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## **BLOGS AS TOOLS FOR IMPROVING YOUNG PEOPLE'S ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS AND SELF-EMPLOYMENT – CASE STUDY OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL POLISH FASHION BLOGGERS**

*The purpose of this article is to present blogs as an effective tool for young people's development of entrepreneurial skills and attitudes. To reach this aim current literature and studies about blogging were investigated and a research was conducted. The scope of the study was to examine Polish most successful fashion blogs by collecting data from their authors in a questionnaire. Findings present blogging as a possible method of self-employment especially dedicated for young people.*

### **1. Introduction**

Nowadays society is more and more organized around the internet. This online, new social morphology significantly changes industry, economy, society and almost every aspect of daily life [1]. Thanks to the internet, a radical change in the social space and social context emerges and influences communities as well as individuals [2]. European Commission perceives the internet as a crucial factor or innovation, knowledge dissemination and distribution of goods and services as well as preventing isolation of rural areas [3]. What is more, European Commission also emphasises the fact that the internet has rapidly changed people's habits [4].

The role of ICT (Information and communication technologies) and the internet in development of entrepreneurial skills and attitudes seems to be crucial. Today ICT world market is estimated for 2 trillion euro [1]. One of the European Commission priorities – smart growth – depends on education, research and development as well as digital society. That is why among leading initiatives one can find the creation of a digital homogenous market based on fast and ultra-fast internet and interoperable applications [3]. Due to European Commission ICT is revolutionising the development and distribution of information these days, giving an exceptional chance to better create and market European content [3] and that is why it is crucial to support digital society, the internet and digital inclusion. Finally, the European Commission's effort to ensure that everybody can contribute to and benefit from the digital economy as well as the society. This is achieved through some of the activities including: accessible ICT, assistive technologies, empowering skills and digital skills along with the rising of the participation rate of disadvantaged people in public, social and economic activities through social inclusion projects. The European Commission's actions on the whole addresses those with physical and cognitive disabilities, youth and the NEETs<sup>1</sup>, the economically inactive, immigrants and the elderly [5].

With 23% of young people currently jobless (according to Eurostat), self-employment, especially in digital forms, may be perceived as a desirable solution. The EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility claims that self-employment can deliver the required flexibility to the labour market and be influential to create jobs and develop skills [6].

Self-employment refers to individuals who work for profit or fees in their own business, profession, trade or operate a farm [7] and its digital form requires performing a job mainly in the cyberspace. Considering digital self-employment, technology can be perceived from three points of view: individual person perspective (refers to the essential attitude), an information society perspective (concentrates on the access to data) and a business organisational perspective (considers the necessity and chance to organize business processes and apply proper leadership styles). ICT supports an individual to efficiently manage all three perspectives to become self-employed [8].

To sum up, ICT – especially the internet – can improve personal entrepreneurial skills and attitudes, prevent social exclusion and increase self-employment. One of the possible methods of digital self-employment is blogging. Blogs have recently become extremely popular and their number is currently on the increase. Establishing that kind of business activity doesn't require huge funding or professional, expert ICT skills that is why it spreads mainly among young people.

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<sup>1</sup> Not in Employment, nor in Education or Training.

The purpose of this article is to present blogs as an effective tool for young people development of entrepreneurial skills and attitudes. To reach this goal authors of this paper have conducted a study among most popular Polish fashion bloggers to examine main features of their achievement and popularity. The paper is structured as follows. Section 2, there is a social interaction and blogs described also a review of the literature on the study. Then Section 3 presents the study methodology. Data analysis and results are described in Section 4. The last section presents the discussion, implications, limitations and conclusions.

## **2. Blogs and bloggers – literature and studies review**

Nowadays, social interaction are becoming increasingly present in cyberspace [9]. People bring their daily activities online, substituting face-to-face communication with virtual one and exchanging real social interactions for online acquaintances. Online access to information is ubiquitous, unlimited and easier than ever, however burdened with almost no control mechanisms on its' quality as the internet contains the best and the worst written products of humanity [10]. On one hand, the internet is a huge opportunity for societies and individuals. It can improve quality of everyday life, support personal development as well as self-employment. On the other hand, it brings numerous threats and dangers like cybercrimes, cyberbullying and hostile behaviours.

The beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century brought the users' participation in online activities greater than before. Due to the fact that social media allow two-way real time communication and publishing content with ease regardless of possessed ICT skills, the internet nowadays is called read-write [11]. Subsequently, every user can publish and comment reaching broad audience. This is how popularity of blogs was born. Socializing online may be incredibly beneficial for an individual as it was proven to be positively correlated with physical and mental health, happiness, self-esteem, earnings and business performance [12]. Less than twenty years ago few researches reported concerns about parallel between the internet usage and distraction from social interactions in real life as well as impoverishment of human relations [13] [14] This situation has changed after spread of social media when it was proven that they can positively influence community life and social capital [9] [15] [16] [17].

Eurobarometer from 2016 presents that young people are especially keen on digital culture and social media [18]. That is why they can be perceived as target group for self-employment as bloggers. The internet constantly burst with its unique personality and creativity [19] what can be highly involving for youth. On the internet, individuals are able to express their personal mood freely, at any time, writing about experiences, subjective and objective opinions and reviews [20]. This is what blog is all about. Nowadays bloggers who are content creators,

are recognized as digital influencers who are proficient at connecting with users through social media [21]. To increase user interaction and involvement bloggers use storytelling describing parts of their life [22]. It is also proven that blog readers find blogs more credible than the mainstream media, which present their potential influence on customer, individual and society [23]. So, from the advent of blogs in the 1990s, they linger a pioneering and durable social and technical innovation [24].

Blogs are websites using reverse chronological posts and personal, diary-like characteristics [25] and allow storing information in archives with easiness of dispersing it through online communities [26]. In other words, blogs are tools enabling to communicate thoughts and opinions to the wider public [24]. Among blogs' success key factors two can be mentioned: quality of representing a personal diary and independence from the official industry tendencies [27]. Blogs are created by people called bloggers and the blogging community is called blogosphere [28]. Numerous types of blogs can be distinguished, i.e.: general information, media/journalism, war, military, political, corporate, personal, entertainment and health care [29] [30] [31] [32]. Fashion blogs that are the subject of this paper are put in category of personal ones.

There are considerable number of studies of very diversified nature considering blogs, i.e.:

- blogs credibility [33],
- debate if blogs may or shouldn't be perceived as a journalism [28] [32] [34] [35] [36] [37],
- motivation for blogging [25] [38] [39] [40] [41] [42],
- sponsored blog posts [43],
- customer engagement [44],
- word-of-mouth marketing [45] [46] [47] [48],
- blogs design themes [49],
- brand creation and trustworthiness [44],
- increasing the level of interaction with reader [50],
- methods of self-expression [51],
- understanding the psychological characteristics of popular bloggers [52] [53] [54],
- blogs as a tool for supporting learning process [55].

Fashion blogs are also an issue of several studies. Rocamora [56] emphasized the fact that they have become key players in the field of fashion and focused in her research on the idea of gender as well as representation of femininity on these sites. Some researchers try to understand the nature of blogs and their phenomenon, including works of Molina [57], Kretz [58] along with Hansen-Hansen and Engholm [59]. Word of mouth marketing on fashion blogs is a sub-

ject of studies conducted by i.e.: Kulmala and her team [60] as well as Hong and her colleagues [61], while Halvorsen and her group investigated fashion blogs as marketing tools to influence consumer behaviour [62]. Bunina concentrated on methods of communication used by fashion bloggers [63], Camiciottoli described a corpus-assisted analysis of creative compounds in fashion blogging [64], Stankeviciute analysed relation between blogs and luxury fashion brands [65]. Other studies included i.e. blogging motivation and social capital on attitude [66] and street style blogs [67].

The role of street style in fashion is constantly growing and fashion bloggers, who seem to be its representatives, are early adapters of emerging trends which they accommodate to their own style [27]. With high level of involvement in social media and blogs, fashion bloggers may become quite influential in fashion industry and become opinion leaders [68]. Some bloggers have become famous, true celebrities running rather a blog-based company than writing a personal diary. This is a part of a phenomenon called 'the democratization of fashion' [69].

### **3. Research methodology**

The study tended toward examining Polish most successful fashion blogs by collecting data from their authors in questionnaire. First, the authors have found several rankings of top Polish fashion bloggers and used them for preparation of their own list. It consisted of bloggers who were the most often present in all gathered rankings. 10 bloggers were included in the final ranking.

Then a questionnaire was prepared. It comprised of questions about technical and social aspects of running a blog. The research tool was a questionnaire with the high level of standardization. Standardization means that all respondents were asked the same questions in the same order. Questions were predominantly closed ones, in which respondent had to select answers from a list of options prepared by the investigators. In the case of open questions respondent could answer without any guidance from the authors. Considering the method of filling questionnaires generally two basic techniques in quantitative researches may be distinguished: questionnaire, which is filled independently by the respondent, interview questionnaire, in which questions are asked and written down by the interviewer. Due to online nature of conducted study, authors decided to use the first method and send questionnaires to bloggers that responded on their own. This method is called CAWI – Computer Assisted Web Interviewing and use an electronic questionnaire send to bloggers by email.

Only invited bloggers – recognized as the most successful Polish fashion bloggers – were able to fill in the questionnaire. Four out of 10 requested bloggers went in for research, so response rate amounted to 40%.

## 4. Results

The questions were concentrated on finding the necessary blogs' and authors' characteristics. We asked participants what in their opinion contributed to achieving success. All the respondents selected the *subject area*. In the various rankings of the most popular blogs in the year 2016, cooking related positions are the unquestioned winner, however fashion blogs are among the leaders equally with lifestyle and technology subject matter. The majority of the respondents claimed that the *quality* of presented materials is important. Half of the respondents chose *originality*. Surprisingly name of the blog, in the bloggers' opinion does not play any role in achieving success. As far as the creators characteristics is concerned, two major qualities are resilience and creativity (selected by 100% of respondents). 75 percent of the respondents chose *communication skills* and *curiosity*. *Creativity* was selected by 100% of surveyed, as one of the most important qualities of the successful blogger. This personality trait is being reflected in the most chosen source of inspiration. All the respondents claim, they personally invent most of the submitted content. The quarter of the interviewee draw the inspiration from the surrounding, one quarter select fashion magazines as their source of the inspiration.

Primary motivation of taking up blogging was in 75 percent of respondents realizing of their passion. Secondly, social factors were chosen (the need of making contacts or sharing knowledge). None of the respondents chose economic reason or popularity, however 75% of the participants admitted to gaining financial profit from the blog. For 50% of respondents, blog is their only source of income. 75% of the respondents selected blogs as their major source of income. That means that for each respondent who admitted gaining profit from their blog, the blog is the major source of income. The rest of the respondents selected regular work as the main source of their income, the percentage correspondents with the amount of respondents that deny gaining any profit from their blog. No other source of income was chosen.

The survey showed that success requires years of practice and hard work. 75 percent of respondents have been blogging more than 5 years. Most of the respondents claim, that it took them from 6 months, up to one year to start making first profit. However, in one third of cases even more time was needed. There is no doubt that blogging requires *perseverance*. We elicited the information, how often does the successful bloggers update new posts to their sites. All responses confirmed that the articles should be updated with regularity. Nevertheless, the posts should not be updated with excessive frequency. None of the respondents update new information every day. Half of the questioned do updates several times a week and half of the respondents do updates several times a month. No longer interval or irregular update answers were chosen.

Running a blog is a time consuming occupation and require a lot of engagement. The authors concentrate on creating one, maximum two blogs. None of the respondents admitted having more than 3 blogs. We also investigated the average time the respondents devote weekly to create their blog. 25% of questioned selected 1 hour a week, however the majority (75%) admit spending on the blog more than 8 hours during the week. Successful blogging can be compared to successfully running a company. We were interested, what number of the crew is optimal to achieve success. It turned out that blogs are created by 1 to 4 persons. None of the respondents selected more. Half of the respondents admitted cooperating with 2-3 other people, one fourth cooperates with one person and one fourth is creating a blog alone.

We are aware of the fact that commercial is an important factor to achieve success in any industry. Nowadays, presence in social media has the important role in the advertisement. We collected information what kind of social media are preferable among polish bloggers. Facebook is an unquestioned winner, chosen by 100% of respondents. Second place with 75% of responses has Instagram. Twitter, Pinterest and Snapchat were equally selected by 25% of questioned. Others like Google+ or LinkedIn do not play any role in polish fashion blogging society. Negative opinions and hates are of daily occurrence in all kinds of social media on the internet. That is why in our opinion coping with negative comments is an important ability, that blog authors should have. In our questionnaire we investigated how the bloggers respond to negative opinions. Most of the respondents either respond them kindly or ignore them. The half of the respondents chose ironic response. None of the respondents admitted to erase negative opinions or to respond aggressively.

There are different possible sources of earning money on blog. We wanted to know which sources are the most popular and the most effective in Poland. As main sources of profit sponsored materials and product placement were chosen. It indicates that among fashion manufacturers blogosphere is considered as an important opinion – forming media, and they willingly share their products with blog creators in exchange for some financial benefits. Including sponsored materials creates potential risk of insincere opinions, the blogger should keep balance between honesty with the readers and the satisfaction of the manufactures. On the other hand, all bloggers that make profit honestly inform their readers about cooperation with the companies. None of the participants admitted gaining money on included advertisements (f.i. google ads). The possible reason could be that adding ads to the page could lead to deterioration in the quality of presented materials by adding some informational chaos and elements that disturb viewers' attention.

Part of our questionnaire concentrates on the role of computer graphic. Graphic is an important element of web page giving it an individual form and making the page recognizable among others. In fashion blogs the role of graphic

is even more important. Good quality, professional graphic content may contribute to the blog's success. The most popular graphic medium present on fashion blogs is photography, selected by 100% of participants. Video Blogs are also becoming more and more popular, one third of questioned bloggers admitted to including video content. One third of participants use infographics. Photography is ubiquitous in fashion blogs. Photographs visualise bloggers ideas and stylisations, are an important comment to the articles and promote materials of cooperating companies. Nevertheless, only 25% of participants collaborate with a professional photographer. Most of the bloggers (75%) make pictures on their own, a quarter of surveyed take pictures with a help of a friend. 75% of surveyed retouch photos before inserting them on the page. However, none of the respondents use regular professional help in creating graphical content, that indicates on possessing necessary computer graphic skills. Graphic layout of the page is also an important factor. The participants are fully aware that the page appearance influence the time spent on the page through attracting readers' attention. The layout also affects the readability of the content. 75% of the respondents collaborated with the professional graphic designer and IT specialists to create the page layout. One quarter of participants admitted to having the required skills and competences. The page layout is changed regularly by all participants. Most of bloggers refresh the appearance once in 2-3 years, one quarter of the surveyed change the layout once a year. We also collected the information about the platform used to create blogs. Preferred technologies are WordPress and Blogger, both selected by 50% of surveyed. No other technology was chosen.

The blogging world in the field of fashion is undoubtedly dominated by woman. However, 25% of respondents turned out to be male, which is a surprisingly big fraction. Men not only are interested in fashion topics, but can also achieve significant success in this area. Blogging is an activity taken up generally by young people. It gives adolescents an opportunity to earn money and gain some experience in the industry, one quarter of the respondents is under 18 years old. However, the major of the surveyed successful bloggers are between 18-26 years old. One quarter of the respondents are between 27-35 years old. None of the respondents is older. Blogging is taken up by educated people. Only one quarter of surveyed have finished merely the basic education. The same percent is under 18 years old, so their relatively low education level is probably the result of their young age. The rest graduated college with the bachelor degree (25% of respondents) or master degree (50% of respondents). The half of the surveyed live in the village. one quarter of the respondents are the inhabitants of cities with a population under 100 000, one quarter of the respondents live in the cities with the population under 500 000 citizens. The bigger city, over 500 000 of population was not chosen at all. The high percentage of village habitants proves that blogs create equal possibilities for both cities and village inhabitants.



The questions and collected results are presented below. To increase its legibility, all responses that weren't chosen by respondents are omitted.

Table 1. Questions and collected results

Question	Percent of respondents
<b>Q1) How long have you been blogging?</b>	
Longer than 5 years	75%
0-1	25%
2-3	0%
4-5	0%
<b>Q2) How many blogs do you own?</b>	
1	75%
2-3	25%
4-5	0%
More than 5	0%
<b>Q3) Why did you start blogging? (Select all matching answers)</b>	
To realize my passion	75%
To share my knowledge	25%
To make contact	25%
To have fun	25%
<b>Q4) According to you, what contributed the most to the success of your blog. (Select all matching answers)</b>	
Subject area	100%

Quality of published materials	75%
Originality of published materials	50%
<b>Q5) What qualities should a good blogger have. Select 3 most important</b>	
Resilience	100%
Creativity	100%
Communication skills	75%
Curiosity	75%
Open-mindedness	50%
Attention to detail	50%
Optimism	25%
Confidence	25%
Courage	25%
<b>Q6) How do you cope with negative opinions placed on your blog. (Select all matching answers)</b>	
I respond them kindly	100%
I ignore them	75%
I respond them ironically	50%
I respond them aggressively	0%
I erase them	0%
<b>Q7) Do you make money blogging?</b>	
Yes	75%
No	25%
<b>Q8) How long did it take to you to start making money on your blog?</b>	
6-12 months	66%
2-3 years	33%
0-6 months	0%
longer than 3 years	0%

<b>Q9) What methods of earning money do you use?</b>	
Sponsored materials	33%
Product placement	33%
Displaying ads	0%
Other, what .....	33% variety of forms
<b>Q10) Do you inform about cooperation with companies?</b>	
Yes	100%
No	0%
<b>Q11) What multimedia do you place on your blog?</b>	
Photos	100%
Video content	33%
Infographics	33%
<b>Q12) Who take photos for your blog?</b>	
You	75%
professional photographer	25%
Friend	25%
Other, who.....	25%
<b>Q14) Do you cooperate with professionals (graphic designer, IT specialist) when you create blog layout and other materials placed on your blog?</b>	
2-3	50%
None	25%
1	25%
more	0%
<b>Q14) Do you cooperate with professionals (graphic designer, IT specialist) when you create blog layout and other materials placed on your blog?</b>	
Yes, only to create page layout	75%

No, I have enough skills to do it on my own	25%
Yes, I regularly cooperate with graphic designer	0%
No, I use available graphics and templates	0%
<b>Q15 ) How often do you change the layout of the page</b>	
Every 2-3 years	75%
Once a year	25%
Every 3-5 years	0%
Less often	0%
Never	0%
<b>Q16) Do you have photos retouched?</b>	
Yes	75%
No	25%
<b>Q17) How often do you submit posts?</b>	
Few times a week	50%
Few times a month	50%
Everyday	0%
Less often	0%
Irregularly	0%
<b>Q18) From where do you take inspiration for new stylings articles about current trends</b>	
Nowhere, I invent everything myself. I am not guided by other views	100%
From street, surroundings	25%
From fashion journals	25%
From fashion events	0%
From other blogs	0%
Other, what .....	0%

<b>Q19) On average, how much time do you spend on blogging weekly (in hours)</b>	
More	75%
0-1	25%
2-8	0%
<b>Q20) What blogging platform do you use?</b>	
Wordpress	50%
Blogger	50%
Blogspot	0%
Yola	0%
Weebly	0%
Other	0%
<b>Q21) What social media do you use to promote your blog?</b>	
Facebook	100%
Instagram	75%
Twitter	25%
Pineterest	25%
Snapchat	25%
Google +	0%
LinkedIn	0%
Other	0%
<b>Q22) Is blogging your only source of income?</b>	
Yes	50%
No	50%
<b>Respondents particular</b>	
<b>Sex</b>	
Female	75%
Male	25%

<b>Education</b>	
Primary	25%
Undergraduate	25%
Higher	50%
<b>Place of residence</b>	
Village	50%
A city with a population to 100.000	25%
A city with a population between 100 000-500 000	25%
A city with a population above 500 000	0%
<b>What is your main source of income?</b>	
Blog	75%
Regular work	25%

## 5. Discussion

Achieving success in blogging requires as much effort, contribution and time as any other business activity. Most of the respondents have graduated college, this proves that this kind of activity requires intelligence. Participants admitted that it took at least 6 month to achieve profit, sometimes it took even longer. Fashion blogs does not generate phrases widely searched in search engines, therefore reaching a wider audience is a slowly, systematic process connected with successively building a strong brand. Perseverance of respondents is being reflected in the regularity with which the new articles are submitted to the page. All the respondents admit to inserting new information regularly, the answers vary from several times a week to several times a month. Another factor that proves the assiduity of blog creators is the amount of time that is dedicated to the blog. The average time is longer than 8 hours per week. Respondents are aware of the fact, that achieving success requires persistence, however creativity is also perceived as key quality to achieve success. Creativity is substantiated with the fact, that the respondents do not need any source of the inspiration, most of the content is invented by themselves. Respondents believe that the subject of

the blog was the major factor of their success. Most of them also emphasize the quality of inserted materials. Another important characteristic is honesty. 100% of participants inform the readers about the cooperation with companies by including in the content sponsored materials or product placement. Bloggers earn money on promotional materials and product placement. This proves that manufacturers are aware of the opinion - forming role of the blogosphere. Bloggers do not use ads as the source of gaining profit. The possible reason could be that adding ads to the page could lead to deterioration in the quality of presented materials by adding some informational chaos and elements that disturb viewers' attention. In our opinion, presence in social media is an important factor in achieving success while social media play an important advertising role. Facebook appeared to be the most important social media, Instagram was also chosen by significant amount of respondents,

The awareness of the importance of the graphical materials is relatively big. Most of the respondents cooperated with professionals during creation of the page layout. The significance of the page appearance is confirmed by the fact, that the layout is being changed regularly (with a period of maximum 3 years). The layout is kept up to date with current trends and innovative technologies. The most common graphic media are photographs. However, only one quarter of participants collaborate with the professional photographer. It strongly indicates that materials included in the blog content does not require exceptional skills. Ability to use a professional camera combined with creativity to produce good quality materials. There is a tendency to retouch visual content before inserting them to the web page, however all the bloggers that admitted processing the photographs do not cooperate with any professional graphic designer. Computer graphical skills and artistic abilities are common among blog creators.

Achieving success as a blogger requires a lot of effort, dedication and time. However, once it is achieved it can bring not only satisfaction and recognition, but also financial profit. Most of the questioned admitted earning money on their blog. The same number of surveyed stated that the blog is their major source of income. Blogging is a profitable occupation and can substitute completely regular job. Blogging is the only source of income for half of the respondents, which is three quarters of the respondents that earn money on blogging. This career path is taken up generally by young people, there is no minimal age or agglomeration barrier, anyone can devote oneself to blogging gain experience and make actual profit.

The main difficulty encountered during data analysis was relatively small group of respondents. We managed to collect data only from four persons. The main reason for this was the fact, that the survey was addressed to the strictly selected audience limited to the ten most successful polish bloggers. We obtained information from 40% of the target group. As further research another survey

will be carried out, this time on less selected, wider target group of polish bloggers that are not that acknowledged, though managed to gain regular profit. The main subject of the following research will be the methods of gaining profit, we would like to investigate whether it is similar to the method chosen by the most popular bloggers discussed in this article.

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## **BLOGI JAKO NARZĘDZIA SŁUŻĄCE POPRAWIE UMIĘJĘTNOŚCI PRZEDSIĘBIORCZOŚCI I SAMOZATRUDNIENIA MŁODZIEŻY – STUDIA PRZYPADKU NAJBARDZIEJ ZNANYCH POLSKICH BLOGERÓW MODY**

### **Summary**

Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie blogów jako skutecznych narzędzi dla młodzieży w rozwijaniu przedsiębiorczych umiejętności i postaw. Aby osiągnąć ten cel, dokonano przeglądu aktualnej literatury i przeprowadzono badanie dotyczące blogowania. Zakres badania polegał na zbadaniu najpopularniejszych polskich blogów mody z wykorzystaniem kwestionariusza autorskiego. Wyniki badania przedstawiają blogowanie jako możliwą metodę samozatrudnienia, szczególnie kierowaną dla młodych ludzi.