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Source: *MIS Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (December 2013), pp. 1069-1092

Published by: Management Information Systems Research Center, University of Minnesota

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43825782>

Accessed: 26-05-2019 20:53 UTC

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## TALKING ABOUT TECHNOLOGY: THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW ACTOR CATEGORY THROUGH NEW MEDIA<sup>1</sup>

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*This paper examines how a new actor category may emerge in a field of discourse through the new media of the Internet. Existing literatures on professional and organizational identity have shown the importance of identity claims and of the tensions surrounding “optimal distinctiveness” for new actors in a field, but have not examined the roles of new media in these processes. The literature on information technology (IT) and identity has highlighted the identity-challenging and identity-enhancing aspects of new IT use for existing actor categories but has not examined the dynamics associated with the emergence of new actor categories. Here, we investigate how a new actor category may emerge through the use of new media as a dynamic interaction of discursive practices, identity claims, and new media use. Drawing on findings from a case study of technology bloggers, we identified discursive practices through which a group of technology bloggers enacted claims of a distinctive identity in the joint construction of their discourse and in response to continuous developments in new media. Emergence of this new category was characterized by ongoing, opposing yet coexisting tendencies toward coalescence, fragmentation, and dispersion. Socio-technical dynamics underlying bloggers’ use of new media and the actions of prominent (“A-list”) bloggers contributed to these tendencies. We untangle theoretically the identity-enabling and identity-unsettling effects of new media and conceptualize the emergence of a new actor category through new media as an ongoing process in which the category identity may remain fluid, rather than progress to an endpoint.*

**Keywords:** Web 2.0, discursive practices, identity, legitimacy, blogging, socio-technical dynamics, A-listers, coalescence, dispersion, fragmentation

*Revolutions don't usually work out quite as planned. And that's what's happening now in the technology world with blogs. They are every bit as important as their boosters said they would be. But in an entirely different way.*

Lee Gomes, *The Wall Street Journal*, 2005

<sup>1</sup>Suprateek Sarker was the accepting senior editor for this paper. Youngjin Yoo served as the associate editor.

The appendix for this paper is located in the “Online Supplements” section of the *MIS Quarterly*'s website (<http://www.misq.org>).

## Introduction and Motivation

Rapid developments and diffusion of new media on the Internet, loosely termed Web 2.0 (O'Reilly 2007), have opened new channels for the creation and dissemination of discourses. Widespread use of new media has contributed to dramatic changes in how public discourses are produced and in the relative position and advantage of established and new actors (Boczkowski 2004; Lasica 2002; Mitchelstein and Boczkowski 2009). The diffusion of web blogging is a notable example of field disruption as new media actors take form within established fields. Researchers have explored how individuals and established organizations adopt new media (Aggarwal et al. 2012; Singer 2007). There have also been reports of influential new media actors, for instance in politics (Wattal et al. 2010), entertainment and music (Dhar and Chang 2009), and technology and innovation (Droge et al. 2009). Given the opportunities for innovation and the potential for disruption of existing fields, understanding how new actors may emerge through the use of new media is an interesting and important issue for information systems research and can inform questions of when new actors may develop and be sustainable in a field (Scott et al. 2000).

We use the term *emergence* to highlight the processes through which social and technical practices may come to be associated with the identity of a new actor category. A *new actor category* may draw on the practices and identity of established actors but is also distinct from them (Navis and Glynn 2010). New actor categories whose members rely primarily on the use of new media represent an especially intriguing and increasingly relevant case, because new media of the Internet and new actors both represent innovations. Organizational research has highlighted the formation of professional or organizational identity in the emergence of new actor categories (Clarke et al. 2009; Gioia et al. 2010; Hardy et al. 2005) but has not considered explicitly how information technology may interact with identity formation in emergence. IT use is integral to the discursive practices of new media actors and has implications for the social identity of actors (Lamb and Kling 2003). Although the identity-challenging and identity-enhancing implications of new IT for existing actors have been examined (Barrett and Walsham 1999; Gal et al. 2008; Lamb and Davidson 2005; Lamb and Kling 2003), the entwining of new media in identity formation and emergence of new actors has not yet been explored.

This paper builds a theoretical understanding of how new actor categories emerge through new media as an interaction of discursive practices, identity claims, and changing affordances of new media. In this research, we investigate the emergence of a new actor category within technology innova-

tion discourse: technology bloggers. "Tech bloggers" create and disseminate news, opinions, reviews, advice, and other information about technology developments via the Internet, using blogging and associated technologies (Davidson and Vaast 2009). Discourse plays important roles in how IT innovations take shape, diffuse, and are adopted (Abrahamson and Fairchild 1999; Iacono and Kling 2001; Rogers 2003; Swanson and Ramiller 1997; Wang 2010). Tech bloggers' influence in such discourse has become increasingly perceptible and they have gained the attention of established actors such as technology firms and journalists (Droge et al. 2009; Gomes 2005).

In a three-year case study, we identified discursive practices that a group of tech bloggers negotiated and through which they made identity claims as distinctive commentators on Web 2.0 developments. We found that emergence was characterized by three opposing yet coexisting tendencies toward coalescence, fragmentation, and dispersion of the new actor category and that continuous changes in new media and the influence of prominent bloggers contributed to each tendency. By identifying and untangling theoretically the identity-enabling and identity-unsettling effects of new media and the interactions among the three tendencies, we conceptualized the emergence of the new actor category as an ongoing process in which identity and practices may remain fluid, rather than a progression toward an end-state (as in Gioia et al. 2010; Navis and Glynn 2010). Finally, we examined the socio-technical processes that shape this ongoing emergence and the theoretical and practical implications of these three tendencies for new media actors.

In the next section, we review the theoretical concepts that informed our research. We then outline the methods used in the case study. Our findings detail the interrelations between discursive practices, identity claims, and new media technologies in emergence through five themes. In the discussion, we consider the opposing yet coexisting tendencies that characterized emergence in this setting and their implications for the new category, its practices and identity. We conclude with a discussion of promising avenues for future research.

## Theoretical Foundations

The term *discourse* refers to the broad array of spoken or written commentary related to a topic, which is manifest in interconnected sets of texts expressed through various media (Phillips and Hardy 2002). We use the term *technology innovation discourse* to refer to the collective commentary of consultants, technology firms, trade press journalists, academics, industry associations, and so on, that promote, criti-

que, and reflect on technology developments (Iacono and Kling 2001; Swanson and Ramiller 1997). Technology innovations give rise to distinct discourses, and multiple, overlapping discourses exist. Our case study is situated in a discourse centered on Web 2.0 technologies in the mid-2000s in the United States. Various actors help to build socially accepted interpretations of IT innovations and to promote their development and diffusion (Abrahamson 1996; Ramiller and Swanson 2003; Wang 2010). Research has examined the influence of established actors such as consultants (Pollock and William 2011), mainstream media and the trade press (Wang and Ramiller 2009; Wang and Swanson 2008), industry associations (Markus et al. 2006; Wang and Swanson 2007), and securities analysts (Benner 2010; Benner and Ranganathan 2012). Less attention has been given to how a new actor category such as technology bloggers may emerge and gain recognition or the role that new media may play in this process.

### **Emergence and Discursive Practices**

Discursive practices may be defined as the production, dissemination and reception of a discourse (Phillips and Hardy 2002). They rule “in” and “out” socially acceptable ways of talking about, behaving, and knowing about a topic (Hall 2001). When individuals begin to adopt new media to produce and disseminate their discourse, shared discursive practices do not yet exist. Whether and how individuals interrelate and negotiate shared discursive practices are fundamental to the emergence of a new actor category through new media. Barnes’ (2001, p. 32) characterization of shared practices is helpful in this regard:

What is required to understand a practice of this kind is not individuals oriented primarily by their own habits, nor is it individuals oriented by the same collective object; rather it is human beings oriented to *each other*...who constantly modify their habituated individual responses as they interact with others, in order to sustain a shared practice.

This characterization focuses the analysis on a categorical level at which individuals are recognized—by themselves and by others—as engaging in shared practices (Barnes 2001; Reckwitz 2002).

Lamb and Kling (2003) argue that a social actor’s technology use practices arise in a network of affiliations within a field. Practices are interdependent and help define each actor’s respective positions, and thus their influence and legitimacy in the field. A new actor category faces a delicate and

dynamic balance of claiming to be different, and hence new and novel, and at the same time claiming to be similar to established categories so as to be viewed as legitimate (Aldrich and Fiol 1994; Navis and Glynn 2010). Perceptions of distinctiveness and of legitimacy are built through actors’ communications with others, that is, through their discursive practices (Heracleous and Barrett 2001; Suchman 1995; Suddaby and Greenwood 2005). If a new actor is associated too closely with existing actors, it becomes indistinct from them. Thus, for new actors discursive practices must acknowledge the norms and values of the field but also contrast with and challenge these norms and values (Suchman 1995).

### **Emergence and Identity Formation**

We are interested in how socially shared understandings of identity are associated with a new actor category. To become recognized, new actors must confront questions such as: “who are we?” and “what do we do?” (Navis and Glynn 2010, 2011). They must establish a self-referential description that provides contextually appropriate answers to these questions. Identity has been theorized as a discursive resource (Clarke et al. 2009; Hardy et al. 2005; Weick 1995) through which an actor makes claims about what it *is*, as well as what it is *not* (Elsbach and Bhattacharya 2001). Such descriptions act as an interpretive resource in an actor’s interactions with others (Hardy et al. 2005; Pratt et al. 2006) and are enacted through discursive practices (Lok 2010).

For new actor categories, identity is negotiated at two interrelated levels: between the new actor category and established actors in the field and among participants within the new category (Clegg et al. 2007). For instance, Clegg et al. (2007) found that business coaches, a newly forming category, defined who they were and what they did in contrast with an established actor category (business consultants). In their study of the emergence of a new market category (satellite radio), Navis and Glynn (2010) found that the identity claims of prototypical members of the new category influenced the identity of the category within the field, and that members focused on articulating the identity of the new category before differentiating each firm’s position and identity relative to the other. They posited from this case that a new category follows a progression from the establishment of the category within the field to the differentiation of its participants within the category.

The concept of *optimal distinctiveness* is useful to understand tensions between similarity and distinctiveness. Drawing from social identity theory, Brewer (1991, p. 478) posited that “groups must not only satisfy members’ needs for affiliation

or belonging with the group, they must also maintain clear boundaries that differentiate them from other groups.” Groups that do not maintain such boundaries may fracture or lose adherents (Brewer 1991). Adapting the concept of optimal distinctiveness to organizational identity formation, Gioia et al. (2010, p. 25) interpreted the tension between sameness and difference as “being similar enough to competitors to gain legitimacy while being different enough to reap a competitive advantage.” They found that *attaining optimal distinctiveness* was a reoccurring theme across a sequential, stage-like process leading to organizational identity formation.

### **Emergence and New Media Actors**

New technologies influence ways of interacting with and presenting oneself to others, and the practices through which work is accomplished (Orlikowski 2000; Zuboff 1988). For new media actors, IT use is implicit in the definition of an actor category and in the discursive practices they use to produce and disseminate their discourse. Thus, we must examine how new media are implicated in discursive practices and identity claims of new actors. Relevant to our case study on tech bloggers, we consider socio-technical features of blogging.

Blogs are web-based publications, typically composed of dated entries in reverse chronological order. Bloggers—people who write blogs—use similar technologies, but their communicative purposes, practices, and lexicon differ widely (Blood 2004; Dearstyne 2005; Gregg 2009; Nardi et al. 2004a). Some blogs are personal, reflecting their authors’ thoughts and life much like a personal diary (Gregg 2009; Nardi et al. 2004b), while other blogs organize, consolidate, and present professional information (Bar-Ilan 2005; Silva et al. 2008) or provide new channels to communicate corporate news (Scoble and Israel 2006). Often, bloggers publish primarily on specific topics. Some specialized blogs have seen their audience and authority grow (Dhar and Chang 2009; Droge et al. 2009).

As with digital innovations in general (Yoo et al. 2010), blog-related technologies change continually. Table 1 provides examples of blogging and related technologies, including software for designing and maintaining blogs, blog aggregators for compiling links and summaries of selected blog postings, blog search and rating services for facilitating readers’ discovery of content and for promoting the visibility of certain blogs, and micro-blogging services.

Various features of blogging technologies influence how bloggers interrelate with others both online and offline (Jiang

and Wang 2009; Schmidt 2007). Most blogs are maintained and published through blog services or using blog content management software. Such software usually allows for readers’ comments and feedback as well as trackbacks and pingbacks, which enable bloggers to receive notification when others link to their content. Bloggers may also acknowledge each other by leaving hyperlinks to their own posts in comment fields of other bloggers or by listing hyperlinks to blogs they recommend (so-called blog-rolls). Linking behaviors indicate various social relations among bloggers such as friendship, acquaintance, or reciprocity (Schmidt 2007).

Despite these relational aspects, blogging technologies and practices often support asymmetrical roles of blog authors and readers (Herring et al. 2005). Blogs are organized around the voice of the blogger and the topics in which he or she is interested (Blood 2004). They garner readers attracted primarily to the blogger’s opinions and the information the blogger provides. Drawing on McLuhan (1964), MacDougall (2005) suggests that a degree of celebrity fascination may emerge around popular bloggers and their readers. The network structure of links among blogs indicates that a small number of bloggers receives the majority of incoming links (Trammel and Keshelashvili 2005). Referred to as “A-list” bloggers within the blogosphere, these individuals may become influential in their field of discourse (MacDougall 2005).

The use of blogging technologies has diffused widely among established actors. Firms have adopted blogging for a variety of purposes, such as to promote knowledge sharing and communication among employees or to project a more personal “voice” from senior executives and thus to influence the firm’s identity among constituents (Baehr and Alex-Brown 2010; Lockwood and Dennis 2008). Some firms also look to engage their lead users in new product development activities through blogging (Droge et al. 2009). Increasingly, firms have established policies for employee blogging (Guerin 2011; Kaganer and Vaast 2010), suggesting that bloggers writing for an established firm have limited autonomy. The widespread diffusion of blogging has affected mainstream media organizations as well and has challenged journalists’ professional identity and discursive practices (Deuze 2008; Mitchelstein and Boczkowski 2009; Singer 2007). The technological ease of writing and distributing blogs challenges journalists’ identity as gatekeepers for newsworthy information (Singer 2007). In contrast with journalists’ practices of fact checking and protecting sources, bloggers are more likely to distribute rumors and opinions, to let the “truth” emerge through conversations with each other and with readers and to link to their sources (typically other bloggers) (Singer 2007).

Table 1. Examples of Blog-Related Technologies

Category	Description	Examples
Blog Content Management	These are the standard professional publishing platforms which bloggers use to publish their content. They generally offer support for formatting blog posts, trackbacks, pingbacks, RSS readers and writers, customizable templates, and social networking integration.	Blogger, Moveable Type, Word Press
Micro-blogging	These are publishing platforms used to publish short text posts and typically allow readers to keep track of ("follow") the blogger's postings.	Twitter, Friendfeed, ReVou, Jaiku, Plurk, Laconica
Blog Aggregators	These are algorithms that scan a list of indexed blogs or news sites using custom logic in order to publish links to the most current news and information from around the web on a single website.	Techmeme, Bloglines, Popurls, Newsvine
Blog Search Engines	These are algorithms that search the web and blogosphere based on a list of indexed sites and keywords.	Yahoo Blog Search, Google Blog Search, Technorati, Sphere, Stumbleupon, IceRocket
Social Software	These include social tagging and bookmarking, enabling users to store, share and search content provided or tagged by other users.	Reddit, Digg, Delicious, MetaFilter

### **Emergence of a New Actor Category with New Media**

Organizational studies have highlighted the concept of optimal distinctiveness in identity formation and emergence of new actors (Brewer 1991; Clegg et al. 2007) and have conceptualized the emergence of new actors and categories as a linear or stage-like process towards an end state (Gioia et al. 2010; Navis and Glynn 2011). These studies do not consider explicitly how IT in general and new media in particular may be implicated in identity formation and in the emergence of a new actor category. IS researchers have theorized how identity, practices, and IT use are related for institutional actors (Lamb and Kling 2003). They have in particular demonstrated that individuals or organizations in established roles may find new IT to be identity enhancing, if the new technology provides opportunities for the actor to strengthen or develop new competencies, or to be identity challenging, if the use of the new technology weakens the actor's claims to legitimacy and distinctiveness (Barrett and Walsham 1999; Korica and Molloy 2010; Lamb and Davidson 2005; Walsham 1998). IS research has, however, not yet fully considered how new media may lead to the emergence of new actor categories, or how the identity of these new categories may be built inextricably with and in relation to new media and to shared discursive practices.

The emergence of a new actor category through new media offers the opportunity to investigate such dynamics. New actors may bring novel capabilities and competencies and they may combine practices and identity claims in ways that challenge established institutional logics in the field (Scott et

al. 2000). Moreover, new media are fast developing and volatile digital technologies (Yoo et al. 2010), which may have unexpected effects on the emergence of new actor categories. In this study, we investigated the emergence of tech bloggers in technology innovation discourse, focusing on how discursive practices and identity claims of optimal distinctiveness became entwined with ever-changing digital media technologies.

### **Research Design and Methods**

Discourse analysis entails various methods for examining the role of language in the social construction of human activity (Phillips and Hardy 2002; Phillips et al. 2004). We used discourse analysis to investigate the posts of a group of tech bloggers and as a context in which to examine the emergence of a new actor category. Our theoretical interest was in how the participants in the social world we studied made sense of and acted in this socio-technical setting (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991; Walsham 1995). We provided contextual information to situate our study in its social and technical setting and offer theoretical abstraction and generalization from contextual details, as advocated in Klein and Myers (1999). To ensure that multiple voices were considered, we utilized a variety of data sampling and analysis approaches for our grounded content analyses of tech bloggers' discourse. In doing so, we respected emerging ethical and legal guidelines of electronic data collection (Allen et al. 2006; Vaast and Walsham 2013), relying on publicly accessible information and providing our readers with tools to retrace this information through uniform resource locators (URLs) to blog posts.

**Table 2. Topics in Coded Tech Bloggers' Entries**

Typical Topics of Technology Blogs in Coded Sample	Count	Percentage <sup>†</sup>
<b>Technologies</b>		
Development Tools	18	2%
Digital Content Tools and Technologies	100	9%
File Formats and Readers	27	2%
Gadgets	63	6%
Mobile Technologies	95	8%
Networking (not mobile networks)	29	3%
Organizational Computing	14	1%
Search Engines	76	7%
Social Networking and Social Media	111	10%
Web Browsers	34	3%
All Other Applications and Technologies	116	10%
<b>Business Issues</b>		
New Product or New Version Announcement	118	10%
Start-up Activity	98	9%
Tech Firm Earnings Announcements and General Strategy	210	18%
Tech Firm, Established Industry and/or New Industry Leadership	63	6%
Tech Firm Mergers, Acquisitions, Alliances, Partnerships	88	8%
<b>Technology Implications</b>		
Ethics and Normative Behaviors Related to Technology in General	68	6%
Integration of Offline and Online Activities	72	6%
IS Privacy and Security Issues	26	2%
Relationship Between Technology, Society and/or Industries	133	12%

<sup>†</sup>Percentages do not total to 100% because more than one category may apply to a single blog posting.

### The Research Setting

To gather published blog entries, we utilized Techmeme.com (hereforth "Techmeme"), an aggregator website. Techmeme uses a proprietary algorithm to monitor the World Wide Web continuously to gather links related to technology developments and innovations. The website's avowed mission is to collect "must read stories in technology" with the goal of being the "tech news site of record." Posts are published in English and generally focus on U.S. technology firms prominent in Internet, mobile, and consumer electronic technologies (e.g., Google, Apple, Microsoft) as well as Web 2.0 firms. Typical entries aggregated by Techmeme include reports of technology news, such as product announcements, business plans and acquisitions among technology firms, opinions and reviews of technology products within this domain, and tips on how to use new technologies. Table 2 profiles a sample of blog entries aggregated by this site.

Tech blogs appearing on Techmeme are not representative of all tech blogs, but Techmeme provided a purposeful setting

appropriate for our interest in the emergence of a new actor category through new media. Techmeme was initiated in September 2005 and quickly acquired a reputation among technology industry insiders and watchers as an influential aggregator (Gomes 2005; Millian 2009; Strang 2007). The aggregator collects postings from tech bloggers as well as entries from established technology discourse actors such as corporate web sites, mainstream media (MSM), and trade press publications. This enabled us to contextualize our analysis of how tech bloggers positioned themselves relative to established discourse actors and to observe closely how a group of tech bloggers interrelated with each other in their discourse. Techmeme's social and technical influences on tech bloggers' discursive practices were of analytical interest as well.

### Data Collection

We captured a daily snapshot of Techmeme's entries over a three-year period, using an automated process to download

and parse entries appearing at 12:00 p.m. ET, from September 12, 2005 (Techmeme launch) through September 11, 2008. The starting point for the study coincided with a growing recognition of tech bloggers in technology innovation discourses (see Gomes 2005). The three-year observation period allowed us to identify phenomena relevant to our interests and to assess the dynamic aspects of emergence in this setting.

Techmeme's founder has revealed some aspects of the proprietary aggregation algorithm (Rivera 2006, 2007; Strang 2007; Sullivan 2007). The algorithm is seeded with a list of technology blogs, online news, and MSM news sites, which are then scanned for incoming and outgoing links in order to select entries that are relevant to the aggregator's focus (business-related stories on Web 2.0 technologies). The algorithm updates the seed list several times a day, based on the frequency that various source sites are selected to appear on Techmeme. Because the algorithm begins with a list of websites and selects entries primarily based on linking activity, some tech bloggers and other sources appear more frequently than others (Rivera 2007; Sullivan 2007). Techmeme nonetheless selects a broad range of technology news sources with many entries from sources appearing only a few times and a smaller number of sources appearing more frequently.

We downloaded the headline and initial lines of the entry that appeared on the aggregator's website, and the links to other sources that the aggregator site assigned as "related." This process resulted in more than 35,000 entries. We filtered non-blog entries from established actors such as the BBC, *The New York Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal* and from corporate websites. More than 17,500 entries remained after this filtering. To ensure that we analyzed discursive practices from a broad array of tech bloggers we randomly selected approximately 10 percent of entries, filtering those that were produced by other types of sources, not by tech bloggers. The remaining sample included 854 entries from independent bloggers, 229 from individuals publishing a blog on the website of an established media firm, and 57 from employees blogging on a technology firm's website. Our analysis focused on blog entries from independent tech bloggers, that is, the many individuals who engaged in blogging without relying on an affiliation with a well-established organization or who left established fields to become bloggers. Entries from other categories of bloggers provided a useful contrast. The appendix summarizes and discusses differences in discursive practice frequency among these groups. We also used systematic and theoretical sampling of blog entries by searching our database for entries that included certain terms of interest in the analysis and by reviewing the top entries for each day of the three-year observation period for evidence of controversial issues or debates.

## Data Analysis

In first level analysis, we used the randomly selected entries in order to identify categories of discursive practices in a grounded manner that acknowledged the theoretical foundations as well as the specific context of the study (Orlikowski 1993). We iteratively refined the categories, as each author independently assessed blog entries, then jointly discussed newly identified discursive practices, referred to the literature for clarification and insights, reconciled differences, and formulated guidelines for applying categories. We assigned between one and five discursive practices to an entry (averaging two per entry). This iterative process resulted in 14 categories of discursive practices, summarized and illustrated in Table 3.

Building on this first level analysis, we examined how tech bloggers made identity claims in their discourse and through their interactions within their networks of affiliations (Lamb and Kling 2003), that is, in relation to their readers, to other tech bloggers, and to other technology discourse actors, as well as in relation to new media technologies per se. We assessed interpretively tech bloggers' identity claims evidenced in their blog entries. Through these steps, we defined five overarching themes, summarized in Table 4, which characterized the dynamic process of emergence for independent tech bloggers. We theoretically sampled additional blog entries to challenge, support, and contextualize the thematic analysis, paying close analytical attention to how bloggers interrelated with each other, how they responded to ongoing developments with new media, and how they made identity claims.

In a final stage of analytical generalization, we examined the emergence of this new actor category holistically (Klein and Myers 1999). We iterated between consideration of the *parts* of the analysis (discursive practices, identity claims, new media uses, themes) and the *whole* phenomenon of emergence. Though these iterative analyses, we identified three opposing yet coexisting *tendencies* toward *coalescence*, *fragmentation*, and *dispersion* of this new actor category within an ongoing process of emergence.

## Emergence of Tech Bloggers in Technology Discourse

When blogging software debuted in the late 1990s, technology enthusiasts, analysts, investors, developers, and pundits began blogging to broadcast their thoughts on technology developments and on the business moves of tech companies.



Table 3. Discursive Practices of Independent Tech Bloggers

Name and Description of Discursive Practice	Example	Percent <sup>†</sup>
<p><b>Reporting technology news and developments in journalistic voice</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acting as information source for news on technology firm actions and announcements, technology developments, Web 2.0.</li> <li>Reporting in straightforward narrative a tech innovation or firm move happening.</li> </ul>	<p>Quintura Search Engine gets backing from early Skype investor — Written by Alex Iskold and edited by Richard MacManus — Russia-based Quintura Search Engine has received substantial backing from Mangrove Capital Partners of Luxembourg, an early-stage an early-stage investor ... This is an interesting deal for several reasons. (<a href="http://www.readwriteweb.com/archives/quintura_search.php">http://www.readwriteweb.com/archives/quintura_search.php</a>)</p>	15%
<p><b>Assuming common interests</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acknowledging what is or will be "talked about" in blogosphere.</li> <li>Responding to a perceived "hot topic."</li> <li>Claiming the blogger knows what is of interest.</li> </ul>	<p>The blogosphere has stalled at 15.5 million blogs—So what — Lots of chatter about the this "plateau" in the blogosphere ... now the question is, so what? (<a href="http://www.onebyonemedia.com/the-blogosphere-has-stalled-at-155-million-blogs-so-what/">http://www.onebyonemedia.com/the-blogosphere-has-stalled-at-155-million-blogs-so-what/</a>)</p>	8%
<p><b>Assuming shared knowledge</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using acronyms and buzzwords without explanation.</li> <li>Assuming an ongoing discussion, conversation on technology topics.</li> </ul>	<p>GData and Open Standards — Last week Google introduced GData to "provide a simple standard protocol for reading and writing data on the web". Based on ATOM 1.0 and RSS 2.0, this represents a significant step for Google towards adopting standard protocols ... (<a href="http://blog.edgeio.com/2006/04/23/gdata-and-open-standards/">http://blog.edgeio.com/2006/04/23/gdata-and-open-standards/</a>)</p>	18%
<p><b>Directing attention</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stimulating collective attention to bloggers as source of news.</li> <li>Encouraging readers and observers to pay attention to bloggers by mentioning others' posts and linking to them.</li> </ul>	<p>I have to echo Fred Wilson's view that Valleywag has suddenly become a must-read for me. Despite the incessant Yahoo! bashing recently, Nick Denton has finally created an insightful Silicon Valley gossip rag that's worth the time put into it. (<a href="http://www.mattmalister.com/blog/2006/12/14/123/valleywag-is-becoming-essential/">http://www.mattmalister.com/blog/2006/12/14/123/valleywag-is-becoming-essential/</a>)</p>	18%
<p><b>Stimulating debate</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stimulating attention on issues of purported importance.</li> <li>Providing interpretations for general technological and economic developments.</li> </ul>	<p>The Internet is Dead and Boring — A lot of people are all up and upset about my comments that the Internet is dead and boring. Well guess what, it is. (<a href="http://blogmaverick.com/2007/08/24/the-internet-is-dead-and-boring/">http://blogmaverick.com/2007/08/24/the-internet-is-dead-and-boring/</a>)</p>	11%
<p><b>Discussing blogging</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reviewing and reflecting on technology developments that affect the practices of blogging.</li> <li>Commenting or reflecting on the social nature of blogging as a shared activity.</li> </ul>	<p>Is Nick Carr the new Robin Hood, or just an A**hole? — Nick goes on a rant about how unfair the blogging world is. It's an easy way to get links (hey, he's getting mine for the first time), but his post is complete nonsense and shows that he has no idea what blogging is all about ... (<a href="http://www.crunchnotes.com/2006/08/16/nick-carr-robin-hood/">http://www.crunchnotes.com/2006/08/16/nick-carr-robin-hood/</a>)</p>	16%
<p><b>Assuming relationship with readers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using first and second person (familiar) to address readers.</li> <li>Referring to own blog posts and opinions written in past, with expectation that readers are following the bloggers' postings.</li> </ul>	<p>How Nanaimo Became Best Known Google Earth Town — Those of you who are astute readers of this blog (and other geo-spatial blogs) will probably already know ... (<a href="http://www.gearthblog.com/blog/archives/2008/03/how_nanaimo_became_best_known_googl.html">http://www.gearthblog.com/blog/archives/2008/03/how_nanaimo_became_best_known_googl.html</a>)</p>	16%
<p><b>Inviting reader participation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Soliciting readers to react to a blog.</li> <li>Commenting on readers' comments.</li> <li>Running polls or soliciting opinions.</li> </ul>	<p>Why do people switch to Linux? — During the last month, we conducted a survey of readers who use Linux. We asked them why they switched to Linux and received a plethora of answers ... (<a href="http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/wlg/8231">http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/wlg/8231</a>)</p>	6%
<p><b>Demonstrating knowledge of other bloggers' discourse</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mentioning other bloggers by name, especially A-listers.</li> <li>Gossiping about other bloggers, showing knowledge of community members.</li> </ul>	<p>Zero Zero Party Over, Oops, Out of time! Tonight We're Gonna Party Like It's 1999... TechCrunch 7 — Wow, talk about a blow out. Last night's Tech Crunch / August Capital Party down on prestigious Sand Hill Road in Menlo Park was amazingly over the top... (<a href="http://thomashawk.com/2006/08/zero-zero-party-over-oops-out-of-time-tonight-were-gonna-party-like-its-1999-techcrunch-7.html">http://thomashawk.com/2006/08/zero-zero-party-over-oops-out-of-time-tonight-were-gonna-party-like-its-1999-techcrunch-7.html</a>)</p>	16%
<p><b>Engaging in discourse directed at other bloggers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engaging in debates about technology or issues with other bloggers specifically; agreeing or disagreeing, taking sides.</li> <li>Mentioning another blogger in the entry and contrasting one's own opinion with that blogger.</li> </ul>	<p>In which I engage Dave — Dave Winer has replied at length and critically to my last posting about the future of podcasting. I'm going to take his comments in my blog, which don't jibe with his tone on the long attack on me at ScriptingNews, up to the posting level, because I don't want this to get buried... (<a href="http://www.ratcliffblog.com/archives/2005/11/in_which_i_enga.html">http://www.ratcliffblog.com/archives/2005/11/in_which_i_enga.html</a>)</p>	8%

<b>Name and Description of Discursive Practice</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Percent<sup>†</sup></b>
<p><b>Comparing bloggers' role to journalists</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reacting to journalists' critiques of bloggers.</li> <li>• Contrasting bloggers' and journalists' roles.</li> <li>• Claiming rights and privileges of journalists.</li> </ul>	<p>Forbes Cover Story Blows It, Calling Bloggers Lynch Mobs — Earlier tonight I was on a four-minute segment on CNBC that largely focused on Forbes' new cover story - Attack of the Blogs... (<a href="http://www.micropersuasion.com/2005/10/forbes_cover_st.html">http://www.micropersuasion.com/2005/10/forbes_cover_st.html</a>)</p>	6%
<p><b>Claiming expertise</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critiquing and analyzing tech news and developments.</li> <li>• Highlighting bloggers' special knowledge of technology, with some claims of expertise.</li> </ul>	<p>The latest Mac ad throws fire on the flames of the War on Craplets. A message to those PR people, engineers, product managers, VPs and CEOs at Dell, HP, Sony, Lenovo, and our other favorite PC makers: Don't let the people in charge of putting these demos on your machines ruin your computers. (<a href="http://gizmodo.com/#1252360/new-mac-vs-pc-ads-show-vista-as-lardass">http://gizmodo.com/#1252360/new-mac-vs-pc-ads-show-vista-as-lardass</a>)</p>	13%
<p><b>Claiming insider access</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Claiming tech bloggers are knowledgeable by breaking a tech news story known through insider sources.</li> <li>• Claiming tech bloggers have access to or relationships with tech figures.</li> </ul>	<p>EXCLUSIVE: Apple Planning Intel-Ready iBook Debut for January — November 17, 2005 — Apple is planning to release its first entry-level iBook laptops with Intel processors next January at Macworld Expo in San Francisco, highly reliable sources have confirmed to Think Secret... (<a href="http://www.thinksecret.com/news/0511intelibook.html">http://www.thinksecret.com/news/0511intelibook.html</a>)</p>	14%
<p><b>Establishing bloggers' independence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stating criticisms or challenging actions of tech companies bluntly; addressing technology firms and their executives.</li> <li>• Maintaining rights to criticize/comment on tech firms without their interference.</li> </ul>	<p>Ex-Googlers Blog Facing Legal Issues? — So, it seems Google's legal team finally took notice of Xooglers, the blog where Ex-Googlers speak relatively freely about their experiences inside the Googleplex. The blog has been rather silent lately. (<a href="http://blogscoped.com/archive/2006-01-05-n89.html">http://blogscoped.com/archive/2006-01-05-n89.html</a>)</p>	12%

<sup>†</sup>Each coded entry may have up to five codes assigned so the percentages do not add up to 100%.

Some adopted blogging practices in parallel with other activities, such as public relations services or software design. Some left positions with media or technology firms to become dedicated tech bloggers. By mid-2005, tech bloggers were being recognized as a distinct and increasingly influential voice in technology discourse (Gomes 2005). The growing recognition of tech bloggers as a new actor category arose from their distinctive contributions to Web 2.0 innovation discourse. Five themes revealed how tech bloggers enacted shared discursive practices and made identity claims as a distinctive voice on technology news and commentary through their use of new media (blogs). In the following narrative, we highlight discursive practices using italics; underlined words in a text segment indicate that there was a hyperlink in the blog post.

### **Theme 1: Jointly Producing Technology Innovation Discourse**

In their posts, tech bloggers emphasized being savvy and well informed on developments in the world of Web 2.0 technologies. Tech bloggers also explicitly took into consideration what other bloggers had written on the topics of the day to build their discourse, as this post demonstrates:

A storm in the OPML teacup — An interesting little exchange over at Scobleizer. Robert Scoble wants blogging tools to support OPML. James Robertson questions this, calling OMPL “a really crappy format”. And this sends Robert flying off the handle. (James Kew, 09/30/2005, <http://jameskew.blogspot.com/2005/09/storm-in-opml-teacup.html>)

This post implied that tech bloggers knew about certain technologies (*assuming shared knowledge*), were interested in similar topics (*assuming shared interests*), and were aware of other bloggers' opinions (*demonstrating knowledge of other bloggers' discourse*). This blogger highlighted other bloggers by name and embedded hyperlinks to their blogs (*directing attention*) while also emphasizing areas of disagreement and debate among tech bloggers (*stimulating debate*). In doing so, the tech blogger suggested he and the bloggers he mentioned were savvy technology commentators who were well-connected and up-to-date on technology topics.

Jointly producing technology innovation discourse by talking about issues other bloggers talked about in their own blogs and commenting upon each other's posts was an important aspect of tech blogging practices. In the following post, the

tech blogger reflected on blogging as a collective activity (*discussing blogging*) while also enacting the practices of *stimulating debate* and *directing attention* to other bloggers:

Blogs — it's all about the conversation...I think Stowe Boyd is onto something. In a post about what makes blogs work — i.e., what makes them vibrant and helps them grow, as opposed to stagnating or becoming echo chambers — he says that he thinks it has something to do with the ratio of posts to comments and trackbacks. (Matthew Ingram, 02/03/2006, <http://www.mathewingram.com/work/2006/02/03/blogs-its-all-about-the-conversation/>)

Heightening their claims of being active participants in these ongoing conversations tech bloggers also claimed to be “in the know” about technology developments, as this tech blogger did in this “live, from the scene” post:

Thanks to Robert Scoble (as blogged about here), I had a great (free!) steak lunch today. Even better, I was joined by some very smart company, including Michael Arrington, Lynda Weinman, and of course, Bill Gates. I'm still at the Mix06 conference between sessions so I have to make this quick (I don't know how Robert Scoble and Michael Arrington attend a conference and still blog so damn much and so damn quickly!). (Simply Albert, 03/20/2006, <http://simplyalbert.blogspot.com/2006/03/my-lunch-with-bill-gates-at-mix06.html>)

This tech blogger seemed equally impressed to be in the presence of A-list tech bloggers (Arrington, Scoble) as he was with a famous CEO (Gates). His admiration for their ability to blog extensively and rapidly during a conference emphasized the identity claims of tech bloggers as industry insiders, as well as the expectation that tech blogging was a consuming, continuous activity (*discussing blogging*). Tech bloggers often commented on the importance of constantly updating their content with new posts. Some bloggers periodically announced through their posts that they were “leaving blogging” due to the excessive strain on their time.

Developments in blog-related technologies such as blog search and user-generated tagging sites helped tech bloggers monitor each other's posts. For the group of tech bloggers we studied, the initiation of Techneme supported their monitoring of the rapid flow of technology news and commentary. In a post entitled, “Memeorandum is Changing the Web” (the web aggregator's original name “tech.memeorandum” was later simplified to Techneme) a well-known tech blogger commented on his reliance upon the aggregator:

Robert Scoble, who writes about it often, says ‘Anyway, sorry that I am fawning over it so much. It's just changed my life, that's all.’ Dave Winer writes ‘I find it's changed the way I think about blogging. Not many of these tech gadgets do that.’ If you don't know about Memeorandum yet, check out the site and read my profile...This means you can find out in near real time what is important in technology (or politics), how important it is, and who's talking about it...If you then post on the subject, you will be linked into the discussion as well...I am on this site at least 15 times a day...So Memeorandum is changing my reading behavior, but it is also changing my writing behavior...I find that I am more educated on the topics I write about, and am writing more often about things the web feels are important at the time. (Michael Arrington, 10/12/2005, <http://techcrunch.com/2005/10/12/memeorandum-is-changing-the-web/>)

This post exemplified the identity claims that tech bloggers were on top of breaking developments through constant monitoring of technology news and of each other's posts and were well-informed technology commentators (*assuming common interests, directing attention, discussing blogging*). This post also revealed that jointly producing news could be a small world endeavor dominated by well-known bloggers such as this poster (Arrington) and prominent bloggers he mentioned and linked to (Scoble, Winer).

Other tech bloggers reflected on whether the reliance on aggregators contributed to their distinctive identity or diminished it by encouraging tech bloggers merely to echo technology news at the price of producing thoughtful, insightful posts, which tech bloggers claimed as their distinctive voice. This tech blogger did so in the following post (*discussing blogging*):

The Lazysphere and the Decline of Deep Blogging: Tech bloggers (and I put myself squarely in this group), I am sorry to report that many of us have become lazy - really lazy....Rather than create new ideas or pen thoughtful essays, they simply glom on to the latest news with another “me too” blog post. Their goal is largely to land on Techneme and sometimes digg - perhaps Google in an archival/Long Tail perspective....People who used to work hard creating and spreading big ideas resorted to simply regurgitating the same old news over and over again, often with very little value add. (Steve Rubel, 01/08/2008, <http://www.micropersuasion.com/2008/01/techmeme-digg-a.html>)

In his post, “Why tech blogging is broken,” another tech blogger lamented the hidden monetization that arose from the interaction of social and technology use practices and automated search and ranking algorithms, arguing that these practices diminished tech bloggers’ claims to be independent and thoughtful critics of technology firms:

Many Tech Bloggers use Techmeme.com as a prime source for material. Because public relations firms are feeding stories to “A” list bloggers before everyone else the “A” list bloggers posts of those announcements drive incredible weight in TechMeme.... You have an “A” list site like TechCrunch that rarely writes a negative review, you then have a [sic] auxiliary base of 25–100 blogs that link to the same review as their sourced material. Then Google comes around and indexes all the sites. What you have just achieved is a #1 spot in the Google Search Results for an article on a product update or new site release. While this is not PayPerPost it is definitely “Public Relations Gaming” of the Tech Blogging community. (Geeknews, 10/20/2007, <http://www.geeknewscentral.com/2007/10/20/why-tech-blogging-is-broken/>)

Thus, despite the usefulness of aggregators to distribute blog content and to facilitate bloggers’ interactive conversations, some bloggers complained that they reduced the sharp edge of tech blogging discourse, an important aspect of bloggers’ claims of a distinctive identity.

## **Theme 2: Engaging with New Media Technologies**

As self-proclaimed technology evaluators and leading-edge users, tech bloggers were on the lookout for useful new media applications, as a constant stream of applications and enhancements for blogging developed and quickly diffused. Tech bloggers explicitly considered how new features influenced their blogging practices as they shared tips or gave advice (*discussing blogging*). By discussing new media and adopting newly developed applications into their own practices, tech bloggers thus signified the tight relationship between their identity claims as tech bloggers, their reliance on new media, and their mutual engagement in negotiating discursive practices to incorporate new features.

The following post was typical of tech bloggers’ monitoring of and experimentation with new media (*reporting technology news, claiming expertise*). This blogger described how he incorporated a new application (“coComment”) into his

practices, so as to more closely monitor “the conversation” around his own commentary:

After repeatedly crying out for a solution, I was really happy to become a beta user for coComment. Little did I know that there were actually TWO comment tracking solutions announced almost simultaneously.... Both products essentially do the same: if I leave a comment on someone’s blog, I can receive an RSS feed of all subsequent comments – the full conversation. (Zoli Erdos, 2/8/2006, <http://www.zoliblog.com/2006/02/08/cocomment-or-mycomments/>)

This post demonstrated tech bloggers’ implied claim to be leading edge technology users who were aware of the newest developments and quick to try them out. It also pointed to the opportunities that new media presented to individual bloggers, since bloggers could more easily aggregate their own postings and comments that were increasingly distributed across many sites.

How and when to include new media channels and features into their practices were openly debated. Here, the tech blogger critiqued an advocate of Friendfeed in the argumentative language that tech bloggers used at least occasionally (*demonstrating knowledge of other bloggers’ discourse, engaging in discourse directed at other bloggers, stimulating debate*):

So I started another bush fire, at least among the growing list of self important so-called A listers who would happily crucify anyone who dare question their favorite startup of the minute.... FriendFeed is a decent enough service, but it’s not the second coming of christ [sic] no matter how much Gray pitches it. (Duncan Riley, 3/15/2008, <http://www.duncanriley.com/2008/03/15/friendfeed-more-hyped-yawn/>)

Tech bloggers’ rapid adoption of new media channels to promote their own discourse also indicated potential conflicts with their collective identity claims as insightful technology commentators. In a playful but pointed critique, one A-list blogger (Arrington) commented on another prominent blogger’s (Scoble) neglect of tech blogging in favor of new media forums like FriendFeed (*discussing blogging, demonstrating knowledge of other bloggers’ discourse*):

But his blog has clearly suffered. He now posts only a few times a week, sometimes sporadically writing multiple posts in a day but often skipping 3–4 days in between. A year ago, Robert wrote multiple posts, every day. I used to read his blog daily, now

I visit once a week...we as a community lost the regularly entertaining and thoughtful posts of a great writer. Like I said, it's time for an intervention. I want Scobleizer back. (Michael Arrington, 12/22/2008, <http://techcrunch.com/2008/12/22/im-sorry-robert-but-its-time-for-a-friendfeed-intervention/>)

As is evident in the above post, some tech bloggers observed that the rapid development of new media channels might draw participants away from tech blogging per se. Another blogger similarly commented (*discussing blogging, stimulating debate*):

The blogging landscape has changed significantly. With the advent of Social Networking sites and tools providing outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, and FriendFeed, I think many bloggers are getting overwhelmed with all that is out there, and frankly, they have found other outlets to get what they were previously getting from their blog. (Jesse Stay, 7/18/2008, <http://blog.louisgray.com/2008/07/to-blog-or-not-to-blog-that-is-question.html>)

Tech bloggers knew that their commentary about new media developments would generate supportive or disparaging comments and links as they collectively and routinely reflected on how using these changing media affected their blogging practices (*discussing blogging*), hence *directing attention* and web traffic to their own blogs by *stimulating debate*. A blogger noted these effects in the practices of a well-known blogger (Calacanis):

Jason Calacanis is fed up with Facebook. (I'll skip the part where I observe *admiringly* that Jason, who is Twittering more and blogging less this summer, knows that writing a Saturday-morning Dvorak troll post will tweak Facebook cultists into lighting-up his in-coming linkometer. (Rex Blog, 07/28/2007, <http://www.rexblog.com/2007/07/28/17079>)

Thus, while tech bloggers experimented with and incorporated the use of these new media into their own practices, they also debated their influence on blogging practices generally: some advocated their use, some decried their influence in bloggers' discourse, and some switched from critic to advocate with each new channel.

### Theme 3: Cultivating Readers

Tech bloggers often promoted a sense of ongoing interchange with readers (*assuming relationship with readers, inviting*

*reader participation*), presenting themselves as colorful, entertaining pundits as well as reliable sources for insights and support on Web 2.0 technologies:

As many of you know, I'm what might be termed "fond" of the Flickr photo-sharing service. Okay, I'm obsessed with it. So imagine my delight when I stumble upon a blog entry that says you can subscribe to a Flickr RSS feed using iPhoto 6. I'm not sure you *can* imagine that degree of delight. (Jim Heid, 1/20/2006, <http://www.macilife.com/2006/01/iphoto-6-tip-subscribe-to-flickr-rss.html>)

As the above entry indicates, tech bloggers at times made explicit conjectures about readers' knowledge and interest in the blogger's opinions and the blogger himself, by stating that readers were up-to-date and informed about their prior postings, opinions, and activities (*assuming relationship with readers*). In the following example, the tech blogger assumed similarly that readers knew about his previous posts and interests (*assuming relationship with readers*) while touting his expertise about a technology firm (*claiming expertise*):

As many of you will already know, I like to investigate new Google subdomains to try and guess what they might be working on next. Having already compiled a list of Google's publicly accessible subdomains (which is no doubt still incomplete), I thought I'd see whether I could find out more about Google's *internally* accessible subdomains. (Tony Ruscoe, 9/20/2006, <http://blogoscoped.com/archive/2006-09-20-n72>)

Closeness and interchange with readers through posts represented an essential aspect of tech bloggers' identity claims *as* bloggers. This tech blogger, for instance, acknowledged readers' feedback as a way to improve the accuracy of his writing:

One of the best things about Gizmodo is that it is self-correcting. In those extremely rare instances when I get something wrong, say eight times per day, a smarter and often more foul-mouthed reader sends a tip to set the record straight. Well, starting today people can call B.S. right here on Gizmodo using comments. (Noah R., 09/23/2005, <http://gizmodo.com/#!126996/step-right-up-for-gizmodo-comments>)

Tech bloggers' explicit recognition and consideration of readers were made feasible by technical features of blogging software, such as allowing readers to react asynchronously to

a blog entry by posting comments. In the following extract, a well-known tech blogger stressed that interacting with readers (via comments) was essential to “true” blogging:

I believe the term “blog” means more than an online journal...Should the definitions of “blog” be revised to exclude journals that do not allow reader comments? Yeah, absolutely. (Michael Arrington, 12/31/2006, <http://techcrunch.com/2006/12/31/what-is-the-definition-of-a-blog/>)

Actually responding to readers’ comments could be time-consuming, however, particularly for popular bloggers who garnered many comments. In the following post, a tech blogger suggested that maintaining close interactions with readers changed when bloggers moved from unknown to well-established status (*discussing blogging, stimulating debate*):

Interactions with readers, wherever they occur, are also an important part of maintaining “presence” on the Web. No beginning blogger should have the conceit that people will just show up to read his or her blog...But at some point, bloggers seem to move into a different point in their blogging career. They no longer need the interactions with readers so much. They’ve arrived. (Hutch Carpenter, 7/22/2008, <http://blog.louisgray.com/2008/07/bloggers-interactions-with-readers.html>)

In a later comment in this post, this blogger reflected on his conversation with other readers and bloggers that had been conducted via the new media channel Friendfeed. He thus highlighted the ways in which tech bloggers exploited multiple new media channels to disseminate their discourse and their desire to reach (if not to actually interact with) as many readers as possible.

#### **Theme 4: Interrelating with Other Tech Bloggers**

Tech bloggers contributed individually to discourse on Web 2.0 technologies through their posts, but they did so with awareness of tech blogging as a putative distinctive activity within technology innovation discourse. The subtle intertwining of individual and collective identity claims in discursive practices is evident in the following post. Here, a well-known tech blogger (Scoble) *claimed* his expertise on a Web 2.0 issue while also affirming another blogger’s expertise (*assuming common interests, demonstrating knowledge of other bloggers’ discourse*):

Mike Arrington is Right, Facebook is Wrong — Mike Arrington and I had a sometimes violent disagreement on today’s Gillmor Gang. — The reason we were arguing? Because we both were arguing different things. (Robert Scoble, 05/16/2008, <http://scobleizer.com/2008/05/16/mike-arrington-is-right-facebook-is-wrong/>)

In posts such as this one, tech bloggers promoted their own standing as tech bloggers, but they also highlighted the relevance of the new actor category of tech bloggers as worthy of readers’ attention. Illustrating this point, a journalist turned tech blogger (Om Malik) reported a technology firm’s launch, but also acknowledged another blogger’s (Arrington on TechCrunch) insider knowledge of the high-tech start-up’s plans:

Flock Lands To Cheers & Jeers — TechCrunch reported this morning that Flock was launching publicly today, in about four hours or so. Apparently it was out on the filesharing networks, prompting the company to pull back the curtain and let the beta out of the bag. (Om Malik, 10/21/2005, <http://gigaom.com/2005/10/20/flock-launches-today/>)

Tech bloggers were at times critical of each other’s opinions, and the language of some posts reflected heated and highly personal debates. Moreover, to garner links tech bloggers sometimes ignited controversy by posting strong opinions or responding caustically to others’ opinions, tactics they referred to as instigating a “bitchmeme,” “linkbaiting,” or “link trolling.” In the following post, a tech blogger acknowledged these tactics even as he engaged in them (*stimulating debate, demonstrating knowledge of other bloggers’ discourse; engaging in discourse directed at other bloggers*):

It’s a Bitchmeme for sure. When Duncan Riley seemed to miss the point of FriendFeed in his TechCrunch post yesterday, as Louis Gray quite rightly pointed out, I wrote a short post about it and assumed it was over. Today, though, Duncan Riley wrote what is basically a hit piece against Louis and is dripping with arrogance. The fact that Louis’ post stayed on the top of Techmeme for the larger part of the day and had Riley’s name in the headline sure didn’t help, I’m sure. (Anonymous, 3/15/2008, <http://www.lastpodcast.net/2008/03/15/its-a-bitchmeme-for-sure/>)

This post illustrates how, even when they critiqued each other, tech bloggers were aware of the differentiated social

structure of blogging and its technical and social ramifications. Tech bloggers' linking and commenting practices (*directing attention, engaging in discourse directed at other bloggers*) constituted overt efforts to become established and recognized by other bloggers (particularly A-listers), thereby raising their individual standing among tech bloggers and, indirectly, the standing of bloggers to whom they linked. They embedded hyperlinks to other bloggers' posts in their own posts, left comments on others' blogs, and could be alerted of other bloggers' linking to their posts through trackbacks or pingbacks.

As noted in Theme 1, Techneme along with other aggregator and blog search technologies influenced blogging, technically reinforcing these practices as automated programs traversed links in order to select posts to rank highly or to repost. Aware of how blog rating and aggregation worked, tech bloggers closely monitored their own standing among other bloggers and explicitly debated whether others "gamed" Techneme to have their blog posts appear. Some admittedly adjusted their practices to appear on Techneme (and to increase traffic to their blogs) by strategically mentioning others' posts and by cross-linking to one another (as the above posts imply). One consequence of these socio-technical practices was to enhance the differentiation between A-listers and less prominent bloggers as recognized in the following post:

The "Central Pundit Theorem." All programs which do popularity data-mining of a topic tend to converge to a small pundit subset. (Seth Finkelstein, 10/28/2005, <http://sethf.com/infothought/blog/archives/000928.html>)

The influence of aggregators on the discourse of tech bloggers was a source of tension among tech bloggers. Not surprisingly, some expressed dissatisfaction with such developments, as this blogger did when commenting on Techneme (*discussing blogging, stimulating debate*):

This site is for the big boys only....If you want to appear, link an A-lister who is talking about Web 2.0 [sic] or search...conclusion: if this site represents the new Web 2.0 technologies that filter content to eliminate noise, then thee and me are nothing but static, baby. (Shelly Powers, 10/28/2005, <http://weblog.burningbird.net/2005/10/the-testosterone-meme/>)

Another tech blogger lamented that the news-breaking or insightful reporting of the tech bloggers who were "creating the news" could be taken over by highly rated blog sites that

merely "reported" it, hence effectively stealing "the buzz" of others, and arguably weakening bloggers' collective claims of distinction (*comparing bloggers role to journalists*):

In the tech blogosphere, there's a clear delineation between those who are actively creating the news (the developers, engineers, and business people), those who are reporting the news (those blogs who follow journalism standards and do actual reporting) and those who simply follow along - either by referencing other people's work, or simply duplicating it. (Louis Gray, 1/19/2008, <http://blog.louisgray.com/2008/01/mashable-uses-list-power-to-steal-b.html>)

Interestingly, this blogger created sufficient interest in his provocative post to appear on Techneme by *stimulating debate and discussing blogging*. Others (notably A-listers) defended the usefulness of aggregators such as Techneme, and the openness of the practices they purportedly inspired, by claiming that anyone, pending the quality of their posts and their understanding of the socio-technical characteristics of tech blogging, could become widely recognized. A well-known blogger did so in the following post (*discussing blogging, stimulating debate*):

TechMeme has given everyone a chance at the microphone when just ten years ago a dozen folks controlled it. Now, some folks take that chance and others don't. But to be sure, it's there for everyone to take. (Jason Calacanis, 10/12/2007, <http://calacanis.com/2007/10/12/why-techmeme-is-great-and-the-haters-suck-the-official-final/>)

To summarize, tech bloggers' attempts to position themselves as distinctive, influential members of the new actor category through their interactions drew attention to the new category but also contributed to tensions between A-listers and lesser-known bloggers.

### **Theme 5: Positioning Relative to Established Actor Categories**

Tech bloggers were competitive with each other, but they were also in competition with participants in established actor categories for standing in the discourse field. Two categories were particularly relevant to the tech bloggers we studied: technology firms and journalists. Through their enactment of discursive practices and implicit and explicit identity claims, tech bloggers claimed to be similar to, yet also different from, these categories.

For instance, although tech bloggers were often irreverent (and at times used crude language), they also often *reported technology news in a journalistic voice*. Like a journalist might do, tech bloggers (particularly A-listers; see the appendix) *claimed insider access* to technology firms and their leaders while asserting *independence* from technology companies. Unlike journalists, some bloggers touted being contributors to the industry as developers, entrepreneurs, or investors, as well as pundits. Thus, by claiming that they were similar to mainstream media journalists but also distinctly different, thanks in part to their technical expertise, freedom from editorial interference, and informal but entertaining writing style, tech bloggers attempted to borrow from journalists' legitimacy while also questioning it.

The following post illustrates some of these varied claims. The tech blogger recounted how he detected a security problem with a technology firm's (Sony) digital rights management software (*claiming expertise*). He detailed the technical risks and criticized the firm (*establishing bloggers' independence*), claiming to have garnered journalists' attention with "an impact beyond the blogosphere" (*comparing bloggers' role to journalists*):

My posting Monday on Sony's use of a rootkit as part of their Digital Rights Management (DRM) generated an outcry that's reached the mainstream media. As of this morning the story is being covered in newspapers and media sites around the world including USA Today and the BBC....But, there's more to the story, like how Sony's patch can lead to a crashed system and data loss and how Sony is still making users jump through hoops to get an uninstaller. (Mark Russinovich, 11/05/2005, <http://blogs.technet.com/markrussinovich/archive/2005/11/04/more-on-sony-dangerous-decloaking-patch-eulas-and-phoning-home.aspx>)

Claiming and maintaining distinctiveness from these established actor categories required tech bloggers to balance potentially contradictory claims and practices. Positioning tech bloggers as independent critics of tech firms but also as developers (for some) and as knowledgeable industry insiders was especially problematic. The careful blending of identity claims and discursive practices necessary was evident in the following post. Here, a tech blogger revealed his relationship with the tech firm whose software product was reviewed in the post:

Firefox 2.0 Review — Written by Alex Iskold and edited by Richard MacManus. Disclaimer: Alex's company AdaptiveBlue has a product called the

blueorganizer, which is a Firefox extension. — In this post, we take a look at what the Firefox team is going to deliver in their upcoming major release, Firefox 2.0. (Alex Iskold, 10/18/2006, [http://www.readwriteweb.com/archives/firefox\\_20\\_review.php](http://www.readwriteweb.com/archives/firefox_20_review.php))

This tech blogger borrowed the legitimating practices of journalists (e.g., disclosure and editorial oversight) to establish his independence as a technology product evaluator. At the same time, he claimed distinction from journalists (*comparing bloggers' role to journalists*) due to his special relationship to the firm as a technology developer and high tech industry insider (*claiming expertise, claiming insider access*).

Tech bloggers who became well known could forge relationships with powerful media outlets and align themselves more closely with these established actors. For instance, in May 2008, Arrington's TechCrunch developed a syndication partnership with a MSM publication, *The Washington Post*. As some tech bloggers started earning revenue, these blog site owners hired staffs of paid bloggers and even sold their sites to established Internet content distributors such as America Online (AOL). Some tech bloggers viewed such actions as a betrayal from the distinctive mission of tech blogging, questioning why a tech blogger would establish relationships that might limit his or her freedom to express whatever opinions on whatever topics the blogger chose. Here, a prominent tech blogger (Scoble) lamented what he perceived as a trend toward emulating journalists rather than maintaining the distinctive content that had characterized tech blogging (*discussing blogging, stimulating debate*):

Rewriting (or competing with) the Wall Street Journal isn't why I started blogging back in 2000. I started blogging because I wanted to share my life with you (back then I was planning conferences with programmers and I was seeing them build remarkable things). I wanted to help other people discover these new things and understand how to use them best. (Robert Scoble, 7/22/2008, <http://scobleizer.com/2008/07/22/why-tech-blogging-has-failed-you/>)

Tech bloggers had other opportunities to align with established actors and to profit from their blogs, for instance when they accepted various forms of paid advertisements from technology firms. Tech firms' willingness to "pay for posts" indicated that tech bloggers' influence and recognition was growing in the field of discourse. Yet, this type of relationship with the tech firms they commented on also challenged bloggers' identity claims of being independent critics and commentators and of maintaining relations of integrity with their readers. Tech bloggers were sensitive to this challenge. For instance, in an extended debate about Microsoft's al-



legedly paying A-list bloggers to promote an advertising campaign, the implicated tech bloggers denied such influence (*establishing bloggers' independence*). Criticisms swirled among tech bloggers and trade press journalists, who questioned whether some tech bloggers had become too economically enmeshed with tech companies to remain independent observers. Here, an A-list blogger (Winer) refuted a trade press journalist's criticism of bloggers, contending that these established actors were worse offenders and maintaining that independence was a challenge journalists and bloggers shared (*stimulating debate, comparing bloggers' role to journalists*):

Charles Cooper [of CNET News] says "the blogosphere" needs to get real about the line between church and state. My response: The tech blogosphere was invented because of the sloppy church-state line at CNet and other professional pubs. They're the last people who get to preach this particular gospel. (Dave Winer, 6/27/2007, <http://www.scripting.com/stories/2007/06/25/betweenMikeAndCharles.html>)

Others were less concerned about defending themselves against such criticisms. In this excerpt of a lengthy post commenting on the raging Microsoft "pay per post" controversy, a tech blogger argued that blogging practices and ethics were still developing (*discussing blogging, engaging in discourse directed at other bloggers, comparing bloggers role to journalists*):

The point I'm making, is that this comes with the territory and new terrain they're charting. We're still experimenting with blogs, and while they're not going to be much different than "traditional media" down the road, they are now. (Ashkan Karbasfrooshan, 06/23/2007, <http://www.watchmojo.com/web/blog/?p=1716>)

Reflections such as these about what it meant to be a tech blogger illustrated how the emergence of this new actor category was an ongoing and dynamic process of negotiating discursive practices, identity claims and new media use, as new bloggers appeared, some veteran bloggers shifted their attention to other new media channels, and others joined the ranks of tech firms or traditional media, or even transformed into media organizations.

## Discussion and Implications

Five analytical themes in our case study of tech bloggers highlighted the intermingling of discursive practices, identity claims, and new media use in the emergence of this new actor

category. Table 4 summarizes these themes. Before we consider how our interpretive analysis of this case suggests a theoretically generalizable view of emergence of new actor categories through new media (Klein and Myers 1999; Lee and Baskerville 2003), we note several limitations of this research. The empirical findings presented here were grounded in the case study of a group of tech bloggers and cannot be attributed to other new actors or settings without further study. Our reliance upon the Techmeme aggregator provided us with a selective discourse to study, not with a representative sample of all technology blogs. Moreover, we examined the discursive practices of tech bloggers, and their reactions to how others viewed them as expressed in their blogs, but we neither investigated the reception of tech bloggers' discourse by other actors nor did we study other actors' discursive practices. We also focused on the discursive practices evident in tech bloggers' main posts, rather than in readers' comments. Future research might tap into the wealth of new discursive data such as these, which bloggers produce.

Reflecting on our theoretical foundations and the empirical analyses iteratively, we identified three opposing yet co-existing tendencies within an ongoing process of emergence of tech bloggers as a new actor category: *coalescence*, *fragmentation*, and *dispersion*. Figure 1 depicts how each tendency relied on the interplay of discursive practices, identity claims, and new media use evident in the five themes detailed above. We consider each tendency, reflect on socio-technical dynamics that shaped emergence of these three tendencies, and discuss implications of this ongoing emergence for new media actors.

### **Coalescence, Fragmentation and Dispersion in Emergence**

We use the term *coalescence* to characterize the tendency for tech bloggers to enact shared discursive practices and identity claims as they used blogging technology in ways that individuals could recognize themselves and be recognized by others as members of this new actor category. Their use of shared discursive practices in their production of discourse illustrated how they negotiated "who we are" and "what we do" (Navis and Glynn 2010) as well as "how we act as" tech bloggers. *Coalescence* does not imply that discursive practices and identity claims are uniform or ubiquitous but does suggest a degree of optimal distinctiveness (Clegg et al. 2007; Gioia et al. 2010). That is, the identity of "tech blogger" was a discursive resource (Clarke et al. 2009) in bloggers' interactions; tech bloggers understood generally what it meant to *act like* and to *act as* a tech blogger relative to other actor categories, but individuals could position their identity some-

Table 4. Summary of Themes in Emergence of Tech Bloggers

Theme Name	Summary of key findings
Theme 1: Jointly producing technology innovation discourse	Tech bloggers claimed to be leading edge commentators on Web 2.0 developments as they built their discourse, for example, by assuming shared knowledge about these technologies and using technical features such as blog posts, hyperlinks, trackbacks, pingbacks, RSS feeds and blog aggregators to monitor and respond to each other.
Theme 2: Engaging with new media technologies	Tech bloggers' claims to be leading edge technology users were exemplified in their rapid adoption of new media technologies such as Twitter, FriendFeed and CoComment, but the diversity of new media stimulated debates among bloggers about discursive practices and identity claims.
Theme 3: Cultivating readers	Tech bloggers claimed that ongoing interchange with readers exemplified blogging; they used commenting and linking features embedded in content management software to technically enact reader relationships, as well as the multitude of new media that provided alternative channels to readers.
Theme 4: Interrelating with other tech bloggers	Tech bloggers read and responded to each other's posts and used Techmeme and other aggregators to closely monitor each other and their own standing. The social and technical attention that some bloggers received contributed to distinctions in the claims and practices of A-list and lesser-known bloggers.
Theme 5: Positioning relative to established actor categories	Tech bloggers claimed to be similar to, yet also different from, established actor categories such as journalists and technology firm spokespersons, but the potential to monetize blogs through advertisements, targeted links, or paid-for postings diminished bloggers' claims to be critical and independent pundits.

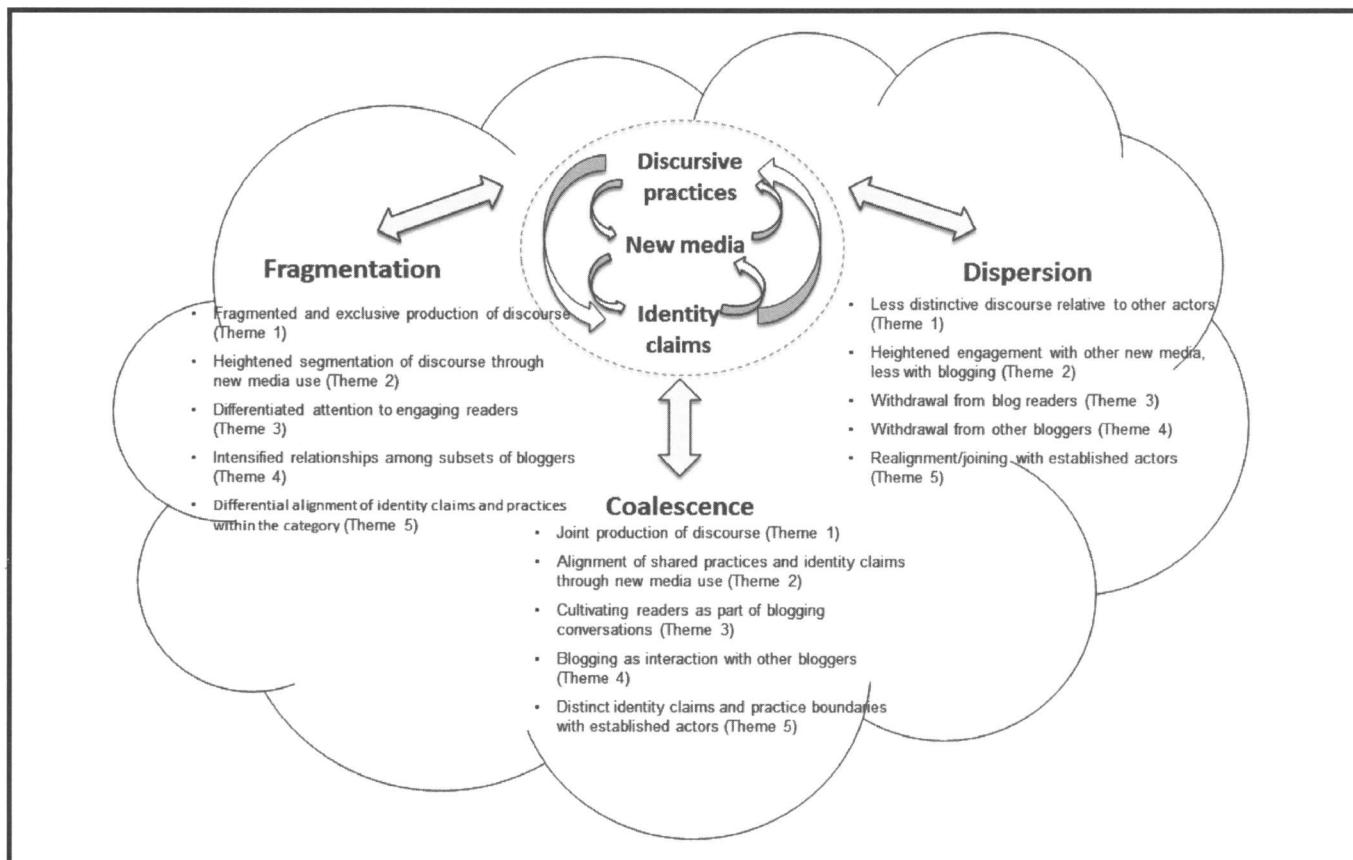


Figure 1. Tendencies in the Emergence of Tech Bloggers as a New Actor Category

what differently within the category (Lamb and Kling 2003). Some, for example, claimed expertise as technology developers while others did so primarily as leading-edge users.

The tendency toward coalescence was evident in tech bloggers' joint production of their discourse as they reflected on their own and others' blogging practices and on how new media developments influenced their nascent discursive practices (Theme 1). Engaging actively with new media to interrelate with each other facilitated their ongoing alignment of shared practices and strengthened their identity claims as leading edge and knowledgeable commentators (Theme 2). Cultivating readers (Theme 3) and interacting with other bloggers (Theme 4) were intrinsic to coalescence, as these clusters of discursive practices and identity claims helped define "tech bloggers" as a distinctive new actor category relative to other actor categories. Tech bloggers positioned themselves relative to other actor categories in ways that suggested both novelty and conformity (Theme 5). They could not rely solely on their use of new media for this purpose, however, as blogging had diffused widely among journalists, tech firm employees, and other established actors. It was through the interplay of discursive practices and identity claims as well as new media use that tech bloggers could claim to be a distinctive new actor while also maintaining a degree of similarity so as to be legitimate (Navis and Glynn 2011).

We use the term *fragmentation* to characterize the tendency of this new actor category to break into subgroups in which participants positioned themselves differently relative to other tech bloggers through their identity claims and discursive practices. Fragmentation weakens claims of optimal distinctiveness of a new actor category because the new actor category threatens to break into subcategories, each claiming its own distinctiveness. The distinction that tech bloggers themselves drew between well-known, highly popular bloggers and lesser-known ones illustrated fragmentation in this case. The term "A-lister" provided a discursive resource, which some bloggers used pejoratively, others admiringly. A-list bloggers did share discursive practices and identity claims with other independent tech bloggers, but how they enacted these practices illustrated the tendency toward fragmentation. For instance, bloggers who most often appeared on the Techmeme aggregator more frequently *reported technology news in a journalistic voice* and *claimed insider access*, and were less likely to *assume relationships with readers* in their posts than were less-prominent independent bloggers. A-list bloggers stimulated the visibility of the new actor category within the field of discourse by directing attention to themselves and other prominent bloggers. However, they also projected an identity built on their own growing personal celebrity, which threatened to overshadow the category as a whole and to exclude less prominent tech bloggers.

Each theme provided evidence of fragmentation as well as coalescence. A-listers contributed to the joint production of tech blogging discourse (Theme 1), but they did so by creating a more exclusive, and thus fragmented, discourse. For instance, A-listers were less likely to *assume shared knowledge* but more likely to *display knowledge of other bloggers' discourse*, particularly that of other A-listers, and to interact with them through their posts (Theme 4). Readers were important to all bloggers, but non-A-listers were more explicit about *assuming relationships with readers* in their posts than A-listers (Theme 3). The social attention directed at A-listers' posts was manifested technically through the links they received, which gave these posts and their authors a more prominent position on aggregators like Techmeme and in tech bloggers' discourse generally (Theme 2). A-listers more frequently *reported technology news in a journalistic voice* and *claimed insider access*, and thus positioned themselves within the tech blogger category somewhat closer to established actors than to non-A-listers (Theme 5).

We use the term *dispersion* to characterize the tendency for the identity claims and discursive practices of the new actor category to become less distinctive within the field and for boundaries that define the new actor category to become blurred. As we saw with fragmentation, the tendency toward dispersion challenged the optimal distinctiveness of this new actor category to the degree that "tech blogger" became a less distinctive identity within the field. Tech bloggers themselves recognized dispersion in their ranks. Some complained that rebroadcasting news and ideas in their posts increased the "echo chamber" effect in blogging and reduced the variety of conversational interchanges and opinions that tech bloggers claimed as a distinctive and valuable voice in technology innovation discourse. Brewer (1991) noted that a social category that is overly open and diffuse and thus not optimally distinctive loses its identity and potentially its adherents. There was some evidence of this among tech bloggers, as some (even A-listers) spent less time blogging or invested their time instead in other pursuits or other media channels.

In addition to coalescence and fragmentation, each theme highlighted the tendency toward dispersion. Tech bloggers who accentuated their similarity with established actors through their discursive practices enhanced the legitimacy of their identity claims, rather than their own distinctiveness (and thus the distinctiveness of the new actor category) within the field (Theme 5). The socio-technical dynamics of technologies such as the Techmeme aggregator supported these mimetic practices, as some bloggers attempted to game the aggregator to gain recognition in ways that contributed to the dispersion of tech bloggers' voice among the many pundits, journalists, and spokespersons distributing their discourse through new media channels (Theme 1). Tech bloggers' engagement with a multiplicity of new media contributed as

well to the tendency toward dispersion (Theme 2). Each new media channel entailed different technical features, which in turn unsettled bloggers' shared discursive practices. As tech bloggers adopted an increasing number of new media channels, some spent less time writing and posting blogs, and their collective discourse was becoming scattered across these multiple channels (Theme 1) as were their interactions with their readers (Theme 3). Dispersion was also evident as some tech bloggers periodically announced their fatigue with blogging and intentions to quit. In doing so, they threatened to withdraw from the jointly produced discourse (Theme 1) and from interactions through blogging with other bloggers (Theme 4).

### **Implications for Theory**

In this paper, we developed a theoretically informed and analytically induced perspective on the emergence of a new actor category through new media as an ongoing, dynamic process in which the interplay of discursive practices, identity claims, and new media use contributes to three opposing, yet coexisting, tendencies toward coalescence, fragmentation, and dispersion. Our perspective draws from organizational theory the importance of optimal distinctiveness (Clegg et al. 2007; Gioia et al. 2010) and the delicate balance of novelty and conformity (Navis and Glynn 2010) in the identity formation of a new actor category. We build as well on IS theory that posits the interplay of identity claims and technology use (Lamb and Kling 2003) and that demonstrates how new technologies can be identity-enhancing or identity-challenging for established actors (Barrett and Walsham 1999; Korica and Molloy 2010; Lamb and Davidson 2005).

Our study departs from these earlier works that view emergence as a progression toward an end-state by highlighting opposing tendencies that coexist and that may engender ongoing fluidity in identity and practices. In the identity formation of a new media actor category, the tight coupling of discursive practices, identity claims, and technology use implies that each element will change in response to changes in other elements. Untangling the interplay of these elements helps clarify our theoretical perspective on emergence.

First, we found that new media use contributed paradoxically to each tendency in emergence by influencing discursive practices and identity claims. The resulting tension among tendencies limited the new actor category's progression toward an end state and sustained the fluidity and variability of the category. Tech bloggers experienced the rapid developments in Web 2.0 technologies, which provided a constant source of change in their technology use. Discursive practices are intricately tied to the technical features of the new media, and

different new media are likely to result in different discursive practices (Boyd et al. 2010; Schmidt 2007). Tech bloggers readily experimented with multiple new media technologies that became available to them, unsettling some discursive practices. New media also provided additional opportunities for bloggers to create and disseminate their own discourse to readers. The multiplicity of new media channels distracted some tech bloggers away from "traditional blogging" and scattered their discourse across these channels, heightening the tendency towards dispersion. As discussed above, the socio-technical dynamics of new media technologies such as web aggregators contributed to fragmentation as well, by promoting attention to and distinction of A-list bloggers' discourses over other bloggers. Yet, the interactive aspects of new media were nonetheless conducive to coalescence, because they facilitated tech bloggers' "orientation to each other" (Barnes 2001, p. 32) to negotiate shared practices.

New media contributed to fluidity in the identity of the new actor category beyond their identity enhancing or challenging effects for established actors. Tech bloggers experienced new media as *enabling a new (category) identity*. Without the use of new media, there would have been no new category of tech bloggers. As new actors, tech bloggers claimed optimal distinctiveness as they claimed to be leading-edge innovation adopters as well as privileged insiders, developers or investors (with regard to technology firms), and objective, independent critics (like journalists), challenging distinctions maintained by established actors. New media had an *identity-unsettling* influence on this new actor category as well. Encountering the ongoing stream of new media developments led tech bloggers to repeatedly reflect upon and reinvent anew their blogging "craft" (Sennett 2008, p. X) in relation to these new media, for example, with the "pay to post" debate. Tension between these identity-enabling and identity-unsettling influences was evident in such recurring debates about what blogging entailed, what a blogger was supposed to be or do. Thus, new media enabled ever-new identity claims and new practices to be crafted but also unsettled tentatively established identity claims and practices.

Second, our analyses highlighted the complex, socio-technical roles played by so-called A-listers in the emergence of this new actor category. It has been theorized that prominent participants in a new actor category can serve as proxies for the identity of the new category as it forms (Navis and Glynn 2010, 2011). Yet, the very recognition of prominent members that supports the optimal distinctiveness of the new actor category—and hence its coalescence—can also contribute to its fragmentation and dispersion. In our case, A-listers did contribute to the coalescence of tech bloggers as a new actor in technology discourse, as these distinctive members brought recognition that could enhance all category members' claims

of distinctiveness and legitimacy. A-listers, however, also made individual identity claims that were less associated with the new actor category per se, which contributed to fragmentation. A-listers were also well positioned to forge alliances with established actor categories or to cease blogging for other endeavors. Because they were prominent participants in the new actor category, such movements contributed to dispersion more than the actions of less prominent bloggers might have.

An important implication for new media actors is that these complex roles and influences depended in large part on the socio-technical features of new media and their enactment by tech bloggers. Some A-listers brought prestige and reputation from previous roles to blogging but their influence within the tech blogger category nonetheless had to be reenacted by themselves and other bloggers. Features such as linking and commenting were social actions that created technical markers, which in turn influenced the technical actions of blog aggregators and rating sites to “headline” more often A-listers’ contributions. As A-listers interacted frequently among themselves, and as other bloggers linked to their posts in their attempts to be recognized by them (and by aggregators), both tech bloggers and aggregator technologies amplified the gap between A-listers and non-A-listers. Those who achieved a degree of celebrity (MacDougall 2005) gained more influence within the new actor category as well as more options to leave the category for new opportunities. Thus they influenced emergence of the new category in these multiple ways.

For some new actors, practices and identity claims may be less entangled with technology use and the category less subject to the turbulence of technological change (see Clegg et al. 2009; Gioia et al. 2010). Because new media of the Internet are digital innovations, the long-term implications of opposing tendencies for new actor categories relying on new media are that the category might remain emergent and that identity might stay “fluid” or “liquid” (Bauman 2000), that is, might not stabilize around key self-referential characteristics and shared discursive practices. The fluidity in identity dynamics arises in large part from the constant flow of digital innovations (Yoo et al. 2010) and their rapid cycles of adoption and abandonment. This helps explain why participants in a new actor category might find that their own identity and that of the category do not solidify, as the socio-technical underpinnings of discursive practices and identity claims are constantly reshuffled. Despite (and partly thanks to) such innovation-fueled ongoing fluidity, select new actors might become increasingly influential in the field of discourse. Some actors can rely upon changing new media platforms to reinforce their growing institutional recognition, at times to the detriment of the recognition of the category as a whole,

hence feeding tensions between individual and collective practices and identities. For new actors relying on new media, we suggest that fragmentation and dispersion will be the companions of coalescence in the emergence of a new category and the formation of its identity.

### **Implications for Practice**

Understanding how new actor categories emerge through new media has practical implications for the consumers and producers of these technology innovation discourses. Our research on tech bloggers demonstrated that their discourses can be evaluated usefully in terms of the discursive practices and identity claims that shape bloggers’ contributions. Readers may better appreciate why tech bloggers promote or critique certain technology innovations by examining posts within the broader context of the jointly produced discourse. Blog aggregators help make the community more visible and allow readers to trace relationships of ideas and of bloggers. Confronted with a plethora of sources on technology innovation, blog audiences (e.g., casual readers, other bloggers, technology investors) might look beyond obvious issues of conflicts of financial interests to assess how and why some blog postings come to be highlighted within a discourse as a result of bloggers’ practices and the socio-technical operation of aggregators and user ratings, rather than the inherent quality or insights of the posts. Moreover, attending to tech bloggers’ own debates about their practices and identity claims may help readers, whether potential technology investors, competitors, or simply technology users, to assess the value of the discourse.

For those who produce and broadcast their discourse through new media channels, a straightforward implication is that adopting and using new media alone is not sufficient to become established within a new actor category; they must also recognize and adopt shared practices and determine what aspects of the category identity they can claim. A more subtle and equivocal implication is that the ongoing stream of digital innovations may maintain the fluidity of the new actor category; practices and claims that are prevalent at one point in time are likely to shift continually. Fluidity in the category identity and practices may keep the category open for new but late arriving participants. However, all participants will face ongoing disruptions and the need for innovation in their own practices. Indeed, for tech bloggers, monitoring, experimentation, and adoption of newly developed media channels were central to their claims of optimal distinctiveness in technology innovation discourse.

Understanding how tendencies toward coalescence, fragmentation, and dispersion influence the emergence of a new

actor category may highlight opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship. The Techmeme aggregator drew together tech bloggers' postings, contributing to the coalescence of this new actor category. It also had the unintended effect of contributing to the fragmentation and dispersion of tech bloggers. Other new media developments (e.g., micro-blogging platforms) had similar contradictory effects, which in turn stimulated the development of other new tools and applications to regroup discourses. Many new actor categories will undoubtedly develop with the shift to mobile platforms. Given the generative capacity of digital innovation (Yoo et al. 2010), the emergence of these new actors is likely to entail tensions between oppositional tendencies and to engender entrepreneurial opportunities to benefit from those tensions with new tools.

## Conclusions

New media provide many opportunities for individuals and organizations to participate in public and private discourses by lowering technological barriers to access and by facilitating the dissemination of content. The widespread diffusion of these technologies has disrupted many fields. In this research, we drew attention to an important potential source of disruption: the emergence of new actor categories. Our study contributes a theoretical perspective of how the emergence of new actors through new media occurs. We argued that emergence entails new actors negotiating shared discursive practices through which they enact claims of an optimally distinctive identity as they use new media to create and distribute their discourse. Our empirical study demonstrates how these dynamics contribute to opposing yet coexisting tendencies toward coalescence, fragmentation, and dispersion in emergence. We theorized how the tensions engendered by these tendencies and the identity-enabling and identity-unsettling implications of ongoing innovations in new media maintain the new actor category in an ongoing process of emergence and hence limit its progression toward an end state of being established.

Our case study is situated in the high tech industry. Although there are well-established and powerful actors (such as large IT vendor firms or venture capitalists), the high technology industry is notable for its volatility and opportunities for new actors. The newness of the tech blogger category and its positioning relative to established actors did not constitute a major drawback in this industry. Tech bloggers could associate the novelty of the new actor category with their claims of being attuned to the ever-changing world of technology innovation. In some fields and industries, established actors such as professionals and their associations tend to dominate

field-level discourse, discursive practices, and identity claims (Korica and Molloy 2010; Lok 2010; Markus et al. 2006; Pratt et al. 2006; Suddaby and Greenwood 2005). These established actors are strongly positioned in terms of institutional legitimacy and they can adopt new media technologies. Understanding whether new actor categories might emerge, claim optimal distinctiveness, and gain influence through new media in the discourses of highly professionalized fields such as education and healthcare will thus require additional study.

Successfully incorporating new media can, however, prove difficult and even destructive for established actors, as has happened for some MSM organizations (Mitchelstein and Boczkowski 2009). Moreover, new actors may bring different capabilities to a field, and they may present novel combinations of roles and identities (Scott et al. 2000). Future research that examines how new actor categories influence the practices and identity claims of established actors in various fields and that investigates field-level change and the dynamics that arise between new actors and established actors will thus be valuable.

The influence of A-list bloggers in our study suggests that the participation of individuals who bring social capital from other fields to the new actor category may be critical to the trajectory of emergence. Many of the A-list bloggers in the group we studied migrated to tech blogging from influential positions in established actor categories (e.g., former technology firm employees, journalists, and technology publishers). Whether and how individuals without preexisting social capital might gain prominence within the A-list of a new actor category is thus an open empirical as well as theoretical question.

Finally, our study focused on the agency of tech bloggers as they employed or responded to developments with new media, thus influencing the tendencies of emergence in this setting. The persistent influence of technological agents such as the Techmeme aggregator on discursive practices, new media use, and identity claims, was particularly notable. Further examination of the agency of technological agents (Latour 2005) is theoretically promising. Along with ongoing innovations, intricate strategic negotiations between human and technological actors may not only affect discursive practices and identity claims of human categories but also the technological actor categories themselves.

## Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the senior editor, Suprateek Sarker, the associate editor, and the three reviewers for their constructive suggestions on previous versions of the manuscript.

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