow you because you mention social media or something. A lot of them, in my experience, some people who follow me and claim to be social media experts are women. There are pictures of women. Some of them are just spambots, some of them people with automated auto follow blogs that they hear the word social media and they automatically follow you. But, with that said I would say... I mean, overall, for someone who's truly credible like Brian Solis, it doesn't affect my decision making, but when finding someone new...

Yeah, I'm actually a little wary of women bloggers, just because I want to make sure that they have some status or some position or something, just like I would with any male, have that position that says, "OK, they're legitimate." They have that experience.

I would be much more trustworthy of a woman who's worked for Mashable than someone who just claims to be a social media guru and is repeating Mashable content.

The gender really doesn't affect it, but when I'm looking to get into a new blog, I'm always a little more wary of women just because of all the crap that's out there.

Researcher: OK. Thank you. What keeps you coming back to Brian's blog?

Participant: His content. He's always bringing up new content like... I've seen a lot of other bloggers, and I don't know, maybe Brian does this and I haven't noticed yet, but other bloggers

like Mark Schaffer and Jeff Boles, tend to repeat blogs a lot. Some of that's because you don't catch blogs the first time, and that's fine, but... Jeff Boles will repeat blog content from two years ago in some cases. And while I will say one of his blog posts on how to create a better blog actually helped me get featured on the front page of WordPress, I kid you not, aside from that one blog post. I will attribute some of that success because I read that article and then I wrote the blog post. I was like, "Whoa! Hey, look! The front page of WordPress as Freshly Pressed. That's fantastic."

But, I mean, that said, beyond that he repeats information and data that's old. That's the problem. Social media's still, even five years later, twelve, God seven years later after social media really started growing beyond your typical social networks. It became something to where, how would you say it? It became something where... I lost my train of thought.

After things started growing beyond social networks... I just totally lost my train of thought.

Researcher: Not a problem.

Participant: What was the question again?

Researcher: What keeps you coming back to Brian's blog?

Participant: What keeps me coming back? Yeah, that's what I was saying. After the inception of social media and stuff, everything's been growing at such a quick pace and everything is still changing enough to where you want to have someone who's on top of it. You don't want people repeating old content all the time. You want new, fresh content. And repeating content occasionally, even within the same week as a promotional, "Hey, did you see this yet?" or within the same month, sure. That's fine. But once it gets beyond, even... I would say at the absolute max three to six months. That content's going to be old. And to continue to repeat it is what frustrates me.

So when I see someone like Brian Solis who's constantly putting out new material that keeps me coming back.

Researcher: OK, excellent. This brings me to the last question.

Participant: Yeah.

Researcher: That is, I want to open up this time for you to say anything that you feel like I've missed. So that being said, the last question is is there anything that you'd like to add or is there anything that you feel like I've missed in this interview?

Participant: No, not really. I mean, where we're talking about credibility, we're talking about bloggers. The only thing I would say is what is your perception. Maybe you could add something about what is your perception of a blogger outside of their blog. Who are they outside of their blog, because I think that adds a lot to credibility because, again, it could be some guy sitting at home in their underwear every day blogging. And there are some bloggers like that. If it's the right content, then it really doesn't matter.

I don't know if this guy does it particularly, but I enjoy his blogs because they're very humorous and pretty sure he blogs full time. He's a guy named Wolf Nards. It's funny. He does a lot of sci-fi/fantasy blogs. He does dissertations on things that really don't need dissertations like the psychology behind Bugs Bunny in drag or things about the rise and fall of Val Kilmer. Just random funny blogs.

Things like that, I don't really care what he does outside of that time because he's just writing a fun blog. But for someone who's a professional blogger, talking about professional topics. Think to a guy here in town who's been getting into blogging, Steve Suggs. He's trying to learn from people like Mark Schaffer and others on how to blog.

It's very important that I know that Steve is credible. I do, personally know that he's credible because my dad's worked with him. Steve has been in the sales training industry for years. He's now trying to get new business by really focusing on this new sales software model that he has, and also talking to... Trying to get people to do his sales training stuff through his online software so blogging that kind of content helps him.

But knowing his credibility helps me trust the content and the product. So yeah, for the professional realm, I would say it's especially important to make sure he knows basically the resume. A LinkedIn profile, things like that really help me to decide what I feel about those professionals.

Researcher: And so, is there anything else you'd like to add before we end this time.

Participant: No. We're good.

Researcher: All right, well thanks for being willing to do this. Again, if you've got any questions about this interview or the data associated with it, you can contact me asax@edk.edu or you can contact our compliance officer.

Participant: All right.

Researcher: Thanks, Chris.

Participant: Thank you. It was good.

Participant 5 Interview

Researcher: How you doing?

Participant: Good, thank you. You?

Researcher: I'm doing well, thank you. I'd like to thank you for being willing to do this. I really appreciate you taking time out of your day to participate in our research.

Participant: OK. No problem.

Researcher: We're going to go ahead and get started. First, I'll start off by saying this call is being recorded. That's just for me to be able to transcribe it for research purposes.If you've got any questions at any time, feel free to stop me. If you'd like to know about your rights of the subject, you can contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at 865-974-3466 or if you'd like to contact me personally, you can contact me by email at asachs@utk.edu or at 865-408-8617.

Participant: OK.

Researcher: Before we go any further, do you have any questions for me?

Participant: Nope.

Researcher: Great.

Participant: Oh, wait. How long will this last?

Researcher: About 30 minutes.

Participant: OK, great.

Researcher: Also, just to let you know if at any time you feel uncomfortable during the interview, feel free to stop me. It's not going to hurt anything.

Participant: Right. Oh and then, just reiterating, these results are aggregated, right?

Researcher: Yes.

Participant: OK. Great.

Researcher: All right. I'll start off by first asking your age.

Participant: Oh. Well, I just turned 46 last week.

Researcher: Congratulations.

Participant: Yeah, whatever. When you get to my age it's not a congratulations. [laughs] Anyway, 46.

Researcher: First, I'm going to ask you some questions about your blog reading habits. How often do you read blogs, Participant?

Participant: I probably read a few every day.

Researcher: What kind of information do you typically search out when you read blogs?

Participant: It's professional.

Researcher: Can you elaborate on that for me just a little bit?

Participant: Sure. Usually related to technology use by social media, by organizations, particularly social media technology. Sometimes, businesses, trends. I think that's mostly what I'm reading nowadays.

Researcher: How do you decide what blog to go to or what blogger to read?

Participant: There's a mix. Do you want to ask me how I do it today or how I have done it?

Researcher: However you feel comfortable answering.

Participant: My blog reading habits have changed and evolved over the years. I've probably been reading blogs about, I don't know, at least five years. What I do now is I have a couple, I guess, trusted content curation sources. Many of them, I have curated myself and put into funnels. I have an RSS feed reader. I do use Google Reader. I rarely go to it.

When I do, I'm always thankful because those are the blogs I've curated, I know I want to read. I don't often [indecipherable 04:06] very busy day. I'm a consultant. I work all the time. I have two kids. I like to spend time with my family and friends.

I don't often have time to go to the RSS feed reader. What I have to do as part of my every day job is keep up with what's going on in social media, because I'm a digital strategist for non-profits. That means that I spend time on Facebook, on Google+, on Delicious and on a number of other sites. I look at what is being posted there. On Twitter, a lot of time on Twitter.

I end up finding the blogs that I read, I'd say my number one source at this point is on Scoop.it, S-C-O-O-P dot I-T, which is a social bookmarking site. I curate to Scoop.it content, whatever they are called. There's a lot.

There are a lot that I follow and I just trust the curator. I follow ones that are specific to the areas that I'm interested in. Beth Kanter, who I know we're talking about, she curates a number of them. There's a number of others. I'll look through those and they point me to blog posts.

I have a curated Twitter stream. I think I have, I don't know, 68 or 100 people following me. I don't even know anymore. A lot of people follow me. I don't follow a lot back, even fewer I pay attention to. I have about 50 in a very closely curated Twitter stream. When I'm on Twitter and looking at what they're posting, I would say that, in general, I will look at the blog posts they're referring me to.

I also am a pretty active social bookmarker on Delicious. When I'm bookmarking on Delicious, I'll sometimes scroll through that. Then, I'll see...

I have a curated Google+ circle through a number of different ways, through fundraising peeps or non-profit technology people, or what I just call social media people. I will look at what they're posting by stream periodically as well.

There's a number of different ways I get to it. I can't worry about what I'm missing. I just read what I can.

Then, I would say that there are three that I try to get to every single week. I actually have Beth Kanter, her blog is my home page whenever I open up Safari, which is not my primary browser, but I need it for a number of things because my primary browser blocks ads. When I want to go someplace that has ads, it reminds me to read Beth's blog.

I always read Frog Loop, the care-to blog. I just try and remember to go to it a couple times a week. I should disclose that I'm a partner at Social Bright, but I read it because they curate really great content and I take a look at that, too.

Researcher: Of the blogs that you've mentioned, what connects them?

Participant: What do you mean?

Researcher: Is there a reason that you go back to those blogs every single week?

Participant: Oh, because they tend to be broad. Social Bright and Frog Loop tend to have a broader swath, an overview, of what's going on in the non-profit technology space. They'll look at tools, they'll look at trends, there'll be interviews of what non-profits are doing. Beth takes a deeper dive into technology and learning and transparency, which I enjoy. I forgot. I try to read Alison [indecipherable 07:43] every week as well, because she's very thought provoking.

Researcher: Excellent. Now, I would like to ask you a few general questions abut credibility in your experience with blogging. When you hear the words credibility in blogging what comes to your mind?

Participant: It's usually the author, that the author really knows what he or she is talking about. Are you going to ask me a question later on about what is a not credible blogger?

Researcher: Yes.

Participant: OK. I'll answer it further than.

Researcher: That's actually the next question. What do you think makes a blogger credible or not credible?

Participant: There are a lot of bloggers out there who just are trying to build a business for themselves. I'll admit that I was the first to do that, too. I think it's a fine way to build your business, but it doesn't necessarily mean everybody knows what they're talking about. I think that

there are just a lot of people who have not done their job or been in digital communications enough, especially in the non-profit space, to know what they're talking about.

I can tell that pretty quickly. It's usually someone new to the space. If they've worked as a non-profit as the head of marketing or communications or technology and then they go off on their own, that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about the upstart who just is thinking that they're a consultant. I can tell pretty quickly.

They start writing posts like "10 things you need to know about working with non-profits" or "What is social media?" Very generic, very 101 based type of blogs. It may also be my preference, but I don't like to read that. That's a waste of my time.

Researcher: Is there anything else that you think makes a blogger credible or not credible?

Participant: Sorry. Thank you. Just finishing up the non-credible, other non-credible bloggers, they're the ones that are just always pointing to how great they are. I'm not really interested in reading about all of the great things that they do. Another reason I don't think a blogger is credible is because they don't share. It's kind of the second part to they're talking about themselves. Bloggers need to share what's going on in the industry and share what their colleagues are doing.

The reverse of that is what makes a blogger credible? They're sharing. They're talking about other people. They're talking about other organizations besides themselves. They are the first to say in a blog post, "So and so blogged about this and that gave me a really great idea," and they link to that.

A blogger is often credible because people are linking to them who I would consider credible or talking about them who I would consider credible. I consider Alison [indecipherable 10:52] credible and, when she's talking about someone I haven't heard about, I'm going to go check them out.

Researcher: You've already hinted at this, and I apologize if the questions seem repetitive, they're just designed to help me get the best answer. What are some of the most important things to you when you're reading a blog?

Participant: When I what a blog?

Researcher: When you are reading a blog.

Participant: OK. The most important thing is that they have a high level of understanding of the industry they're writing about, that the blogger is looking at a higher level view of what's going on in the industry and looking at trends and cases and there's not a very, very narrow perspective related to one organization or one person's deeds. I think that it's important that the blogger be a very good writer. I didn't mention this. There is a blogger that I think is kind of one of those upstarts. He started off promoting himself a lot and he moved away from that.

He kind of knows what he's talking about, but he's a terrible writer and he's very informal in the way that he writes. Lots of not capitalizing things. Extremely informal in the way you might do an email to a friend and that puts me off.

I feel like, if you're blogging professionally, you have to have a professional tone and the respect for the readers that you're addressing them professionally. I will admit, Aaron, that this could be a generational thing.

Researcher: I'd like to ask you some questions, specifically, regarding your experience with Beth Kanter's blog. When did you start reading Beth's blog?

Participant: 2008. 2008, September.

Researcher: Why did you choose to read her blog?

Participant: I had just graduated from business school. I had worked in the non-profit world for almost 18 years or so and I felt like my business school had not focused on social media for non-profits and I was frustrated. I can't remember why, but someone pointed me to her.

Researcher: When you read Beth's blog, what sticks out to you the most?

Participant: What excites me the most, you said?

Researcher: I'm sorry, what sticks out to you the most?

Participant: I really like analytics and I really like data and so does Beth. I can always count that Beth includes that in almost everything that she writes when it's not a guest post or something like that. There's always a deeper level to her blog posts and she often will test out things I'm interested in. I feel like, "Great, she's testing that first and I'm going to learn from that." The other thing is that she's really open about learning in public, which I very much admire. She'll test things. She'll try things personally or with organizations and talk about how they failed or how they succeeded.

She also has access to a lot of people that most of us do not have access to. She can have lunch at Facebook and she can walk into Google and probably talk with Sergey Brin and we can't.

Researcher: Excellent. Thank you. How does Beth's gender influence your thinking about her credibility?

Participant: I don't think it does one way or another.

Researcher: OK. What keeps you coming back to Beth's blog?

Participant: I don't know if there's nobody...I don't think there's anybody that writes the way that Beth writes. She's consistent. She produces content five days a week, which--not to be transcribed, please, this is off the record, but I do think it's insane. That's a very hard schedule to keep up with and I admire her for keeping up with. Back on the record. She produces five days a week, which is consistent, I can count on it, I know it's there. It's all a very high quality post. It's a deep dive into something. It's consistent with my point of view.

I'm frustrated with superficial looks at social media and she never does that. She has wonderful guest posts who share what they've learned when they've done social media campaigns, which I'm always wanting to learn from and to offer to my clients.

What I really like about her blog is that it's often a great place to look for resources. I know she's been doing a lot of blog posts on Pinterest and maybe I've bookmarked some and maybe I haven't. I can always go back and search her blog and I can trust that her blog's summarized the way that I'm thinking about it.

There are things she doesn't write about as much as others, but that's what she writes about and I enjoy it.

Researcher: Excellent. That brings me to the very last question and this is basically a time to open up and allow you to say anything you'd like to say. Is there anything else that you'd like to add or that you feel I've missed?

Participant: I guess there's a couple of things. One thing that Beth does, and I don't know if anyone talked about it with you, is that she uses an informal means of research for a number of her blog posts and that is through her Facebook page and her Twitter feed and also through this closed group that we're a part of, the social media non-profit friends group that I'm sure someone's mentioned to you at this point.

She will ask questions and I always know she's about to write a blog post about it. She really will allow people to offer resources or ideas or thoughts about that question. She always credits them in the blog post.

I know if Beth asks me a question about, I don't know, whatever, and I say, "Oh, I did write an article about this, Beth, that might be relevant to what you're talking about."

I'm not thinking about it selfishly like, "She's going to cite my article. Boy, I should tell her." But if she found it interesting, I'm sure she would cite my article.

That's something I really admire and I aspire to do that and I try and stick with that ethic as well. When someone has a conversation with me on Twitter, I will say to them, "I really like what you had to say. Can I include that in a blog post and I'll take a screenshot of it and put it in the blog post?"

I like that, that she really uses cross-channel and informal resources to crowdsource what she wants to know and to get the pulse of what's going on.

There was something I was going to say about her blog. Let me think about it for a second. It was slightly negative. It was something that was frustrating to me about it and now I can't remember. Let me think...

Oh, that's it. It's the same thing that someone will say about me, which is Beth hasn't worked at a non-profit as a director of communications and marketing or technology. That is the only piece that I would say is missing.

If you were to fill out, what would make someone 100 percent fully credible, like filling out their LinkedIn profile to 100 percent, if she had that piece of it. She does the best that she can and she brings in all those pieces as often as possible. She just shares it with others, with guest posts or interviewing people, and I do the same thing. It's the same knock on me.

Researcher: OK. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Participant: I guess I'd just add to that. There's nothing Beth can do about it, but I would say if somebody had Beth and they worked at that organization, they'd have it all. You know?

Researcher: [indecipherable 20:10]

Participant: If they'd worked at that organization, they'd have it all. No, I think Beth is really generous with the community and that adds a lot to her credibility. She's very, very generous. I don't really think so. Is there anything that you feel I didn't answer fully that you want to go back and ask me to clarify?

Researcher: Actually, yes. How credible do you think that Beth Kanter is?

Participant: I don't know. How do you answer that? Is it a scale?

Researcher: However you want to answer that. In your opinion, how credible do you think she is?

Participant: Credible as what? As a blogger?

Researcher: Yes.

Participant: Or as an expert?

Researcher: Blogger, as an expert.

Participant: I think she's very, very credible. I'd put her way up there. As I said, I think she's a 4.9 out of five only because she's missing this piece in her background, but she can't do anything about that. I think she's as credible as it gets. I don't remember if there's been any controversy in her blog recently. I don't think so, and I can't think of a specific time when she's written something that's very controversial. She doesn't tend to write those posts. She doesn't write the post "I hate Google because..." That's not who she is.

She's very research based. I think one of the hallmarks of a very credible blogger is someone who's fair minded and willing to listen to controversy and I think, also, that's a piece of it. I feel pretty confident that Beth would do that. She wouldn't close down conversation, for example.

I should mention I've met Beth in person. I've had dinner with Beth and other folks. I know Beth. I can't say that we're friends. She's just a genuinely nice person and that helps. That definitely fills out that credibility for me.

That would be important to know. If I met somebody and that person turned out to be an asshole, that would totally change my view of the credibility of the blog.

Researcher: That is good to know. If you don't have anything else you'd like to add, that brings me to the end of the interview.

Researcher: Thank you. Thank you very much.

Participant: OK. Bye.

Researcher: Bye.

Participant 6 Interview

Researcher: Excellent. Again, I just want to thank you and to let you know this is being recorded.

Participant: OK.

Researcher: I'll give you a little bit of a spiel here. If at any time you've got any questions, feel free to stop me during the interview. If you don't feel comfortable or don't want to proceed, that's absolutely fine. The data that's going to be collected from this research is going to be kept in the University of Tennessee's Communications Office at the 293 Communications Building. It's going to be kept confidentially, so nothing outside of me, or my thesis committee, my thesis advisor, nothing like that's going to be shared. If you've got any questions about the data, you can always feel free to contact me at asacjs@utk.edu, or you can contact our Compliance Officer at the Office of Research, and their number is 865-974-3466.

Participant: All right.

Researcher: Before we begin, do you have any questions for me?

Participant: I don't think so.

Researcher: All right. Well then, I'd like to start off by asking you a few general questions about your blog reading habits. To begin, how often do you read blogs?

Participant: Oh, gosh. I'm in the communications business. I do a lot of research and reading for my job. I am probably reading blogs many times a day. I read them personally a little bit less often. That's probably more a once a week or once every two weeks. But, yeah, I do an enormous amount of research online, and I do spend a lot of time looking at blogs about various different things.

Researcher: Excellent. What information do you typically search out when you read blogs?

Participant: I'll give you another personal and professional divided answer. Are you more interested in the professional use of them, or the personal use?

Researcher: However you'd like to do it.

Participant: OK. When I am doing research for a client, I often look for blogs because you can get a different sense of trends when you're looking at something that is so time-oriented. You also then get to see what the users and the other readers are saying and thinking about it, so you can have a sense of how well-received a particular perspective is. There's an element of timeliness to information that I'm looking for. Gauging other's opinions on that information, looking for other connections

For example, I have a client that is in the glass manufacturing business, and they do a lot of work architects and designers. For example, they have a shower product, and I'll do research on shower design.

Many of the things that I look at, I interpret the information from a blog a little bit differently than I would a from a product website, knowing that a product website is oriented at selling me that product. They're going to be talking about all of its features and benefits, and whatever their persuasive message is.

If I find an independent blogger, or even a sponsored blogger in some cases, talking about a design trend or use of a particular product, you just get a different view of it that's a little bit less rigid. It's not to say that it's more trustworthy, but it gives you a broader view, and gives you more information to make decisions about what is trustworthy and what is marketing.

Researcher: How do you decide what blog to go to or what blogger to read?

Participant: If I am doing research like I was just talking about, it often is a matter of search results to begin with. I'll start out with just some keyword searches to see what comes up. It might be a name that I recognize from having seen it in the past. You asked me specifically about Beth Kanter in our email exchange, when you have a relationship over time with someone like Beth, you build trust in her because you know what she's looking at, what things she's doing, the activities she's involved in.

I've read Beth's blog for probably six years now. I don't read every issue, but we're friends on every possible platform. I'm in pretty close touch with what she's doing every day, and in a case like that I would go straight to Beth's blog if it was a philanthropy or social media question, because I know she has expertise in those areas.

I would also look at other people who were active on her blog, and other blogs that she comments on or follows as other good sources. I use her social network. When it's more of a little bit of a cold call research thing, how I decide whether to pursue that person versus another blogger really depends on the quality of what they write and how relevant the topics they're covering are to the research I'm doing.

Researcher: Excellent. With the blogs that you do go to, what keeps you coming back to those blogs?

Participant: Quality content is definitely probably the most important thing. A user friendly design helps. There are blogs that I follow that are not very well designed, and they're probably not at the top of my list. Some of them are people who, like with Beth, I've developed a relationship with over the years and I trust their information. If I were to come to their blog today and see it, I might think, "Oh, I'm not sure I can trust this person. It looks like their site was built in 1989." The design certainly influences that. You want to have something that is professionally designed.

Professionally and well-written. If I'm looking at it from a business perspective. Everybody makes mistakes, I'm not saying it has to be perfect, but if I see a lot of errors in terms of bad spelling or links don't work, or it's just a super frustrating experience, I'm probably going to go elsewhere.

Personally, I tend to follow blogs of people I know, whether I know them from virtual relationships, or I know them because I've met them and I have a face to face friendship with

them. Those maybe have a different filter for credibility, because I don't require an individual to have as much design expertise as I might require a professional or a company to have.

Researcher: You mentioned something about quality content early in your response. Can you just elaborate on that a little more for me, what quality content would be to you?

Participant: Sure. Because I read so many, that has quite a broad definition. If it is a creative blog, I suppose quality relates to, does it cause me to think about things in new ways? Are they presenting ideas and opinions or observations that are helping me grow and learn and think? Is it an enriching conversation? If it's more of a research or business purpose for me being at the blog, it's a little bit more about is the content, does it feel trustworthy? Does it have broad perspective? I'm 35 years old, and identify as a Gen-Xer and I tend to fit that "I don't want to be sold to" definition. If I feel like I'm being sold to, I'm very skeptical about the information.

I do look for someone who is transparent. Chris Brogan is a great example. He very clearly will say if he's being hired by a client or not when he's representing his opinion, and he is also very good at noting what the upsides and the downsides of an issue.

He blogs about all sorts of different things, but he will often say, "I really like this because...on the other hand, that could also mean..." I feel like he's presenting an opinionated, but thoughtful response to something. If I feel like I'm trying to be overly persuaded to believe in one way or the other, it just rubs me the wrong way.

Researcher: Excellent. Thank you very much. I'd like to ask you a few general questions about credibility in your experience with blogging or reading blogs. When you hear the words credibility and blogging, what comes to mind?

Participant: As a reader?

Researcher: Yes.

Participant: When I hear the words credibility and blogging I think about, is the person trustworthy? Is there transparency in what their motivations are? Are they clear about whether they're working for someone or representing their own opinion? Are they someone who checks their facts, or are they just spreading rumors?

Researcher: To continue on that, what do you think makes a blogger credible or not credible.

Participant: Let me think about that for a second.

Researcher: Take all the time you need.

Participant: I'm trying to think about a blogger that I can think of as not being credible. There are many of them out there and I tend to discard them quickly. Things that make a blogger credible, I like to know a little about the person. If they have a bio that is clear and explains who they are and what the purpose of their writing is, that's helpful. When I see things like they will call out when they've edited a post, they will call out what their edits are, what their updates are rather than just editing the post and reposting it as if it were the first time. I like it when they're transparent. You'll see often the full disclosure, I work for a company that does X, Y, and Z or

they'll let you know this is a personal blog and my opinions don't represent those of IBM, for example.

However, I do work with IBM as a client, so you know where they're coming from. And, I think another thing that really influences my perspective on how credible someone is how they respond to comments. There are always best practices about being polite and nice to people. There are ways to handle negative commentary that are more credible than others. Some people just delete all the negative comments and I would perceive that as not being very credible. Responding to them in public and solving that problem rather than trying to pretend it doesn't exist.

There is an exception to that which is probably an important one to note which is our local news site here called Mlive.com and the Mlive commentaries are notorious for being anonymous and very nasty and whether a reporter responds to commentary on his piece on Mlive doesn't make any difference to me whatsoever because I wouldn't respond to those either.

Researcher: When you're reading a blog, what are some of the most important things to you?

Participant: I'm often working on a very compressed timeline both personally and professionally, so I highly appreciate the scanability, being able to quickly understand what the gist of the post is and make a decision about whether that's something that is worth it to me to spend the time reading or if that's a day where I'm just going to let it go by without reading it. I suppose some of the functionality of the platform is important. I like to be able to comment. I like it when commentaries have names and faces rather than being anonymous. I like it when the poster responds to my comment or comments of others and facilitates a conversation. I think that actually helps a blog provide more value when you're not just putting an opinion out there in the world but when it gets traction, you almost become a small community leader in a way.

Did you ask me for things I dislike, too? I'm sorry, I've forgotten the question.

Researcher: The question was what are some of the most important things to you when you're reading a blog?

Participant: I would say beyond that general stuff it is about whether the topic and the subject is relevant to me and what I'm looking for. If it's more of a general blog where I think about it in a personal way, I am usually looking for information that is somehow innovative and interesting and a new way of thinking, a commentary on current events that matter to me. There are lots of current events, but I follow the blogs that are about ones that matter to me. I will say that the quality of the writing does make a difference to me. I don't really judge on you made a mistake in your grammar or that word is spelled wrong unless it is making it hard to read the blog, but I'm most interested in hearing thoughts from people who appear to have really thought something through.

So, if it's a short post or something from Twitter or something like that, the observation is totally fine, but when it's a more in depth essay, those that are hard to follow and circular in their logic and might ramble, I don't really spend the time trying to figure out what the author is trying to say.

If it's a well-constructed and thoughtful post that is meant for somebody to read, and I guess that's another distinction. Some people blog because the like to publish their thoughts. They don't care if anybody's listening. Those might be people that I would follow if I was a close friend and it was my friend.

Chrissy, for example, is a yoga instructor and she spent a year in India and she blogged every couple days about just something new that she was seeing in India and what it made her think about. I read all of her posts because I have a close relationship with her. If I didn't know her or wasn't interested in India or yoga, I probably would think this one's just putting her journal on the web.

Researcher: Out of the things that you've mentioned so far, what's one thing that indicates to you that the author knows their subject matter or knows what they're talking about?

Participant: How do I decide if that person seems to know what they're talking about? Some things are reputation based. Someone like Beth has a wonderful reputation and she has a track record and a lot of work that she's done that I have been aware of. So, anything that she posts, I probably will go into it assuming that she knows what she's talking about because she has in the past always proven that she does. If it's a new blog that I come to, I guess in some ways it's about how that author presents their opinions and how philosophically in alliance we are, and I'm talking now more about opinion blogs than I am about corporate marketing stuff. If I were to read an editorial and the person was purposely using inflammatory language and making it more spectacular than productive, I probably wouldn't take much of what they said as fact.

I guess you have a filter for if that seems a little bit preposterous. I want to check that fact before I pass it on. If a flag goes up, then there's a moment where I decide I don't think I trust this source and I would then look for other sources to validate or invalidate what they were saying if it were a research project.

When it comes to a more corporate piece, if you're using a blog as a corporate communication, your audiences are so different in that case. I think it is about voice and tone. If it seems like a blog that recognizes the whole of the person that they're appealing to and recognizes that they're one thing in the world and attempts to speak to what is interesting and useful to their core audience, that would put them on the plus side.

If it was a more traditional like this is our message and we're sticking to it, that would probably put them on the minus side for me.

Researcher: Thank you. I'd like to ask you some questions regarding your experience with reading Beth Cantor's blog.

Participant: OK.

Researcher: I apologize if these seem a bit repetitive. It's designed to give me the best answer..

Participant: Sure.

Researcher: When did you start reading Beth's blog?

Participant: I first became familiar with Beth's blog in 2006 probably. I'm trying to think back to how I found her in the first place and I can't remember, honestly. It was probably someone in my network read her posts and shared something or commented on something and I found it interesting. That's also about the time I started working in the philanthropy sector, so I had a professional reason to follow her, as well. I became more and more familiar with Beth through her blog and through Twitter and Facebook.

Researcher: You already hinted at this. Again, these are designed to help me get the best answer. Why did you chose to read Beth's blog?

Participant: She was covering information that was really helpful to me. At that time, things like Twitter and Facebook and blogging were not highly used as standard communication tools in the philanthropy sector. Many of us recognized immense potential there but nobody really had applied experience, and Beth was exploring in a way and had access to people and was sharing information about that exploration that nobody else, at least in my network, really was doing at that time. She would run workshops and she would talk about I did this workshop with a bunch of non-profits today and we played with wikis and here's what we learned. We learned that people have trouble with wiki markup and we learned that people really like this and they don't like that.

I could, through her experiences, learn things that I wouldn't be able to learn on my own. She was also posing really interesting questions about that same content. We were all in a learning mode and she was saying this is what I saw, this is what I learned, what do you think? She was also saying have you ever tried X, Y, and Z and what was your experience? She was drawing experiences out of her network and functioning as a hub for that conversation.

Researcher: How credible is Beth Kanter to you?

Participant: I trust Beth.

Researcher: Can you elaborate on that a little bit more? What, in your mind, makes her credible?

Participant: She's proven to me that she has good intentions and she is a smart person. She clearly learns quickly and she herself has a good filter for things she explores and recommends. I often agree with her and I have learned, even, to use her as a little bit of my own self parachute. I use Beth as a curator. When Beth recommends something I will often read it. I suppose that goes without saying, in general, outside of Beth, that if I see an article headline I may not go find out what it's about but when I find four or five other people talking about it and they're people I trust then I'll go read the source article because then I feel OK, this is really worth my time to read.

Back to Beth. I think that she has a humility about her and a genuine desire to find the best ways to use social media for social good. That's appealing personally and professionally and because we're talking about tools that many of my clients want to use, want to learn how to use, don't know how to use today, her approach to blogging, which is very much in the vein of sharing knowledge and enhancing everyone's ability to use tools better, makes her very credible.

I don't feel like she's promoting something. I feel like she's really trying to help people get better at what they do.

Researcher: OK. Thank you. When you read Beth's blog, what sticks out to you the most?

Participant: She has a great sense of fun. Beth has done a really nice job of combining what can be dry, technical content with personality so it feels like a conversation. It's very welcoming, it's inclusive. It has a sharing and dialogue oriented element to it that's very different than if it was a textbook treatise that just came out in chapters.

Researcher: This may be a little bit of an awkward question, but how does Beth's gender influence your thinking about her credibility?

Participant: My first instinct is that it doesn't, although I'm aware that we are often unaware of our own biases so I'm just running through my head to see if I am gender balanced in my reading. I probably do read more women than I do men and I can't say if that's because what they're talking about just happens to be interesting to me. I think I select based on how interested I am in the topics that they're covering rather than I feel like I have a closer kinship with this person because we're both women. I would say there is nothing conscious influencing me based on gender for Beth.

Researcher: Thank you. What keeps you coming back to Beth's blog?

Participant: I do trust her and I think that that's something that really does bring people back. I feel like I have a relationship with her. I like so much what she has done in the past and it's been valuable to me, it's helped me grow and learn more and become better at communicating and I hope that through the conversations I've had on her blog I'm also contributing to that for others that are part of that community. Because I have that experience, my expectation is that what she does in the future will also have that benefit. Because of the business that I'm in and the topics that Beth covers, I believe that reading her blog helps me stay abreast of what's new and upcoming in terms of communication tools in our sector. Because I'm in the client service business, it's really important for me to know what our clients are reading and hearing and thinking about and many of them follow her as well so there's an added incentive.

[audio cut]

Participant: ...that I'm interacting with on a daily basis have an expectation that I will know what she's talking about.

Researcher: Excellent. That brings me to the last question which is just an opportunity to open up the space and the time for you to add to this in any way you'd like. The question is, then, is there anything else that you'd like to add or is there anything you feel that I've missed?

Participant: I don't know the exact topic of your paper, but I'll add an observation from my experience helping clients use blogs as communication tools. We help clients with all kinds of different things and it's everything from helping build a brand by having an individual within that brand become a blogger and use their personality to build the brand to using a blog almost as a social and project based tool. Some of the program work that our foundations do involves

gathering many groups of grantees together and we'll help them use a blog to open the lines of communication with that grantee community and then expand it beyond.

One of the obstacles we run into very frequently, both internally, we have an internal blog that have gone nowhere and our clients have similar obstacles. The technology remains difficult for people who feel that they aren't tech savvy. Some of them maybe truly are not, but I think there's a perception that you have to know something techie to be a blogger, probably not helped by the fact that many of the blogs that they're exposed to are about technology.

There's a little bit of an obstacle getting people to adopt it because they're scared of I don't know how to do this, I might push the wrong button and blow the whole thing up.

We also run into obstacles of people being unwilling or uncomfortable putting themselves out there in public like that. I think that, to the subject of credibility, I think that some people are worried more about how other people will interpret them and so they doubt their own credibility. I don't know if that's helpful to your thesis or not, but it is something that we often struggle with as a communications firm.

This is such a wonderful opportunity and it seems like exactly the right tactic to accomplish someone's goal, but we can't quite overcome that they don't want to write the blogs themselves because they don't feel like they have anything valuable to say or they don't have something to say often enough or they don't want other people to judge them for what they have said in public or oh my gosh, I can't figure out this technology.

Those are the two things that are stumbling blocks for many of the projects where we're using a blog as a communication tactic.

Researcher: Excellent. Thank you. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Participant: I don't think so.

Researcher: Participant, thanks, again, so much for being willing to do this. It really means a lot to me that you're willing to participate. If at any time you've got questions, again, feel free to contact me at asachs@utk.edu and, again, your data's going to be confidentially in our offices. It's not going to be shared. If you don't have any more questions for me, I guess that brings our interview to an end.

Participant: Thank you very much. You did a nice job with the questions and with the interview and also with setting it up. That was all a good experience. Good job on that and good luck with your thesis and when it's done send me a link. I'd love to see it.

Researcher: Absolutely. Thank you so much, Amy.

Participant: All right. My pleasure. Thanks, Aaron.

Researcher: Have a good day.

Participant: You, too.

Participant 7 Interview

Participant: OK. So let me start off by thanking you for being willing to interview about blogging and reading Brian Solis' blog. I really appreciate it. Just to let you know this is for my thesis so I'm going to be recording the call so I can transcribe it.

Participant: OK.

Researcher: If at anytime you have questions during the interview or don't want to continue any further, you can stop me, and there are not any consequences for that. I'll be keeping the data in my communication department's office. If at any time you want to know what's being done with the data or you have any questions about, you can contact me at my UTK address, and that's asachs@utk.edu.

Before we begin do you have any questions for me?

Participant: I have no questions.

Researcher: OK. All right. I'm going to start off by asking you some general questions. Let's start first -- how often do you read blogs?

Participant: I would say overall probably across all subjects, four to five times a week. The content would vary, but I frequently go to different blogs.

Researcher: OK. What sort of information are you typically searching for when you read those blogs?

Participant: It depends on whether I'm reading for personal interest or whether I'm reading for professional interests. Personal could be everything from cooking and how to effectively raise my child.

Professional lately has focused a lot more on things like onboarding, and leadership, as well as trying to maintain some perspective of the social media aspects of my job.

As a co-coordinator of marketing focused on recruiting students, the only part of the world that I think about on a regular basis is what I call the 17 year old.

That's a very fickle target -- a target that is someone who is obviously at a different life stage than I am, a significantly different life stage than I am.

I use a lot of reading either on higher education trends, on higher education marketing trends, or social media in general to help me understand how that target market: what they're doing, what they're interested in, how we can reach them, and how we can engage them.

Researcher: OK. You already kind of hinted at this, but how do typically decide what blog to go to or what blogger to read?

Participant: It varies a lot. Sometimes it's just sheer luck. Sometimes they will pop out from some of the reading feeds that I've set up. I do some Google reader. I've been pretty happy with a

lot of the feeds that I've gotten from Linkedin lately. Again, that's that leadership type category, that business, how do you position yourself as an executive? How are you successful in your career? That's that type of space.

In terms of social media and technology, I follow a few things on Facebook, and use that kind of as a jumping off point to find and identify new people.

Brian Solis in particular I know because of a social media course that I took at Syracuse. We were asked to read his book "Engage." That was an opportunity to really have a good introduction to him from what I consider a very credible source.

Because I work in higher education, I looked at the contents of Syracuse, and the content that the professor provided to us as a very reputable resource for deciding who to speak with.

Social media has gotten so huge as a topic for marketers that I think it's really tough to sort through who's worth following, and who's not worth following.

So the endorsement of the professor helped me as a launching off point. Then as I went through the book, even though it seems a little odd for a book to introduce you to a blogger, the book helped ground me in his approach and his mindset and the level of sophistication that he brings to the thinking.

I actually enjoyed the blog a lot more than I enjoyed the book.

I find him to be a great aggregator of a number of related topics that helps me to keep my mind open, and expanding as to how this aspect of relationship, communication, life, whatever you want to call it, is changing and evolving.

I think that's important for my job as well as -- it's fascinating to me as a communications person.

Researcher: Excellent. So on that note, you mentioned Brian Solis' blog. Are there any other blogs that you read with any regularity?

Participant: In the social media space not as a regular, loyal follower. No.

Researcher: With Brian's blog, and I apologize if any of these questions seem a little bit repetitive. They're designed to help me get my answers. What keeps you coming back to that blog?

Participant: To me Brian's whole approach is grounded in data. It seems to me he's a great aggregator of some of the reports and some of the thinking that's been out there. It's easy to find a fair amount of data in what he shares. That to me lends credibility to what he's saying. He adds his opinion onto the research and the data that he examines but what he posts is not a random conversation, and it's not just his crazy idea of the day. It's deeply grounded in a lot of research and a lot of work.

I really like how he takes social media to a dynamic of life and a dynamic of business as compared to a communications gimmick.

I think there's a lot of people who look at some of the different things that you can do in social media, and see it as an opportunity to share a marketing campaign, or to launch an effort -- sorry I'm not being very articulate -- using a traditional type technique, and then dropping it into a different medium, and hoping that it works.

To me, Brian takes a whole different approach to that and says, you have to shift your ideas about marketing. You have to shift your ideas about connecting with people to fit this media. Please don't drop your direct mail campaign into social media, and hope that it works.

I love that that is a constant thread with him that he challenges us in so many ways to think about life differently through this media and through this technology.

He's got a recent blog on the interplay between Facebook and Twitter and viewing of television, and viewing of full-length movies.

There's a research report out there. One of the topics that he touched on in that post has to do with the fact even though all movie theaters will tell you to put your cell phones off, a lot of the respondents to the survey talked about how they want to engage either via Facebook or Twitter to communicate and enhance their experience as they go to see a full length feature film.

That was fascinating to me, because that's challenging what we accept as the right way to watch a movie.

Historically, somebody in my generation or age category may look at that experience and say no, I want you to be quiet and I want the movie theater to be dark.

There were enough people involved in this research that responded and said, wow, we'd really like to do that. That's part of the experience for us. That's fascinating to me because that challenges my thinking and that helps me stay in touch with how society is changing and how life is evolving.

For the work that I do, that is absolutely critical that I stay in touch with that, that I stay that open to the fact that there has been things that I had always assumed to be true maybe are changing and aren't true anymore. Long answer but...

When I read Brian, that helps me to do that. It helps me to pause and step back and realize that consumer behavior, consumer attitudes, are constantly evolving. They're evolving in ways that, as a marketer, I might not be able to predict.

Researcher: Excellent. I want to shift a little bit and I want to ask you a few general questions about credibility, in your experience, with blogging. To start off with, when you hear the words credibility in blogging, what comes to your mind?

Participant: I've had this conversation with friends and when I say friends, I really mean classmates. This was a topic we kicked around in the class at Syracuse. It was the notion of many of us came to that program and have come to communications or marketing communications from a background in journalism.

For many of us in the room, the notion of credibility had to do with a writer being associated with a publication. If you worked for the New York Times, you were at one point in time credible. You were a credible writer, you were a credible thought leader. You were someone that we would want to listen to.

It was interesting in this conversation because the older people in the room had that you have to be associated with a respected organization for you to be considered credible.

Then the conversation shifted and we talked about how, in many cases, bloggers can be more specialized and go deeper even than reporters had in the past without being associated with what used to be a newspaper or a magazine.

They have a lot more freedom and flexibility to be outspoken, to be candid, to be nimble. We talked a lot about how a blogger has fewer constraints than an employee of a publication might have.

That was a big preamble and I apologize for that.

After that conversation, it was interesting to hear different generations and different points of view on this discussed.

As I came away from that, I felt, personally, it is the ability of a blogger to define a subject, to be deep in the subject, and to artfully mix opinion and perspective with data, or examples, or anecdotes from other sources.

So to me, they have to externally source some information but they also have to show to me that they are deep enough in the subject that they can provide some context and some interpretation on top of that thing.

Brian Solis took a report and I could have written findings on that same report, on media usage, on TV viewing and movies, and social media.

I could have looked at that and done an analysis but I don't have the exposure to all of the perspective that he has.

I could have never provided that educated perspective that he's got just because of the volume of the work that he does and the sophistication with which he writes. So I think that's an aspect of it, too.

I think the style of the writing can have an impact on it. He definitely has opinion and perspective in his work but it is presented in such a way that it feels very credible. It feels very like the credibility that the old opinion page editor would have with a magazine.

So I think he exercises a fair degree of, integrity is not quite right, but perhaps scholarship within his area that allows him to have a point of view that I really do respect.

Researcher: So in general, what do you think makes a blogger credible or not credible?

Participant: Expertise in the area, and that can be defined in a lot of ways. I think that can be defined in perhaps a regular position of employment. Brian Solis works as a consultant. It can be in the amount of interconnection they have with other people who have similar areas of expertise.

I'm trying to think beyond Brian. I'm trying to think from a broader perspective because I read in other categories. What do I look at?

I think volume has an impact on it. I think if you're a high-volume blogger I think you create a different perception than if you're a low-volume blogger, and I don't know how I would define high-volume and low-volume.

But there is a dimension to how much they post. And sometimes, frankly, I'm looking for somebody to validate what I assume and what I already think. You know, a dimension of credibility can be someone who's like-minded to me.

Researcher: OK. Excellent. So for the next question, what are some of the most important things to you when you're reading a blog? What are the things that you look for when you read?

Participant: I look for clarity of thought, clarity of expression. I'm not very patient with people who don't write very well. I look for a return on my time investment. If I'm going to spend five minutes reading something, I want at the end of that five minutes what I have read to enhance my knowledge of something, to deepen my perspective on something, or perhaps to shift my worldview in a way.

Like the recent post from Brian on social media usage and entertainment consumption, TV and film. That helped to shift my worldview a little bit, so to me that was a worthwhile investment of my time to read that.

Researcher: OK. And so, out of the things that you have mentioned, what's the one thing that when you're reading a blog, you say, you know, this lets me know that this person knows what they're talking about?

Participant: I think it's the ability to bring an informed new idea to the table for me. If I'm smarter for having read the blog, I think that says a lot. Can you ask that question again? I don't think I answered it very well.

Researcher: So let me rephrase it just a little bit differently. When you're reading a blog, what is the one thing that tells you that this person is on top of their game, that they know exactly what they're talking about, that they are that credible? What's the number one thing for you?

Participant: I think it's the ability to present a new idea within the context of what I may already understand. Part of it is that thought leadership or that innovation or that new thinking, whether it's 'here's a new way to make pancakes' or 'here's a new way to think about watching a movie.' To just present that idea without the context of the larger issue of the world's best pancakes or what media consumption is about, without that context that new idea is less meaningful. I count on a blogger to be an expert in what he or she chooses to write on. It's that new approach. It's that new idea, wrapped in the context and perspective that I can count on a

blogger to have. I don't have the time to be an expert on all of the things that I care about so the bloggers that I do spend time with, I expect them to be experts in their areas of whatever area that is. I want them to bring to me these nuggets of wisdom that I need to be a more informed person. They have to be able to put that within a great deal of knowledge about their specific area.

Researcher: Makes sense. Thank you. I'm going to shift to things that are a little bit more specific, to Brian. I know you already mentioned this but just for interview's sake, when did you start reading Brian's blog?

Participant: May of 2011.

Researcher: OK. Was that during the course at Syracuse?

Participant: Yea.

Researcher: This will seem a little redundant but why did you choose to read Brian's blog?

Participant: I chose to read Brian's blog, in part, because I wanted to know more about the author of a book that was required for this course. I also wanted to have the experience of being able to supplement a book that was printed on paper with something that had the potential to be a little bit more timely.

We joked a lot in the class about reading books for social media class because as the approaches and the theory and the thinking as well as the tactical execution were developing in such a rapid pace it seemed almost comical to read a book that was even a year and a half to two years old.

So once the text was identified and I knew who the author was, the first thing I did was I googled him. I looked in his blog and looked at what he was currently writing about and really got a flavor for him as an author and as an authority even before the book showed up at my home.

Researcher: Excellent. So in your opinion, how credible do you think Brian Solis is?

Participant: I think as someone who works to help us all understand how the technology associated with social media allows people's behaviors to change for the area where he has done a lot of work, I consider him highly credible. That has to do with the volume of work that he has done. He's a rather prolific blogger. He's done several books. He has consulting work. He's deeply immersed in his subjects. He's someone who, as a consultant, has built a name for himself. His professional reputation is highly linked with his ability to aggregate and interpret content on a field that a lot of people care a lot about. I have a great deal of respect for him. He likes to look at how life is changing and how society is changing. Somebody who takes that forward-thinking approach, to me doesn't always have to be right but has to be able to challenge our assumptions and cause us to be open to new ideas.

While I can't always incorporate what he shares into my day-to-day life, I very much respect his opinions and his perspective on how things are changing and how we can expect things to change.

Researcher: OK. Now this may seem like a strange question, but how does Brian's being a man influence your thinking about his credibility, or does it at all?

Participant: I'm not sure. I have read some work, and I apologize, I can't remember her name, but with a great practitioner who works with the NWF, National Wildlife Federation. I'm trying to think about, they're in a little different space. I don't know that Brian's being a man has an overarching influence on how I think about it. And it may be that for me, social media would be a gender-neutral topic.

There may be some bloggers with some areas of expertise where I could see that I may fall into, if you're going to write about women's shoes, a woman might be a more credible source for that.

But for me, I'd say social media is, and the impact on business space, I think that's gender-neutral for me.

Researcher: OK. Right. I guess we'll move onto the next question. What keeps you coming back to Brian's blog? I know you've already mentioned a little bit about his idea innovation and presenting new thoughts, but if you can elaborate on that for me a little bit, that would be excellent.

Participant: Based on what I've read from Brian thus far, Brian has established himself as a thought leader in his category who will challenge me to always be ready to evolve my world-view. I can count on Brian to provide context to reports or findings. He can pull something out of the universe and provide context with it that I know will challenge my thinking and will make me be a little more sophisticated, a little more informed about that particular topic, that particular idea.

So I count on him to help make me smarter on those areas on which he is an expert.

Researcher: OK. Excellent. This brings me to the last question I have for you, and this is just to kind of wrap it up. Is there anything that you would like to add or is there anything that you feel like I've missed? I just want to give you a little bit of space to express your thoughts, concerns, anything like that.

Participant: I think one of the things that concern me the most is, I'm a big advocate of free speech and love that technology now allows anyone and everyone to publish. I worry not just for other people but for myself, especially in certain categories, the ability to identify reputable sources, particularly for some topics.

Researcher: OK, we'll resume with last question. You started mentioning good resources with bloggers. I probably have that phrasing off a little bit.

Participant: It has to do with the fact that if we are not there yet we'll soon approach a point where there is someone out there writing about everything. It's like doing a great job on researching a paper for school. You can only look the shortest possible distance and collect one piece of information and call that good enough. Or you can invest more time and effort and go out and find multiple points to help you reach a more informed conclusion. I think that's what gives me pause because I feel like there are people like Brian who are out there doing a great job

of writing with thought and integrity about subjects that they really truly understand, and live and breathe every day.

There are also people who will not have that depth of knowledge, that depth of understanding, who are also out there writing and the potential to become misinformed is pretty great some days. Does that make sense?

Researcher: It makes a lot of sense actually. I completely understand that. Do you have anything else you'd like to add? Or do you think I covered everything I need to cover? Did I miss anything?

Participant: I think that's a great set of thorough questions. I don't have anything else.

Researcher: OK all right. Well, Alyssa, thanks so much for being willing to interview. If you have any questions about the data feel free to send me an email or contact me on Facebook. We'll be keeping the data in our communication department offices, nobody's have access to to it or anything. If that's all you have, that's all I have. Thanks so much for being willing to do this.

Participant: Excellent, you are welcome. Best of luck.

Researcher: Thanks, have a good night.

Participant: You too. Bye bye.

Participant 8 Interview

Researcher: I'd like to take the time to thank you for being willing to do this interview. Just to start off, I want to let you know that all of your information recorded here today is going to be kept confidentially in room 293 at the Communications Building at the University of Tennessee. If you've got any questions about the data, how it's going to be used, you can contact me at asachs@utk.edu or you can call our compliance officer at the university and we'll be happy to assist you. To start off, again, just thanking you for being willing to talk about blogging credibility.

How old are you?

Participant: I'm 53.

Researcher: 53, and how often do you read blogs?

Participant: Recently, quite often. The past two, three years, I'd say I read a blog two, three, four times a month but in the past two, three months, I've been reading them just about daily.

Researcher: Just about daily. What sort of information do you typically search out when you read blogs?

Participant: I'm looking at either things that are interesting, things that can help me in my daily life, or sometimes I read a blog to explore something I know nothing about.

Researcher: OK. How do you decide on what blog to go to or what blogger to read?

Participant: Well, I know with some of them, it is word of mouth things that I've seen on the Internet or on Facebook and, once you get started with a blog, it's usually something that pertains to what I'm doing or makes sense to me.

Researcher: OK. What keeps you coming back to the blogs that you read?

Participant: I think interesting content and humor always helps in a blog, and having stories and having some relevance to what I'm doing in my life.

Researcher: When you say interesting content, can you elaborate on that a little bit for me?

Participant: Well, with this particular blog that I'm reading, it's opening up all sorts of new worlds of organizations that I never knew anything about. I work internationally, and I like the international aspect of this blog, because this person travels to several different countries and looks at what people are doing, how what they do, their specialty, fits into different cultures.

Researcher: OK, excellent. Now, I'd like to ask you a few general questions specifically about credibility and your experience with blogging or reading blogs. When you hear the words "credibility" and "blogging," what comes to mind?

Participant: Somebody who knows their stuff, someone who has some facts and figures of some relevance to back up the comments and the content of their blog.

Researcher: What do you think makes a blogger credible or not credible?

Participant: I think life experience has an awful lot to do with making a blogger credible or not credible. Anybody can put together a nice-looking website or a nice-looking blog, but it's what you can get out of it. Is it practical? Is it something that you can take something away in your everyday life or something that you can use to apply with blogging?

An example. Blog that I'm reading, she uses a lot of illustrations and a lot of almost pictographs to get her concepts across, and I really like that. I do a lot of things in colors myself, and it makes a lot of sense to me.

Researcher: OK. Excellent. What are some of the most important things to you when you're reading a blog?

Participant: I like interesting stories. I like stories that are more about people. Facts and figures are OK, but if you can't tie them into peoples' lives or something that is more meaningful than just the dollar or the statistic, it doesn't do much for me. Besides humor, I like seeing how different people interact with different situations. Sometimes the offshoots of the blog's different comments that will take you to a different website or someone else who has a total different aspect to what they're doing.

One of the blogs that I'm reading, some of the folks that are getting masters degrees, I've gone off to look at their side blogs to see how what they're doing interacts with what the person does that I'm reading.

With another blog, it's more the practical application of what they're talking about, how you can put that into practice and different comments and practical quips and practical stories and anecdotes that people have used, taken information from the blog and used in their own personal lives.

Researcher: OK. Excellent. Out of the things that you've just mentioned, what is one thing that lets you know that this blogger knows what he or she is talking about?

Participant: One thing? That they're experienced, that they're not fresh off the street, that they've been doing this for a period of time, whether it's comments about remaking your life or changing habits in your life, or if it's comments about how to get non-profits up and running with different social media tools.

Researcher: Excellent. Now, I'd like to ask you some questions regarding your experience reading Beth Kanter's blog. When did you start reading her blog?

Participant: About two and a half months ago.

Researcher: OK, about two and a half months ago. Why did you choose to read it?

Participant: Because it had some interest to me. I have a relative who's in a non-profit organization. She's in the Peace Corps, and I know that she works at recruiting. It peaked my interest to see how social media could recruit and how organizations could use social media, like the Peace Corps or UNICEF or Heifer International. Those kind of things.

Researcher: In your opinion, how credible is Beth Kanter?

Participant: I think she's very credible. She's done this for a long time. She knows a lot of people. She's not above changing her methods. She's not above saying she doesn't know. She doesn't try and tell you everything, but she gives you new concepts and new ideas all the time. She works with a lot of different organizations and is involved in a lot of associations.

Researcher: OK. When you read Beth's blog, what sticks out to you the most?

Participant: Her love for social media and technology, and wanting to get it into people's hands in a way that will really make sense for them to use it. Not so much all the statistics or facts and figures, but down to earth. This is how it can help you. Very practical.

Researcher: Does Beth's gender influence how you think about her credibility?

Participant: No. Doesn't have any bearing at all. Her humor style might be different, but if Beth were a man instead of a woman, it's the issue and what she's talking about and how she's having people interact that is the issue.

Researcher: OK. What keeps you coming back to Beth's blog?

Participant: I really like the fact that she interacts with international non-profits. It's not just American companies. That has really peaked my interest to see how even third world countries who don't have as great an access to social media, or don't have as reliable an access to social media, how she works with them and gets them using Twitter, and Facebook, and the Internet and other blogs. I think that's pretty neat.

Researcher: Excellent. That brings me to the last question, which is basically just to open up this time for you to add anything. Is there anything that you'd like to add or is there anything that you feel that I've missed?

Participant: I think you need to be careful with blogging that you don't make it too personal a thing. If you have it more on a topic or a subject like Beth does, then I think you're going to have more people who are interested in your blog and wanting to know what's going on. I think if you make a mistake and make it more about you, then I think you lose interest. It becomes more a family page than a blog. It's nice to see that while Beth has some personal interest in what she does, so there's a human element, that it's very much on her subject matter in what she's telling you about. I think that's good.

Researcher: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Participant: No, I don't think so.

Researcher: All right. Well, Marj, thank you again for taking this time to do the interview with me. Again, just to remind you, if you've got any questions about the interview, it's going to be kept in room 293 in the Communication Building at the University of Tennessee. If you've got any questions, feel free to contact me at asachs@utk.edu. Thanks.

Participant: Thank you.

Participant 9 Interview

Researcher: Anyways. I want to thank you for being able to do the interview. It's going to be recorded. If you have any issues with being recorded, you need to go ahead and stop me. If you have any concerns or feel like you don't want to complete the interview at any time, just feel free to stop me. There's no consequences for that. All the data's going to be secured in the communications office. So if you have any questions about that, you can either email me at asachs@utk.edu or email The Cross. Also, you can contact the compliance officer at UTK if you have any questions about the data.

So I'm going to start off by asking you a few general questions. The first is to state your age. So how old are you?

Participant: I am 29. In a few months, I'm going to go into the new decade. [laughs]

Researcher: Well, 30's the new 20, right?

Participant: Right, exactly. Age is just a number.

Researcher: Exactly. And so, I'm going to ask you some general questions about your reading habits. So how often do you read blogs?

Participant: OK. Well, I would have to say I read blogs probably on a regular basis, and more so now than ever before. When blogs started really becoming popular, of course, in the '90s, I just followed some friends' blogs. But, right now, with social media, I read probably an average of four to five social-media-specific blogs, probably twice a day--once in the morning, once in the afternoon.

Researcher: OK, excellent. What sort of information do you typically search out for when you're reading a blog?

Participant: Well, I would have to say the first thing that I want to go and look for is what's new in social media. I want to look at what are some of the current trends, because not only is it going to help me in the classroom, helping with my students who are actively and searching for opportunities in the job market, and they realize that, yeah, social media, you got to know what it is. And so, I want to make sure I'm prepared, so that's why I check them so regularly, saying, OK, what are the new campaigns coming up, what are new startups, what are new platforms and how they're being used for campaigns.

So that's probably the primary reason why I'm going on these blogs. But the second one is looking at crisis communications. I'm following specifically within social media, what's happening with some of the followers and bloggers about what they're talking about related to that particular area.

Researcher: Excellent. How do you decide what blog to go to or what blogger to read?

Participant: I basically have gone and done a couple approaches. One is... [audio cuts]

Participant: ...or Social Media Today. And I look at, OK, do these individuals say if they have a blog or not? Maybe they do...

Researcher: Can I pause for just a second? You cut out right as you started answering that question. So would you care to..?

Participant: Oh. Yeah, yeah. Well, what I look at is I go through some of the major PR blogs, social-media blogs like Mashable. Sometimes I look at Social Media Today, Digital Buzz Blog. I want to look at, from those blogs, well, maybe there's others that they're referencing or other contributors, and so I look to see if they have a blog. That's how I started following certain crisis-communication bloggers who write about social media. And then, I just observe what people are talking about on Twitter, saying, "Oh, you've got to read this blog post from so-and-so." I start reading, and I just go, "Wow, OK."

I have that reading list. But then sometimes what I try to do, too, is go out on a mission and just say, "OK, can I find a new resource today?" I just put in a key term in Google or Bing and just say, "OK, social media and crisis. What are the blogs that come up?" That's one way that I go and look for blogs.

Researcher: Out of the blogs that you regularly read, what keeps you coming back to those blogs?

Participant: I would say the useful content. The thing that I've noticed a lot of times is there's some people that call themselves "social media gurus," and they're always trying to sell you something. I'm totally deterred by that. I want to go, "OK, not all of us have thousands of dollars to go to this webinar or thousands of dollars to buy this particular white paper." I go to blogs for sound content, but I go because people have a certain unique voice and are willing to give back to the community. And that's what really got me interested in looking at some of these bloggers, like Brian Solis and Deirdre Breakenridge.

Then there's someone in the crisis community, like [inaudible 06:27] that are so open with their knowledge and insight. They're willing to share this with everyone, and they're not looking for profit at all. They're very conversational on social media and other platforms.

So that's what keeps me. They're out there building a community, they're out there willing to share their content openly with people. That's what is really great that I like about them.

Researcher: All right. Now I'd like to ask you a few general questions about credibility in your experience with blogging and reading blogs. When I say the words "credibility" and "blogging," what comes to mind?

Participant: I think of expertise, experience, transparency, and authenticity. I think of those as, basically, when I think about credibility, you have to have a long-term presence, and a long-term presence in, basically, that particular area of interest. So, I look at a blog with a certain credibility. Like, when I look at Mashable, they're pretty big and they're pretty predominant of being the ones breaking news about new media trends, and they're keeping up to date to what's going on.

But they're not just a one-hit wonder that some of these other blogs are. They're consistently managing, making sure that they have the most updated information as possible. I think authenticity and experience come into play with just long term. I look at, for credible blogs, to see how long they've been present. If they've been present only for, maybe, a year, maybe they're just starting out, so I might look at to see where they're going next.

But, if I see someone that's been blogging for several years, that has a strong following, that's to me credible.

Researcher: So, you've hinted at this a little bit, but what do you think makes a blogger credible or not credible?

Participant: Well, I think, with the not credible, I always question where the blogger, like...It's one thing they basically have a conversation through social media, and I always ask myself, "Well, could I step down with them and have a cup of coffee and still have the same conversation if it wasn't online?" I have had a chance to meet several bloggers in person, like Jason Falls, with his blog. What I've found out about him is, I think he is credible, because I could see him saying some of these things, like, first I had a certain idea of what his voice was going to be like in the blog, but at meeting him, whenever I read his blog I hear him talking, which is weird.

But I think the consistency of seeing this person and [inaudible 09:07] the blog and then also reading what they're reading online, having that hybrid approach of really being consistent and credible in both places, I think is important.

And not being credible is, I think, blogs that aren't willing to be transparent. They're basically sharing no information with you. I'm like, "Who is really writing this blog? Is it this person that they have, or is it, other people?" I don't really know them, as a person or as an individual.

So bloggers that are willing to open the doors into inside of who they are, put in more of a human face, I think is more credible.

Researcher: OK. Thank you. So, what are some of the most important things to you when you're reading a blog?

Participant: The most important things that I read in the blog?

Researcher: No. What are the most important things to you when you are reading a blog?

Participant: Oh, reading. OK. I would have to say additional links to other information other than on their website [laughs] ...

Researcher: Me, too.

Participant: ...and I see that a lot with blogs, sounds like, "Oh, look at this post that I've read," I'm like, "Well, I look at multiple resources." In terms of resources, I mean other additional articles, maybe some report, like, "Hey, check out this newly released social media report that just came out by [inaudible 10:17] or by Edelman," and I'm like, "Oh, OK. This is a great resource." I look at those additional information that I can use at a later time, and then if I have

questions, I can go back to blog. I think the use of multimedia is really important, and the power of sharing blogs with those [inaudible 10:36] , I think that's also really important to have the opportunity to extend this conversation with friends and followers.

To say, "Hey, this is great. I want to tweet this," or "Hey, this is wonderful. I want to print those off and share this with my students or colleagues." Those are some of the things that which I look. I think, also, I look at how many times they blog. If it's a couple of times a week, that's great. But if it's once every six months, then, well, that's something to keep in mind.

Researcher: Right. Yeah. So, out of the items you just mentioned, what is the one thing that lets you know that this blogger, that he or she knows what they're talking about, that they are an expert in what they are blogging on?

Participant: I have to say their voice in connection with the links and the other information that they share. It's not only about saying, "Hey, check this website out." It's about, "Check this website out, and here is my initial point of view on why I think you guys should check this out." I think the combination of that explanation why this additional link or this additional point is important, that focus on the voice of the personal blogger, that personalization of interpreting the content that is presented in the blog and referencing other sources, I think, is the most important to me.

Researcher: OK. Excellent. Thank you. I would like to ask you some questions about reading Brian's blogs specifically. When did you start reading Brian's blogs?

Participant: It was interesting. When I was in the PhD program in Tennessee, my first year, I was basically trying to finish with my core classes and brief. I always was interested in new media. But everybody back, in 2007, said, "Oh, it's a fad. It's not going to stay." But I still loved it. That's the reason. I was like, "I want to do this. Whatever." [laughs] But the second year, in the fall of 2008, I started looking around and saying, "I want to become the student of social media." I felt the Internet was my best friend to find out information.

So, I plugged in just social media in a search engine. Brian's blog came up. I looked at this and was like, "This is so useful. He actually is telling us what we need to know about social media." What really got me to be a big follower is his free e-books, because they were so helpful about explaining what social media is, why it's important to PR and where to go for more resources.

I thought I had found myself a gem, right here, of resources. I was like, "Yes. I'm there." Then, of course, he had a crisis e-paper, about which again, I was like, "OK. I'm sold." So I started reading his blogs regularly. Four years later almost, he is a regular blog that I check up with.

I follow him on Twitter. I follow him on Facebook. I read his blogs and I tell my students, "If you have one block, besides Mashable that you want to follow, follow his. That's basically how I started reading Brian's blogs.

Researcher: Excellent. You already mentioned how you chose it, that you stumbled on it and it ended up being that resource for you. How credible do you think Brian Solis is?

Participant: I think he's very credible. With the knowledge that he's sharing very openly, whether it's his papers, with alternate, or whether it's his insights from his presentations or webinars, I think he is very credible. He is definitely a thought leader in this industry, because he is saying the things that need to be said and moving the conversation forward in social media. Sometimes, I know in academia, we like to go in little circles about one particular issue, without going from point A to point B. What I like about Brian is he says, "OK. Here's how we go from point A to point B. But here are C, D, E and F, all the way to Z, where we need to go." He is forecasting years ahead of us, which, for me, is very refreshing to look at.

It helps me say, "What other ideas can I look at in how to bridge what I'm saying to others in the community and come up with my own opinion." I think, for his vision, that is absolutely one of his strengths, being a credible source. He knows where people are going.

What is great is, again, you can definitely tell that he has a very big passion for this industry and this area. He has built an expertise in this area. But again, he is transparent. He's sharing this knowledge with everyone. He is building those relationships with everyone. He is very active on Twitter, thanking people for interacting, which I think is refreshing.

You see some people that are just...you can tell that they have automated updates. You can just tell that they do. But what you can see with his is that he is in real time. He has even responded to some of my tweets, which I thought was cool. That is something that I think makes him a credible person.

Researcher: Excellent. When you read Brian's blog, what are the things that stick out to you the most?

Participant: Well, I really like the fact that he provides very thorough interpretation of key concepts. But what I like about him is that he talks about, "Here is some research that we have done." Whether it is at Altimeter or whether it's a provider firm that has done it or whether it is Edelmen or Cision or Nielsen, he ties it back into, "Here is what we need to know and here's how we apply it." I think the way he writes a beginning to the end, there is a lot of creativity. But there is a lot of scientific thought and the understanding of taking some of these research findings and being able to explain them to his followers, in a very clear and concise manner. If you asked, maybe, an academic to write it, you might be seeing all this academic jargon on your hands.

I have seen some blogs, we look at this and you're like, "OK. I need a thesaurus. I have a PhD." The point is not confuse people. Brian has a very direct but concise way of how to interpret and share his ideas, which I think is really useful and really easy to read. You want to go and be like, "OK. I want to read more."

Researcher: Excellent. This question I will just go ahead and throw out there. It may seem a little strange. How does Brian's being a man influence your thinking about his blog? Or does it?

Participant: It really doesn't influence it. I don't really think of a blogger as being male or female. I pretty much have an even following, between male and female bloggers. Everyone talks about PR as being mostly female dominated. So I think it is good to have a male perspective, because you see a lot of female bloggers. In crisis communications, most of the major crisis bloggers are male. But I follow Kim Stevens, who is a disaster manager and social

media expert. I look at her for her insights. But I also look at others. I don't think really gender makes a difference to me, personally. But it may for others.

Researcher: What keeps you coming back to Brian's blog? What is the thing that keeps you returning time after time?

Participant: I would have to say just the relationship I feel like I have built...Over almost four years of following his blog, I have kind of depended on saying, "This is one of my go to places to go for information." There are some blogs that I like, "Oh, this is interesting." But it may not necessarily be up my alley. But it's always good to learn. I always liked learning about new things and growing, because I figure, well, there might be something I might be doing on another project in the future that may be related to that. It's like e-commerce. You have some blogs related to that.

I'm like, "Well, that's good." It's not related to my research or teaching. But I go definitely to his blogs with the latest trends. Whenever he has something like, "Hey, here's the research. Here's what's going on." Here is something to think about related to his models, whether it's a conversation prism or his other models that he has created with Altimeter.

I'm like, "OK. I'm going to see what else is new." It sparks my curiosity. I always walk away thinking, "Wow. This is cool."

Researcher: Excellent. That brings me to the last question I have for you. That is just to open up some space for you. Is there anything you would like to add or is there anything you feel there is anything I have missed?

Participant: Well, I think that, with blogs, and one of the things that I think with social media in general is that blogs really do serve a purpose as the ultimate hub for information for everyone. I think that, as communicators and public relations professionals, we are going to see this continue to be a trend. It is a way to share our voice and make our stamp on who we are as a person, manage our reputation, and really use that platform as an extension for our other platforms. I think a lot of times, with blogs, we think our centralized platform is Facebook or Twitter or let's say, Pinterest, for example.

But I really think the ultimate hub for where an identity and persona lies is in a blog, because you get really an inside view of who this person is. I really think you do with Brian. He uses Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest as just extensions. He has a presence on them and he's very active on them.

But I think he is directing the traffic back to his blog, which I think is a lesson for us as communicators. Blogs are a traditional tool in social media. But they are very credible and they allow for an authentic voice to come out.

Researcher: Excellent. Do you have anything else that you would like to add? Do you think I've covered everything well?

Participant: I think you did. Yeah. You answered all the questions that I had and I hope I answered all the questions you had. [laughs]

Researcher: Yeah. You did. That brings us to the end of the interview. I want to thank you again for your time and for being willing to do this. Again, if you have any questions about the data or the interview, feel free to contact me or you can contact the compliance officer.

Participant: Sounds good.

Researcher: All right. Thanks Karen.

Participant: No problem.

Researcher: Have a good evening.

Participant: You, too.

Researcher: Good night.

Participant: Good night.

Participant 10 Interview

Researcher: All right. Let me start off by thanking you for being willing to participate in my research. I really appreciate you taking time out of your day to do this.

Just to let you know that this call is being recorded. None of the data is going to be shared with anybody else. It's going to be kept confidentially in the University of Tennessee's communications building in room 293. If you've got any questions about the data at any time, after the interview you can contact me at asachs@utk.edu. You can contact the research compliance officer at (865) 974-3466.

Before we get started, do you have any questions for me?

Participant: No, I don't.

Researcher: All right, well I'll start off by asking you your age. Anna Lisa, how old are you?

Participant: I am 34.

Researcher: 34, OK. I'm going to ask you a few general questions about your blog reading habits. The first question is how often do you read blogs?

Participant: Every day. I don't know if you want more detail than that. At least an hour to two hours a day.

Researcher: What sort of information do you typically search out when you read blogs?

Participant: This professional related information, so since I work in the nonprofit technology sector, I'm usually looking for something related to either something I'm working on or something related to my organization.

Researcher: How do you decide what blog to go to or what blogger to read?

Participant: We actually...I guess I'll say this, part of it is word of mouth. Since I'm kind of among a community of professionals I tend to get recommendations from other folks in my professional tier and read those. I also read the blogs of other individuals, professionals I know. Besides that, I guess it would just be searching for keyword topics if I'm researching something or I'm looking for information that I might use just a search engine.

Researcher: So the blogs that you do read, what keeps you coming back to them?

Participant: The blogs that I keep going back tend to be individuals, experts that I trust, or a group, an organization that I trust with information that is pretty specific to what my focus is or interest area. If I know of a person or an organization that pretty much is working on topics related to what I want to work on or what I'm interested in, then I'll tend to go back to them quite often.

Researcher: Excellent, thank you. Now I'd like to ask you a few general questions about credibility in your experience with blogging or reading blogs. When you hear the words credibility in blogging, what comes to mind?

Participant: The word credibility means to me in blogging, that a person is transparent about who they are. They're transparent in terms of if they have any financial relationship with any organization or sector that they tend to be blogging about, I want to know that up front. If they're transparent about that then that adds to their credibility in my eyes. Besides transparency, not that type upfrontness, it's also important to me that they're linking. That they're linking to other blogs that they're linking to other sources. They're crediting their information. If they're doing a lot of that then that increases their credibility in my mind.

Researcher: I apologize if any of the questions seem repetitive. They're just designed to help me get the best answer. What do you think makes a blogger credible or not credible?

Participant: A blogger is not credible if they don't seem to be citing any information. They're not linking out to other people, other blogs, other resources and/or they're not citing where their content coming from, or contacts, I should say. If they're talking about a topic, if they're not relating to any source above data or information or even other people, the sources from which they're basing their opinions on then that's not credible to me. I think I answered the credible question in my last question, in terms of the keeping your transparency and citing and linking out to their sources. If they're not doing those things then they're not credible to me.

Researcher: OK, and so what are some of the most important things to you when you're reading a blog?

Participant: When I'm reading a blog?

Researcher: Mm-hmm.

Participant: The most important things to me are A, that that there's some type of context for the information, that there's resources cited. There's other information linked to, et cetera. The second thing that's important to me is that not only is information cited but that comments are allowed on a post. You'll find people blogging who don't even allow commenting on their blog posts. If I see that, then I think this person isn't actually participating in this type of communication in an appropriate way, or in the way that's the standard way to communicate in this format, which sends off some red flags for me.

Researcher: Excellent. Out of the things you've mentioned, what is the one thing that lets you know that the author knows what they're talking about?

Participant: Let's see. I have a lot of things going through my mind right now. [laughs] I think I don't know. I didn't think about this ahead of time, but it seems to me like the main thing that's cropping up over and over for me is citing sources. If a person is clearly stating the context of what they're referring to or what they're talking about and then goes from there to explain what they're talking about, then that's when I know. That's the strongest thing for me. I feel like citing sources and linking to other resources is the number-one thing that folks can do.

Researcher: Excellent. Now I'd like to ask you some questions regarding your experience reading Beth Kanter's blog. When did you start reading Beth's blog?

Participant: I guess I would have to say in 2006 is when I actually started in my current position, and she was already blogging in this sector as well. She's a community member of the organization and the community that I work within, so I would say since 2006.

Researcher: Why did you choose to read her blog?

Participant: She is a respected expert already in my professional community. It's kind of like a circle effect. It's kind of a like a chicken-and-egg situation, where she's credible because she has this important blog, but I keep on going back to her blog because she's credible. There's kind of a circular effect there, but I would say why I got pointed to her in the first place is that she's already a respected member of my professional community. Her basis of information, she uses her blog as her primary outlet for her information and resources. If you want to learn anything or you want to connect with her as an expert, then reading her blog is actually the primary way of doing that. She kind of maintains that blog as her primary resource. Therefore, since she's already a recommended expert, then I know that her blog is the place to go to get the most up-to-date information from her.

Researcher: OK, thank you. I know you've already mentioned that you think that Beth is credible, but how credible do you think that she is?

Participant: I think she's actually very credible. The reason why is because she kind of falls in this interesting place as a blogger, where her blogging strength doesn't come from her personal style or her writing skills or things like that. I'm not trying to make this sound bad, but she's not necessarily a spectacular writer, as writers go. What makes her blog credible and an important resource is that she's putting tons of information out there. She's extremely transparent. She's sharing lots of information. She's providing lots of images and resources and links. She's also very up-to-date and frequent. She's a frequent blogger. She provides just a lot of information and a lot of context in each post, so that it seems like her priority is to give you information. You can tell in each post that she's more concerned in getting as much information as possible across to the reader as she can rather than, say, "I want to make a tidy blog post for the sake of writing a blog post." You can tell her goal in each post is to try to get across as much information as possible to the reader.

Researcher: Thank you. Again, I apologize if these seem repetitive, but when you read her blog, what sticks out to you the most?

Participant: I would say what sticks out to me the most is the length of them. She actually is someone who will have really long blog posts. That stands out to me as the one thing I think about from Beth is that you know, when you read her blog posts, you're going to get a lot of information and you're going to get a lot of links. These links are going to be further examples, illustrations, other resources related to whatever topic she's blogging about. She's really good at pointing to other organizations, other experts. She pulls in a lot of information in a single blog post. What stands out to me is not just the information you'll get from her in each blog post, but each blog post is almost like the center of a hub of spokes. That each blog post links out to many different resources and types of resources on that one single topic.

Researcher: How does Beth's gender influence your thinking about her credibility?

Participant: That's an interesting question. I wouldn't say that her gender influences her credibility as much as it influences interest. For one thing, especially in this sector, which is the technology sector, which has been traditionally a male-dominated sector. She is one of the people helping to flip the tide in terms of being a respected voice in the sector who is a female voice. I think that it's not so much that it adds to her credibility, because I think the things that add to her credibility are the other techniques and tactics of linking and the amount of information and context. Her gender adds to a level of interest, for going to her as a leader in the community.

Researcher: What keeps you coming back to Beth's blog?

Participant: I would say that the amount of resources. It's not just her words that she's blogging in each blog post, but it's the amount of resources that I can take away and use for my own work. For example, I could use it in my own presentations, or I could use her information or her resources in my own examples or research, or if I'm blogging, then I might link to her blog. So she's a really good resource for other resources that I might want to use.

Researcher: Excellent. This brings me to the last question that we've got. This is just basically time for you to add anything you'd like. Is there anything else that you'd like to add or that you feel that I've missed?

Participant: No, I don't think so.

Researcher: OK. All right. Well, Annaliese, thank you so much again for being willing to do this interview. Again, if you've got any questions about the research at any time, feel free to email me, or you can also contact me at 865-408-8617.

Participant: All right. Thank you.

Researcher: All right. Thank you.

Participant: Bye.

Appendix D

Included Term	Semantic Relationship	Cover Term
- I'm typically looking for information relevant to my field or my education	Is a reason to	Visit a blog
- I'm just looking for information that's relevant to my field or something that I find interesting		
- I often look for blogs because you can get a different sense of trends		
- so you can have a sense of how well received a particular perspective is		
- Gauging other's opinions on that information		
- looking for other connections		
- I have a client that is in the glass manufacturing business… and I'll do research on shower design		
- but it gives you a broader view		
- gives you more information to make decisions about what is trustworthy and what is marketing		
- I'm usually looking for something related to either something I'm working on or something related to my organization.		
- Usually research		
- information		
- entertainment		
- I'm looking at either things that are interesting,		
- things that can help me in my daily life		
- explore something I know nothing about		
- look for is what's new in social media		
- what are some of the current trends		
Included Term	**Semantic Relationship**	**Cover Term**
- health and nutrition		
- if I I'm bored		
- I'll sometimes go to the blog of		

Included Term	Semantic Relationship	Cover Term
the person that wrote it		
- It's usually friends' blogs things that friends are posting		
- cooking		
- and how to effectively raise my child		
- onboarding		
- leadership		
- maintain some perspective of the social media aspects of my job		
- higher education trends		
- higher education marketing trends		
- I follow a few things on Facebook	is a reason why the participant	Reads a particular blog or follows a particular blogger
- use [social media] as a jumping off point to find and identify new people		
- I looked at the contents of [the course at] Syracuse		
- I base it on their credibility		
- site layout		
- site design		
- I just look for someone who knows what they're talking about		
- it often is a matter of search results to begin with		
- I'll start out with just some keyword searches to see what comes up		
- searching for keyword topics		
- I might use just a search engine		
- tooling around on the net and just happen to come across one		
- put in a key term in Google or Bing		
Included Term	**Semantic Relationship**	**Cover Term**
- I would also look at other people who were active on her blog		
- the quality of what they write		
- how relevant the topics they're covering are		
- part of it is word of mouth		
- I tend to get recommendations from other folks in my professional		
- I also read the blogs of other		

individuals		
- Usually based on recommendation		
- but mostly, recommendations		
- through my friends		
- they tell me about it		
- it is word of mouth things that I've seen on the Internet or on Facebook		
- I just observe what people are talking about on Twitter		
- I go through some of the major PR blogs		
- I look at Social Media Today, Digital Buzz Blog		
- I have that reading list		
- I have an RSS feed reader		
- I have a curated Google+ circle		
- I spend time on Facebook, on Google+, on Delicious and on a number of other sites		
- I will look at what they're posting by stream		
- I read it because they curate really great content		

Included Term	Semantic Relationship	Cover Term
- interested in what the person's writing about	Is a reason to	Keep reading a particular blog or blogger
- the useful content		
- for sound content		
- Original ideas		
Included Term	**Semantic Relationship**	**Cover Term**
- Original thoughts		
- Quality content		
- Interesting content		
- very thought provoking		
- information that is pretty specific		
- Professionally and well written		
- Humor		
- Stories		
- My run blogs, I go to a lot, because I like to run		
- Relevance to what I'm doing in my life		
- I like how the person writes		
- because people have a certain unique voice		
- if a friend who's pointed me to a		

Included Term	Semantic Relationship	Cover Term
blog		
- If the information is reliable		
- if I they have reference points		
- if it's entertaining		
- willing to give back to the community		
- They're willing to share this with everyone		
- they're not looking for profit at all		
- conversational on social media and other platforms		
- If I know of a person or an organization that pretty much is working on topics related to what I want to work on		
- People I know		
- I know them from virtual relationships		
- I know them because I've met them		
- I have a face to face friendship with them		
- User friendly design		
- Someone who is transparent		
Included Term	**Semantic Relationship**	**Cover Term**
- Because they tend to be broad		
- They'll look at tools		
- they'll look at trends		
- takes a deeper dive into technology and learning and transparency		

Included Term	Semantic Relationship	Cover Term
- the political blogs, especially some of the kind of fringe ones, I don't really consider them credible	Is a way of	Thinking about "blogging" and "credibility"
- as a general rule, I'm not so sure about if blogs can be considered credible		
- I don't think they're very credible sources at all		
- I'm not always so sure that a blog is necessarily credible		
- people's opinions and how they feel about that information		
- it's just people's opinions		
- Somebody who knows their stuff		
- the author really knows what he		

Included Term	Semantic Relationship	Cover Term
or she is talking about		
- expertise		
- someone who has some facts and figures of some relevance		
- it's also important to me that they're linking		
- they're linking to other blogs		
- they're linking to other sources		
- they have some accurate links to their information		
- They're crediting their information		
- Are they someone who checks their facts		
- I think they have to cite sources		
- that you want the author to have cited sources		
Included Term	**Semantic Relationship**	**Cover Term**
- to artfully mix opinion and perspective with data		
- a writer being associated with a publication		
- If you worked for the New York Times, you were at one point in time credible		
- it is the ability of a blogger to define a subject		
- to be deep in the subject		
- that a person is transparent about who they are		
- They're transparent in terms of if they have any financial relationship with any organization or sector that they tend to be blogging about		
- Is there transparency in what their motivations are		
- transparency		
- Are they clear about whether they're working for someone or representing their own opinion		
- Well, credibility means is it accurate		
- is the person trustworthy		
- authenticity		
- authenticity		
- experience		
- experience		
- a long term presence in, basically, that particular area of		

interest		
- to see how long they've been present		
- I usually think of someone like Tosh.0		
- they're making some spoof		

- I look for things that are pretty to the point	Is a reason for	Thinking that a blogger is credible
- that also cite things		
- I don't want them to just tell me like in a diary form		
Included Term	**Semantic Relationship**	**Cover Term**
- I like it when they…back it up with facts		
- life experience has an awful lot to do with making a blogger credible		
- Experience		
- experience matters a lot		
- Is it practical		
- Is it something that you can take something away in your everyday life		
- she uses a lot of illustrations and a lot of almost pictographs to get her concepts across		
- Expertise in the area		
- a regular position of employment		
- somebody to validate what I assume and what I already think		
- someone who's like-minded to me		
- web links		
- references		
- they're pulling from an official source		
- an official research source		
- a bio that is clear		
- when they're transparent		
- full disclosure		
- willing to open the doors into inside of who they are		
- blogging about something in her day to day life		
- sharing		
- talking about other people		
- talking about other		

organizations besides themselves		
- people are linking to them		
- talking about them		

- can't even spell something correctly	Is a reason for	Thinking a blogger is not credible
Included Term	**Semantic Relationship**	**Cover Term**
- too much advertising		
- they are getting money from advertisers		
- someone who's paid by that source		
- promote a certain product		
- to promote something over something else		
- don't seem to be citing any information		
- not linking out to other people		
- they're not citing where their content coming from		
- they're not citing where their content coming from		
-Some people just delete all the negative comments		
- aren't willing to be transparent		
- very 101 based type of blogs		
- ones that are just always pointing to how great they are		
- they don't share		

- clean layout	Is a kind of	Salient blog feature respondents look for
- I don't want it to be scrolling, scrolling every entry		
- time order		
- look clean, smooth		
- on topic		
- creative		
- quick		
- content itself needs to be engaging		
- author's writing style		
- to the point		
- the information is accurate		
- entertaining		
- resources cited		
- additional links		
- comments are allowed on a post		
Included Term	**Semantic Relationship**	**Cover Term**

- be able to comment		
- high level of understanding		
- higher level view of what's going on		
- looking at trends and cases		
- clarity of thought		
- clarity of expression		
- return on my time investment		
- the use of multimedia		
- opportunity to extend this conversation		
- how many times they blog		
- being able to quickly understand what the gist of the post is		
- scanability		
- commentaries have names and faces		
- quality of the writing		
- thoughtful post		
- interesting stories		
- stories that are more about people		
- application of what they're talking about		
- how you can put that into practice		
- practical quips		
- practical stories		

-they're able to take a topic, stick with that topic	Is a reason to	Believe that a blogger "knows what they're talking about"
- write it well and fluidly		
- writing style		
- who they are and what they're writing about		
- If a person is clearly stating the context of what they're referring to or what they're talking about		
- the ability to present a new idea within the context of what I may already understand		
Included Term	**Semantic Relationship**	**Cover Term**
- how philosophically in alliance we are		
- how that author presents their opinions		
- their voice in connection with the links and the other		

information		
- they're experienced		
- they're not fresh off the street		
- they've been doing this for a period of time		

- friend of mine recommend that I start reading him	Is a reason to	Start reading Brian Solis' blog
- plugged in just social media in a search engine		
- I chose to read Brian's blog		
- It was recommended to me		

- I got pointed to her	Is a reason to	Start reading Beth Kanter's blog
- someone pointed me to her		
- someone in my network		
- Because it had some interest to me		

- done this for a long time	Is a reason to	Believe that Beth Kanter is credible
- knows a lot of people		
- not above changing her methods		
- doesn't try and tell you everything		
- but she gives you new concepts and new ideas		
- works with a lot of different organizations		
- the books that she's written		
- her research		
- very research based		
- She provides just a lot of information		
- putting tons of information out there		
Included Term	**Semantic Relationship**	**Cover Term**
- has a good filter for things she explores		
- sharing lots of information		
- resources		
- links		
- providing lots of images		
- extremely transparent		
- very up to date		
- frequent		
- wouldn't close down conversation		

- a genuinely nice person		
- has a humility about he		
- has good intentions		
- a genuine desire to find the best ways to use social media		
- learns quickly		

- Done a lot of work with the private sector	Is a reason to	Believe that Brian Solis is credible
- The way how his blog was set up		
- Very entertaining		
- Help us all understand how the technology associated with social media allows people's behaviors to change		
- a rather prolific blogger		
- Done several books		
- Consulting work		
- Deeply immersed in his subjects		
- Built a name for himself		
- His professional reputation		
- Knows his stuff		
- Can definitely write really well		
- The knowledge that he's sharing		
- Sharing this knowledge with everyone		
- Is saying the things that need to be said		
Included Term	**Semantic Relationship**	**Cover Term**
- Moving the conversation forward in social media		
- Is transparent		
- Is building those relationships		

- Depth	Is a feature that	Is most salient to respondents reading Brian Solis' blog
- Knowledgeable		
- Intelligent		
- Intelligent		
- The way he handles critiques		
- Thorough interpretation of key concepts		
- The way he writes		
- Scientific thought		
- Being able to explain them to his followers		

- Using social media to bolster your company		
- Use those savvy consumers to figure out where your company needs to go		
- Hiring people for your company that specialized in that		
- How hiring someone specialized in social media is good		

Included Term	Semantic Relationship	Cover Term
- Global perspective on technology	Is a feature that	Is most salient to respondents reading Beth Kanter's blog
- Sense of trying to bring equality through technology		
- Use of guest blogs		
- Length of them		
- Pointing to other organizations		
- Sharing		
- Information		
- Sense of fun		
- Very welcoming		
- Inclusive		
- Dialogue oriented element		
Included Term	**Semantic Relationship**	**Cover Term**
- interesting stuff about how companies can use social media	Is a reason to	Return to Brian Solis' blog
- established himself as a thought leader		
- provide context to reports		
- provide context		
- interesting		
- entertaining		
- intelligent		
- intelligent		
- constantly putting out new material		
- relationship		
- learning about new things		
- growing		
- latest trends		

- trust	Is a reason to	Return to Beth Kanter's blog
- relationship		
- what she has done in the past		
- blog helps me stay abreast of what's new		
- what our clients are reading		
- many of them follow her		

- consistent		
- produces content		
- high quality		
- a deep dive		
- consistent with my point of view		
- guest posts		
- great place to look for resources		
- sharing relevant articles		

Appendix E

Blogger Website Screenshots and Biographies

Brian Solis biography

Brian Solis is a principal analyst at Altimeter Group. He is also an award-winning author, prominent blogger, and keynote speaker.

Solis has studied and influenced the effects of social media and disruptive technology on business, marketing, entertainment, and culture. Brian works with enterprise organizations to research market trends, disruptive technology, and emerging business opportunities. He also works with executive management and social media leadership to develop new strategies and align teams around initiatives that enable business objectives and priorities. Over the years, Brian has also led new media business and marketing efforts for Web 2.0 startups and celebrities. His latest book, The End Of Business As Usual, looks at the changing consumer landscape, its impact on business and what companies can do to adapt and lead. It was recently named as a Top 10 Business Book by Publisher's Weekly. His previous book Engage, is regarded as the industry reference guide for developing effective social business and social media strategies. Brian's blog is ranked in the top 10 marketing blogs in the AdAge Power 150 and is also a Top 100 business blog as ranked by Technorati. In addition to his writing and research, Brian is the host of the annual Pivot Conference where brands, agencies, and experts come together to address challenges and opportunities in new media.

Brian also hosts Revolution, a popular online video series that examines technology, trends and best practices and introduces viewers to the thought leaders who are blazing the trail. Guests have included Katie Couric, Mark Burnett, and Guy Kawasaki.

Brian Solis website screenshot

Beth Kanter biography

Beth Kanter is the author of Beth's Blog: How Nonprofits Can Use Social Media, one of the longest running and most popular blogs for nonprofits. She co-authored the book titled "The Networked Nonprofit" with Allison Fine published by J Wiley in 2010 that received Honorable Mention for the Terry McAdams Award. Beth has over 30 years working in the nonprofit sector in technology, training, capacity building, evaluation, fundraising, and marketing. Her second book, Measuring the Networked Nonprofit, with Co-Author KD Paine, will be published in October, 2012.

In 2009, she was named by Fast Company Magazine as one of the most influential women in technology and one of Business Week's "Voices of Innovation for Social Media." She was named Visiting Scholar for Social Media and Nonprofits for the David and Lucile Packard Foundation in 2009-2012. She was a Society of New Communications Research Fellow for 2010.

Beth was honored with the inaugural PepsiCo Women's Inspiration Award at the 2011SxSW Interactive Festival.

A frequent contributor to many nonprofit technology web sites, blogs, and magazines, Beth has authored chapters in several books, including "Managing Technology to Meet Your Mission: A Strategic Guide for Nonprofit Leaders," edited by NTEN both published in 2009 and the 2011 Craigslist Bootcamp Nonprofit Management Guide to be published by J Wiley in 2011.

A much-in-demand trainer, Beth was the keynote speaker for the Cambodian Bloggers Conference in Phnom Penh, The Connecting Up Conference in Brisbane, Australia, State Department's Tech@State Conference, Minnesota Council on Nonprofits, Making Media Conference in Chicago and many others. She has presented about nonprofits and social media at some of the leading social media industry conferences including O'Reilly's Graphing Social Patterns, Gnomedex, SXSW, Blogher, and Podcamp.

Beth is an internationally recognized trainer who has developed and implemented effective sector capacity building programs that help organizations integrate social media, network building, and relationship marketing best practices. Beth is an expert in facilitating online and offline peer learning, curriculum development based on traditional adult learning theory, and other instructional approaches.

Beth has designed and deliver workshops that include interactive key notes, 90 minute "sprints", half-day, one-day, two-day and for international projects, week long training programs.

She is currently the instructional designer for the E-Mediat project, a networked approach to capacity building of NGOs to use social media the Middle East. She curated NTEN's "We Are Media: Nonprofit Social Media Starter Kit," an online community of people from nonprofits who are interested in learning and teaching about how social media strategies and tools can enable nonprofit organizations to create, compile, and distribute their stories and change the world.

Beth Kanter website screenshot
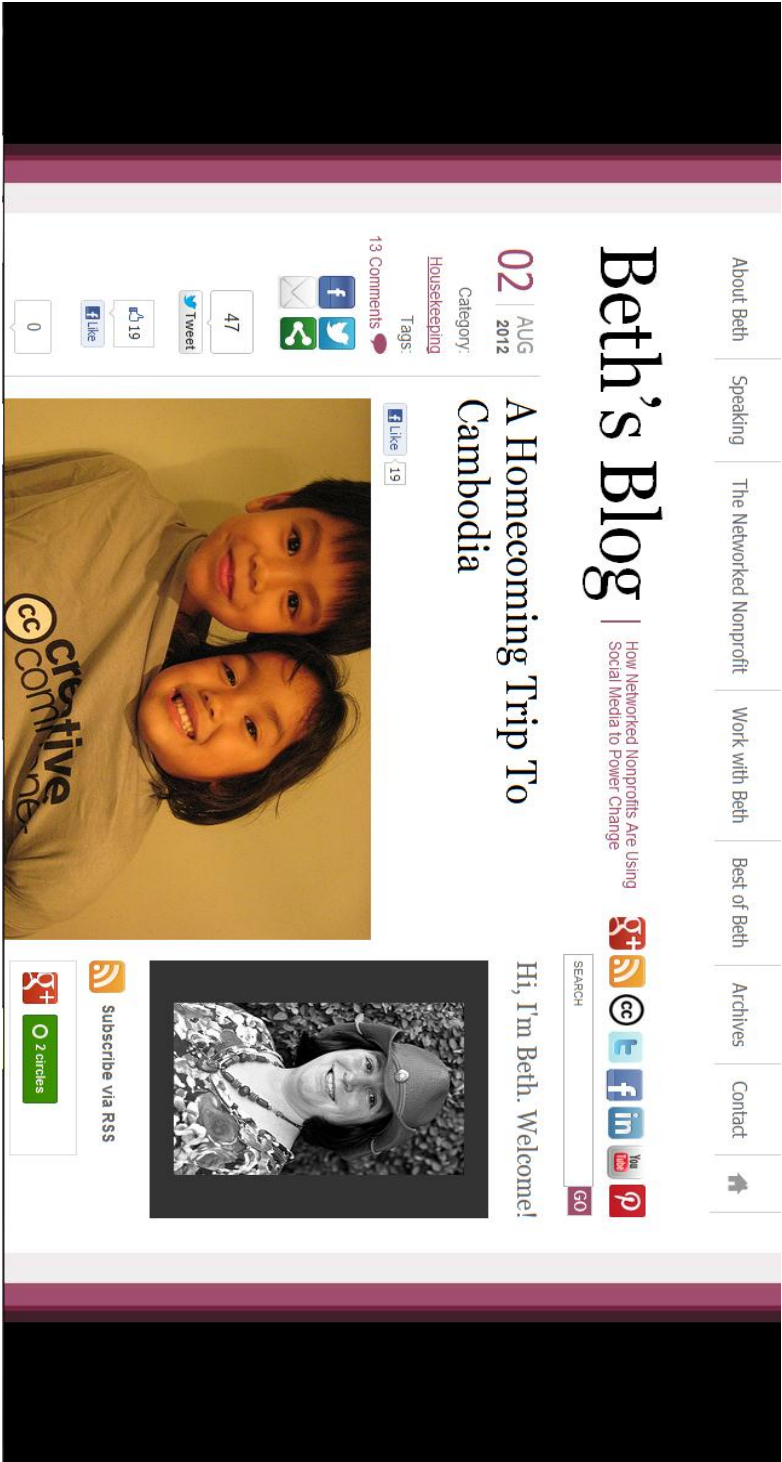
Vita

Aaron Michael Sachs was born in Pomona, CA. After graduating from Karns High School in 2005, Aaron attended Berea College in Berea, KY where he graduated in 2009 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in German, as well as a Bachelor of Arts degree in Speech Communication. Aaron attended graduate school at the University of Tennessee and graduated with a Masters of Science in Communication and Information in August of 2012.