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I LOVE TO WRITE AND CREATE. IS IT ENOUGH TO EARN MONEY? THE ENTREPRENEURIAL PROCESS OF BLOGGERS

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ABSTRACT

Technological development and new digital opportunities pave way for new and emerging forms of entrepreneurship. Digital entrepreneurship and digital entrepreneurial processes have been scarcely studied. This chapter focuses on entrepreneurship taking place in social media by exploring blogging and entrepreneurial process of bloggers based on a netnographical analysis of four Polish bloggers and their blogs. Our findings suggest that the entrepreneurial process of bloggers consists of three phases: legitimization, monetization and professionalization. The study contributes to the existing literature on entrepreneurial process, and that of bloggers particularly. Furthermore, the study makes a methodological contribution as nathnography has not been widely used in entrepreneurship research. The study has also practical implications for educators, for example, as it demonstrates how it is possible to transform passion or hobby into entrepreneurial activity in social media and to gain livelihood thereof. Our study suggests that social media and related opportunities, earning modes and entrepreneurial processes develop rapidly, and are, thus, interesting avenues for future research.

INTRODUCTION

'Light is better around the Silicon Valley model of entrepreneurship'ⁱ

Entrepreneurship and the entrepreneurial process are not unambiguous (Moroz and Hindle 2012) and the related definitions are discipline-based. Theories do not necessarily keep up with practice and emerging new solutions create opportunities for entrepreneurial activity. Similarly, new technologies and a new way of looking at the life of millennials and the next generations, open up new perspectives on entrepreneurial activities, which have not been sufficiently addressed in the research. On the other hand, entrepreneurship research tends to explore and theorize from researching the 'exceptional' high-growth 'gazelles' and more

mundane forms of entrepreneurship stemming from hobbies and passions, for example, remain scarcely studied (see e.g. Aldrich and Ruef 2018; Welter et al. 2017; Dodd et al. 2021).

Next generation does not necessarily search for permanent employment when entering the labour market but wish to pursue their passions (Duffy and Pruchniewska 2017) which pave way for related entrepreneurial activities. Furthermore, technological solutions such as social media help fulfil these passions the role of which has been highlighted by scholars in entrepreneurship research (see e.g. Newman et al. 2021; Lee and Herrmann 2021). Blogging is one of the many ways of being visible in the virtual media space. Although the first blogs appeared 30 years ago and earning money from blogging is also widely-spread, research has only scarcely addressed entrepreneurial activity based on blogging. The literature review by Olanrewaju et al. (2020) shows that research focuses on the use of social media by entrepreneurs rather than on transforming social media into entrepreneurial activity. Some studies concern fashion blogs (McFarlane et al. 2022; Duffy and Pruchniewska 2017) for example, whereas the blogosphere, in terms of self-branding and social media influencers for example, is widely studied in culture and media (Khamis et al. 2017).

The use of social media to carry out entrepreneurial activities can be considered as digital entrepreneurship defined as a digital start-up whose operations include using digital technologies (Zaheer et al. 2019) and new ways of creating and running businesses brought by the digital age (Dinh et al. 2018). Digital entrepreneurship is a new issue in entrepreneurship research, emphasizing that digitization has potential to revolutionize both entrepreneurship and related research in the future (Landström 2020). However, given the increasing role of digital entrepreneurship in the society the topic is underrepresented in the literature (Zaheer et al. 2019). Furthermore, digitization opens up new possibilities for research methods, such as netnography (Kozinetz 2015).

Digital opportunities, based on IT solutions and web applications shape both the concepts of entrepreneur, entrepreneurship and the entrepreneurial process and the definition of employment and self-employment (Sahut et al. 2021). As a scholarly field digital entrepreneurship covers technological solutions and topics related to innovation and management. Entrepreneurship by bloggers, bloggerpreneurs named by some (Duffy and Hund 2015), fits into the definition of digital entrepreneurship. Digital entrepreneurial processes have been scarcely studied (Sahut et al. 2021) although blogosphere is facing rapid changes. Therefore, there is an evident need to study entrepreneurial process in social media (Secundo et al. 2021).

Non-obvious forms of entrepreneurship (including blogger-preneurship) are becoming an intrinsic part of our social and economic reality and the topic has been scarcely studied. The aim of this chapter is to investigate the entrepreneurial process of bloggers. The study explores blogging and entrepreneurial process of bloggers based on netnographical analysis of four Polish bloggers and their blogs observed in 2020-22. Based on the analysis we suggest that the entrepreneurial process of bloggers consists of three phases: legitimization, monetization with active and passive phases, and professionalization. Our study, thus, contributes by refining and extending the model proposed by Gustafsson and Khan (2017) and by highlighting the role of co-creation in the entrepreneurial process of bloggers. Furthermore, we make a methodological contribution as netnography has been scarcely used in entrepreneurship research. Our findings are useful also for practice as the study demonstrates how social media, and blogging particularly, based on one's passion can pave way to the emergence of new ventures as well as financial earnings. The findings can also be used for educational purposes to attract young people to such entrepreneurial endeavours.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial process

Depending on the discipline and research approach entrepreneurship is understood and studied differently: it can be understood as a market function, an individual or a process (Landström 2020). Defining entrepreneurship through the prism of the market is the domain of economists and, in many cases, limited to the study of business entities and their owners. The individual approach is characteristic for behavioural researchers, including those dealing with psychology. Finally, entrepreneurship as a process is widely studied in business, and particularly in entrepreneurship, studies (Moroz and Hindle 2012; Kuratko 2016; Dimov 2020).

Starting an entrepreneurial business takes place over time, and is, thus, considered as a process requiring a series of individual decisions (Grilo and Thurik 2008). Some compare entrepreneurial start-up to travelling (McMullen and Dimov 2013), which has its beginning, subsequent stages and an end. There is no clear and unified understanding about when the entrepreneurial process starts and ends (Davidsson and Gordon 2012). For some researchers, the starting moment is the emergence of the desire for profit (McMullen and Dimov (2013), for others the emergence of the outline of a business idea or the first steps towards business

activity (Davidsson 2005). The completion of an entrepreneurial start-up process is also understood in different ways. Davidsson considers it as the moment when the venture creation terminates or obtains regular sales (2005). For McMullen and Dimov, it is the moment when a venture definitively realizes a profit or loss from its activities (2013). Furthermore, Davidsson distinguishes two phases of the entrepreneurial process: discovery and exploitation (2004). Discovery is a conceptual phase involving identifying, refining and developing a business idea whereas exploitation is the executive phase focused on the acquisition and involvement of resources (money, time, work), their coordination and market creation (Kollmann and Kuckertz 2006). Baron (2007) added one more phase, which takes place after the launch of the business and refers to all activity related to the early functioning of the company.

Entrepreneurs try to find feasible business models, experiment, and pass their ideas to clients for evaluation (Bocken and Snihur 2020). Digital entrepreneurship, especially when related to social media, is particularly predisposed to the creation of such opportunities in the client/participant interface. Blogging, as a social phenomenon, goes beyond the entrepreneur, and the participants of a given medium (blog, Instagram, etc.) are heavily involved in the process, thus, they co-create the content with the community and the entrepreneur. However, the entrepreneur with her/his passion, abilities and beliefs is still the key actor in the entrepreneurial process (Bruyat and Julien 2001).

Digital entrepreneurship and social media

Along with new technologies, businesses increasingly transfer their assets, services or major part of them into the digital sphere, which implies an emergence of a wide spectrum of digital enterprises (Kraus et al. 2019). The Covid-19 pandemic has further accelerated digitalization of businesses. The digitalization of entrepreneurship has been noted by researchers since the 1990s, yet it has not been extensively studied although the number of scientific publications in digital entrepreneurship has recently increased (Berger et al. 2021). Given the multifaceted field of entrepreneurship research it is understandable that similar types of ambiguities characterise the research on digital entrepreneurship (Zaheer et al. 2019).

The growing interest in digital entrepreneurship went hand in hand with the growing role of social media. With the development of social media, its potential for entrepreneurship has become noticed and researchers analyse the impact of social media on entrepreneurship, primarily through the prism of company management in the context of marketing, information search, networking and crowdfunding, for example (Olanrewaju et al. 2020). However, there

are few studies exploring entrepreneurial opportunities and entrepreneurial processes in social media (Secundo et al. 2021).

One example of social media is a blog, which appeared in 1994 as a sort of personal diary, and gained the name 'blog' in 1997 (Cisek 2008) when the blog was perceived mainly as a social phenomenon. It was considered to function as a channel to communicate emotional needs and to satisfy needs for bonds or expression (Smith, 2010). The opportunity to financially earn from blogs has been discovered relatively recently. Research on the intersection of business and blogging focuses primarily on marketing activities (Zanette et al. 2013) and public relations (Kent 2008).

In the beginning the possibility to earn from blogging was modest and only few bloggers were guided by economic motives when starting their online journals, as evidenced by many of their historical and current entries. However, the advertiser discovered marketing opportunities in the popularity of blogs and started cooperation with bloggers. Some bloggers decided to monetize their blogs regardless of their non-economic motivations for setting them up. There are several ways to monetize the blog (Schaferhoff 2021) of which the most popular one is affiliated marketing and 'pay per click' advertisement. More demanding ways of monetizing include writing sponsored posts and product reviews. In addition, it is possible to benefit financially from blogging by for example opening online shops to sell the related products the bloggers create by themselves (e.g. books, courses, lectures, workshops) or the products produced by the third party.

One of the few studies of the entrepreneurial process of bloggers concerns the Dpmmax blog run by a Russian psychiatrist (Gustafsson and Khan 2017). The study revealed three phases of the entrepreneurial process: preparatory (creating broad virtual network of subscribers, demonstrating professional skills and knowledge by posting relevant material), monetization (publication of books based on a blog post, promoting products) and professionalisation of services (acquiring additional income from professional knowledge and experience). Although the initial intention of the creator of the blog was to describe culinary and hunting struggles, it later turned out that small interjections about his professional activity in psychology attracted much greater interest among the audience. The study also highlighted the crucial role of the audience in creating blog content.

Next we describe how we explored the entrepreneurial process of bloggers based on netnography and then continue by presenting the findings of the study.

METHODOLOGY

Netnography

Netnography is a relatively new research approach, a kind of ethnography (Kozinets 2015; Costello et al. 2017) borrowed from anthropological research in the paradigm of interpretivism. The idea of netnography appeared with the fledgling internet and the emerging social groups there. Netnography encompasses observing the activity of the surveyed community in the virtual space by analysing entries, comments, statements and visual materials (if any) posted online. Netnography has been rarely used in entrepreneurship research (Kuckertza and Prochota 2018) but it is widely used in researching various opinions in marketing research particularly (Bengry-Howell et al. 2011).

As a derivative of ethnography, netnography is a multi-method research approach which relies on triangulation e.g. by enriching observations with other techniques (Kaur-Gill and Dutta 2017) during the data collection. Netnography is, thus, not limited to online content analysis, but it encompasses also some interaction with the research subject. Triangulation may concern various sources, documents and various research procedures (Bekhet and Zauszniewski 2012) such as interviews (Denzin 1989) to gain a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon studied. Kozinets, one of the most frequently cited researchers on netnography, calls for the need for human presence in the research (2015), and is also supported by subsequent researches (such as Costello et al. 2017; Padricelli et al. 2020).

Conducting netnography raises up ethical concerns about the research objects' consent to be studied. As long as the content appears in open access (as in this study), the researcher has the right to analyse and describe it without consent of the research objects although there is no unanimity on this (Sugiura et al. 2017). The situation becomes more delicate and complicated when the researcher joins a given community and is allowed to enter a closed circle guarded by a password (Kaur-Gill and Dutta 2017).

Data and analyses

In order to investigate the entrepreneurial process of the bloggers a three-step study was designed in which participant observation was combined with interviews of the bloggers (see Denzin 1989). First, a desk research was conducted to enlighten the scope of blog monetizing in US and Poland and, thus, to provide the context for the study. Second, we selected four popular blogs in the Polish blogosphere to be observed. The basic information of the selected blogs and bloggers is summarised in Table 1.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Blog/blogger name date of starting/popularity	Type of blog	No. of readers/ month	Way of monetisation
<i>Kominek</i> (<i>Fireplace</i>) (FP) (2005) <i>JasonHunt</i> (JH) (2015) Tomasz Tomczyk Considered the father of the Polish blogosphere	Lifestyle until 2015 Professional	No data 150,000	Blog banner ads Conducting marketing campaigns Selling own books Courses on monetising blogs
<i>Busem przez świat</i> (<i>By bus around the world</i>) (BAW) (2009) Karol Lewandowski On the Polish list of blogging fame galleries	Travel	100,000	Selling own books Selling partners' products Organising trips for groups Courses on monetising blogs and movie creations
<i>Lifemanagerka</i> (<i>Lifemanager</i>) (LM) (2014) Agnieszka Świetlik Selected as one of the leading blogs in 2016–2019 on the topic of lifestyle	Lifestyle: mainly for women	Tens of thousands	Promoting products Promotion campaigns
Mama ginekolog (<i>Mumgynaecologist</i>) (MG) (2015) Nicole Sochacki Wójcicka on the Polish list of blogging fame galleries	'Blog about the joy of being a mother. A story about how to take care of health and enjoy life, combined with medical advice'	760,000	Selling own books and own products Selling partners' products

The choice of blogs was done based on their popularity and high recognition of the blogs in order to be able to find enough online traces of the bloggers such as interviews and narratives. The choice was also influenced by the method of monetization (advertisement activity, selling own products, selling third-party products, etc.) and the blog's profile (health, travel, professional services, professional services related to the blogosphere). The observation of the blogs took place between 2020 and mid-2022. The research data included both current and

historical entries as well as the appearance of the blogs and press reports on the blogger/blogs as summarised in Table 2. In the analysis we paid attention to the content posted on the blog and to graphic and structural changes of the blog, which are informative of earnings on the blog and changing forms of its monetization.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Blog/blogger	2020–mid 2022	Historical data	Article about the blogger
JH (2)*	10 entries Products and services offered as well as cooperation proposals	Available historical entries regarding the next stages of monetisation, from the 14-year history of the blog	(9), (11), (12)
BAW (4)	3 entries Products and services available in the store and as a cooperation	Stories from past, showing the development of the blog activity Observation of new ways of monetisation	(8)
LM (3)	65 entries, including five on monetisation and the cost of running a blog Products and services offered as well as cooperation proposals	Review of historical entries relating to the past of the blog and the blogger (around 500 in total) Observation of new ways of monetisation	Not found
MG (1)	Observation of changes in the appearance of the blog, resulting from the deepening monetisation	Two entries about history	(6), (7), (10)

Note: * The numbers in () correspond to the items in the list of ‘Sources of information about the studied blogs and bloggers’ to be found after the references.

Third, as suggested by Kozinets (2015) and others (Costello et al. 2017; Padricelli et al. 2020) interviews with bloggers were conducted in order to interact with the research object and to gain information about their entrepreneurial process, monetization of the blog and future plans. Each of the four bloggers was asked to participate in the interview and requested for consent thereof. Two bloggers agreed to be interviewed: LM provided written responses to the questions and JH was interviewed online. The online interview lasted about an hour, and it was recorded and transcribed. MG refused due to lack of time, and BAW did not respond. As the inability to obtain answers from all study participants is acceptable in a netnographic research (Padricelli et al. 2020) we decided to continue with the two responses. An individual set of

questions was developed for both interviewed bloggers based on more than two years of observation of their blogs, as well as their history and bloggers' statements on topics related to blog monetization. The questions covered financial motivations for starting a blog, turning points, current financial opportunities and the role of the blog in the current business model. The data are informative on the ways in which bloggers monetize their blogs and, thus, enrich and complement the data observed from online sources. Some quotes from interviews are included in the text to illustrate the findings. Next, we present the findings of the study, starting with the scope of blog monetizing and continuing with analysing the primary data collected for the study.

FINDINGS

Context – scope of blog monetizing

It is estimated that the number of blogs worldwide varies between 570 million and over 600 million and is constantly growing, although more slowly (Byers 2022). Given this, information about blogs and bloggers should be treated as selective: it mainly comes from a few studies conducted by bloggers themselves or companies dealing with consulting and promoting blog monetization.

Similarly, information on their founding motives and earnings is incomplete. A survey from a year 2020 of 1 030 bloggers, mainly from the US, shows that 12% of the respondents took up blogging because of the possibility of earning, and the rest were looking for opportunities to express their opinions or share knowledge with others (Djuraskovic 2022). Regardless of the founding motivations, almost half of the respondents treated the blog as a full-time job (49%), a part-time job (around 30%), and only 15% as a non-profit hobby. For the majority of the bloggers (60%), the blog has become a source of income gradually over time, mainly through affiliations (19%), product sales (16%) or ad placement (15%). For 67% of the respondents, the opportunity of earning money became an issue when the blogger was contacted by a company offering promotional cooperation. However, these earnings are negligible – half of the bloggers earn \$1 000 or less per month while spending \$500 on a blog. On the other hand, some bloggers (about 3%) earn \$20 000 and some (less than 2%) spend \$10 000 to maintain a blog.

The Polish reality looks a bit different. Particularly earnings from blogs are lower, although they may exceed the national average salary level in a few cases. According to Bankier.pl, in 2017, Polish bloggers with more than 1 million hits per month earned around \$80 000 (Bankier.pl 2017). In the case of average blogs with 150 000–300 000 views, the respective

amount was \$30 000, while of the smallest blogs with 5 000 views only \$700 per year. In Poland, only 4% of the surveyed bloggers are blogging full-time (Blog media 2016) which in comparison to the US data (almost half work full-time) is very modest. Given the figures there seems to be potential for Polish blogsphere to develop. The pioneers have already entered the field as discussed in the following section portraying the entrepreneurial process of the studied bloggers.

Entrepreneurial process of bloggers

By analysing the research data we identified four themes - motivations to start blogging, monetizing blogging, monetizing related activities beyond blogging, and performing as an expert based on blogging. The motivations for running an online journal are different and depend on the sphere in which the blog operates. Main stimuli seem to include the desire to express oneself, connect with the community and share opinions. Each analysed blog was founded out of passion, and the blog itself was treated as a hobby without financial expectations. For JasonHunt (JH), the main motivator was his desire to write. He had been passionate about writing from an early age, when he wrote his teenage novels. Already then the blogger realized that writing could be a source of his income one day. LifeManager (LM) started a blog because she has always been passionate about a healthy lifestyle and nature, and wanted to promote and share the attitude and lifestyle on her blog. *'For me, blogging is a lifestyle'*, she claimed. Blog Bus Around the World (BAW) was created as a means of communication with family and friends during a crazy journey by an old bus from Poland to Gibraltar. Realizing wider interest in the subject matter, not only among family and friends, he decided to continue blogging. Blog Mumgynaecologist (MG) was created accidentally as the author started responding to posts by women on Instagram. This made Nicole, the blogger, realize the potential and need for an information campaign and led her to start a blog.

Bloggers who started a blog with the appearance of the first blogs in Poland in the early 2000's did not perceive keeping a journal as a source of income. However, some, such as LM, a marketing specialist by profession, expected that blogging might eventually bring some income although the primarily expectation was only to cover the costs of running the blog *'I did not assume that one day I would be able to quit my job and devote myself entirely to my internet activity'*, she stated.

Along with an increasing number of observers, income opportunities linked to the placement of advertising banners or sponsored links on blogs emerged. JH gained his first

earnings after two years of blogging, although, in the beginning, the amount was meagre. Very soon, he was recognized by 11% of online users in Poland, which led to cooperation with well-known brands such as Burger King. In 2012, due to sponsored posts, his earnings exceeded ten times the average monthly salary in Poland. This type of earning is of passive character as the advertising companies were looking for blogs with a large number of followers. The bloggers rather decided whether they were willing to cooperate with a given company or whether the advertised product corresponded to the blog's profile. In Poland JH was the first blogger to promote a more sophisticated way of earning on the blog by switching to '*cooperation between the agency and the blogger, not the agency and the banner*'. He followed the idea that '*the best advertisement for a product is us (bloggers) and our opinions*' and implemented it by stopping the placement of banner ads on his blog in 2011. Instead, he started cooperation with advertisers by creating marketing campaigns on the blog, but also outside it, benefitting from his recognition as a blogger.

Other bloggers started to follow suit by reducing the number of ads or totally abandoning this type of earning. The authors of BAW have moved away from writing promotional texts (mainly tests of photographic equipment). MG does not advertise or promote anything, but her blog is informative including tips without any affiliated links written by her and cooperating doctors. Only LM blog includes some promotional banners and product ads which redirect the reader to the seller's store page.

Another observed step on the monetization path is that bloggers became active in selling products online in created stores. Initially, they sold partners' products, and over time, they created own products to be sold. MG for example offered several own product lines in the areas of clothing, cosmetics and health, but also products from other manufacturers. BAW started by selling scratch maps and photographic equipment, as well as his own adventure books which relate to his blogging. Later BAW offered a range of own products useful for travel (travel socks, T-shirts, mugs, etc.).

JH followed his own path in monetizing his own brand even further. He changed his blogging profile by quitting his first blog portfolio named *kominek* (*Eng. fireplace*) and started a new one, JasonHunt. The new version of the blog was less visually driven and resonated with the blogger's new image as a specialist. He later stopped writing regular blog posts and he mainly released podcasts. At the same time, he has started consulting, preparing courses and writing textbooks, which formed the basis of his earnings.

Similarly, BAW started to earn money from his expertise by offering to organise tours,

performing at tourist events, and providing courses on how to open own store on the blog. LM has chosen a different way to monetize her expertise: she co-hosted a lifestyle programme in television, and records films testing products and places. Each blogger has published guides and books related to their blogging activities. LM and MG have published cooking books, BAW focused on travel guides, MG has published personal diaries, and JH and BAW provided training on how to blog and how to earn money thereof. Increasing expert activities have pushed blog entries of the bloggers into the background. However, the surveyed bloggers kept on posting on their blogs. MG and LM posted about once a month, BAW released posts during every expedition and after them while JH focused more on podcasts. All blogs were accompanied by other forms of communication in a variety of platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram or TikTok, all of which helped promote the blog and related income generation. sJH highlights that blog monetization should go hand in hand with at least one additional communication channel.

The studied bloggers were supported by teams dealing with photographic and technical services. For example, MG had four persons (including doctors) helping her to prepare blog contents. The company itself employs more than 50 people. Blogging has become a serious venture and enterprise that benefitted, in various forms (employment or contracts), from the support of specialists, and, thus, created employment for others.

Our analysis of the studied four blogs and bloggers reveals that entrepreneurial process of bloggers consists of three phases: legitimization, monetization which can be divided into passive and active phases, and professionalization.

The first and fundamental phase, **legitimization**, covers several activities which give a ground for the entrepreneurial process (topic selection, choosing a blog name, activity planning, regular blog posts) and gaining an engaged audience. In order to become visible and move on to the subsequent phases, a blogger needs first to build a community around the blog. Legitimization can be time-consuming, and as LM estimated getting a sufficient number of views '*costs several thousand hours invested in writing and placing content on the blog*' without any profits. Over time, the personal brand of the blogger can become the brand of the enterprise they run (Pihl 2013) which was also demonstrated by the surveyed blogs. Maintaining traffic on the blog and reaching a wider audience attracts customers willing to establish cooperation which includes also promotion. Defining the rules for such engagement and collaboration by indicating which products will be promoted and on what terms, for example, suggests that a transition to the next stage, i.e. blog monetization, is taking place.

The second phase, **monetization**, includes accepting orders to promote products, placing banner ads on the blog, and opening the shop with own or third-party products. Two types of monetization activities can be distinguished: passive and active. In most cases, passive monetization occurs first and it is followed by the active one. Promotion activities are passive actions as the blogger accepts the proposition of companies to promote products by posting about them on the blog or just placing ads. For most bloggers this is the predominant way of earning (Djuraskovic 2021). Active operations imply creating and selling products in online shops which require more active approach by bloggers.

Some bloggers move further to the third phase, where the blog starts to play a more marginal role, and the blogger begins to sell professional services and to create income based on one's knowledge. Given the visibility on social media, they may expect to gain financially lucrative contracts. The main activities and ways of earning include preparing and conducting courses, giving lectures and offering other expert services. In this phase, the focus is not on the quality or attractiveness of blogging anymore, but professional knowledge and expertise become crucial for blogger's earning. The **professionalization** of entrepreneurial activities stemming originally from blogging leads some bloggers to marginalize their blogs. The bloggers may increasingly focus on the other activities than blogging, and posts are added less often.

Our finding also demonstrate that blogger-preneurship and entrepreneurial process of bloggers differ depending on the blogger. For example, there are no banners on the MG blog, and posts do not refer to specific products. MG does not 'sell' its professional services on the blog. Instead, she and her team post general advices and information for free. She provides her professional services in hospitals and clinics without referring to the blog. The blog or the newsletter are not used as a marketing tool. From the blog's website, it is possible to enter the online store, which offers a wide range of products, mainly by the blogger's company, whose name does not, however, indicate any connection to the blogger's primary occupation as a gynaecologist.

The monetization of blogs allowed some studied bloggers to quit their day jobs and devote themselves only to creating online content or products and services related to the blog. For example, *'operating under the banner of "LifeManager" is an almost full-time job'* for LM. However, there are also those whose income from the blog and blogosphere activity would allow them to abandon their jobs, but they still continued to work besides running a blog. An example is the creator of MG, who is still an active gynaecologist working at the

hospital although her company's income from producing and selling the products (online) brought her to the list of millionaires in Poland.

Bloggers look for and apply feasible business models and at the same time follow the changes appearing on social media and client interfaces. An example is a change in the monetization process of the JH blog or the entry into new areas of LM, who, following the expectations of readers 'switched to "instant" content, mainly Instagram and TicToc' (LM), also entered these platforms. JH expects that the next model of monetization in social media will be subscriptions. This evolution has already appeared on the blog studied by Gustafsson and Khan (2017), which since the study has changed to a subscription model in which only a part of the content presented on the blog is openly available for all.

DISCUSSION

The bloggers' entrepreneurial process described in this study extends and modifies the model proposed by Gustafsson and Khan (2017). Based on our netnographic study of four bloggers we suggest the first phase to be named legitimization instead of preparation as it is legitimization in the eyes of readers, i.e. prospective customers, that forms the basis for monetization of the blog. Legitimization is a phase when blogger personalizes one's offering by building upon one's hobby and passion for example and makes it accessible on line. By dividing the second phase, monetization, into passive and active phases the study further clarifies the process as such division was not acknowledged in the study by Gustafsson and Khan (2017). In addition, the professionalization phase goes beyond blogging *per se* as the bloggers particularly benefit from their expertise and use their online journals merely as a marketing tool or a source of ideas. This is possible as wide outreach among their audience has been originally due to their attractive blogging. Table 3 summarises the three phases of the entrepreneurial process of bloggers.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Legitimation	Monetisation		Professionalisation
	passive	active	
Topic selection	Promoting	Selling products	Professional services
Blog name	products	and books	related to:
Site selection	Placing banner ads		– blogging (e.g. courses)
Activity planning	on the blog		– the theme of blogs

Regular posts

(e.g. planning trips)
– creating promotional
campaigns

The study also highlights the ways in which bloggers communicate and interact with readers (through a virtual platform), and use, thus, an opportunity to verify their ideas about products and services on an ongoing basis. This takes place in the form of content posted on the blog and the offer in their store. Such testing is important for entrepreneurial process of bloggers and resembles a lean start-up process (Reis 2011; Blank 2013): the reader/client takes part as a stakeholder by being a peer of products offered (Karami and Read 2021) and in the case of blogging, also the co-creator of the content provided.

The proposed model of the blogger's entrepreneurial process presented in this study is not reserved only for bloggers' entrepreneurship, but it may also apply to other forms of entrepreneurship which appear along with digital technologies and new generation of entrepreneurs in social media, such as TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, etc. In each case, the audience/prospective clients play a crucial role as their engagement determines the success of the monetization of a blog or other medium.

CONCLUSIONS

As a phenomenon entrepreneurship is multifaceted and deeply embedded in the context. Given the rapid development of digital economy, new business opportunities and models emerge and become visible in social media, for example. Based on the natnographic study of four bloggers this study contributes to the literature on entrepreneurial process by providing more fine-crained insights on the one of bloggers particularly.

Some studied blogs were created from passion, as a form of hobby, and spending free time. They were transformed into businesses while becoming legitimate and gathering audience with similar interests. By studying a non-Silicon-Vally mode of entrepreneurship, such as mundane blogging, the study provides new knowledge on the multifaceted phenomenon also there 'where there is not so much light' (see Welter et al. 2017). Based on this study blogging plays an important role for bloggers as a hobby, passion and a source of income as well as for their audiences and clients in terms of entertainment and source of support and information. New knowledge on the entrepreneurial process of bloggers contributes to a better understanding of entrepreneurship derived from a hobby and passion

combined with the possibilities of digitization as this study, indeed, demonstrates that passions and hobbies can be turned into a profitable businesses (see Stebbins 2009; Duffy and Pruchniewska 2017). The findings are also informative when studying other non-obvious forms of entrepreneurship, including tribal entrepreneurship, user entrepreneurship, hybrid entrepreneurship or accidental entrepreneurship, which may similarly be rooted in entrepreneurial activities resulting from hobbies and passions (Milanesi 2018).

The study makes also a methodological contribution as netnography has been scarcely used in entrepreneurship research despite its potential. Netnography makes it possible to study the reality reflected in the digital space. Given the era of digitization, entrepreneurs leave increasing amount of virtual traces which provide new possibilities to study their entrepreneurial endeavours. Netnography requires long-term involvement of the researcher and 'entering' the studied community along with the interactions with its members and interviewing the actors, such as bloggers, for example. Due to researcher's personal involvement netnography raises ethical concerns. Those observed, in this study the bloggers, may be reluctant to participate to interviews. In some cases, their unwillingness may ruin the long-term work sacrificed on observing the research object online. In this study two of the four observed bloggers did not accept the invitation to be interviewed. Although their interviews likely had produced even richer research data we consider our approach relying on two interviews acceptable as suggested by Padricelli et al. (2020).

Our study has also practical implications. By demonstrating how hobbies and passions can be transferred to new entrepreneurial ventures and profitable businesses in social media, our study contribute to the emergence of new business ideas and earning modes. The findings can be used in entrepreneurship education to encourage potential entrepreneurs to provide creative contents, sharing their knowledge and expertise, inspiring, show casting problems that many readers struggle with and proposing solutions to them, and also to earn and make profitable business thereof.

The analysis was based on four blogs created at a time when the monetization of such activities was not yet widespread. Currently, blogs represent only a small fraction of entrepreneurial potential in social media. Therefore, it is worth researching bloggers (and the whole portfolio of their activities) who are just entering the market to gain a better understanding of emerging motivations and new modes of monetization. Social media and related opportunities and earning modes likely evolve rapidly and existing and future blogger-preneurs will undoubtedly discover them. These new developments are interesting avenues for

future research in entrepreneurship.

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Table captions

Table 1 The basic information about the blogs

Table 2 Information about the observed data by blog/blogger

Table 3 Entrepreneurial process of bloggers

NOTES

- ⁱ Welter, F., T. Baker, D. B. Audretsch, and W. B. Gartner (2017), 'Everyday Entrepreneurship — A Call for Entrepreneurship Research to Embrace Entrepreneurial Diversity'. *Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice*, **41** (3), 311–321.