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Krohn, Mikaela

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Strategizing with Organizational Videoblogs: Sensegiving, Self-Branding or Spectacle?

Mikaela Krohn,

Department of Management and Organisation,

Hanken Svenska Handelshogskolan, Helsinki, Finland

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Abstract

Purpose

Despite the increased interest in video methods and the role of visuality in organizations and management, the use of video in organizations has received scant attention. This paper explores organizational videoblogs as a phenomenon, and discusses avenues that opens up for qualitative research. The paper examines the affordances of organizational videoblogs in a strategy context by contrasting them with more conventional corporate videos, in order to discuss how spectacularization and social media style communication is influencing social practices in organizations.

Design/methodology/approach

First, this paper introduces the phenomenon of organizational videoblogging and its implications for research. Second, it engages in a theoretical discussion on videoblogs as a strategizing activity, through three different analytical lenses: strategic sensegiving, strategic
self-branding, and strategy as spectacle. Illustrative empirical examples are used to support the theoretical discussion.

Findings

The paper argues that organizational videoblogging is a phenomenon that changes social practices in organizations by injecting a visual, social media type communication. Organizational videoblogs emphasize authenticity and provide new affordances for sensegiving and self-branding in strategizing, but ultimately lead us to ask whether they risk turning strategizing into an infotainment-like spectacle.

Originality/value

The value of this paper lies in conceptualizing how and why organizational videoblogs can be studied in organizations. The paper provides future research with vocabulary and characteristics to distinguish different types of video in organizations.

Paper type

Conceptual paper

Key Words: visuality, videoblogging, video methods, affordances, sensegiving, strategy-as-practice

Introduction

The last fifteen years have marked a visual turn in organization and management scholarship, which has increased interest in and understanding of the visual, in addition to the linguistic, mode of meaning-making in management (Bell and Davison, 2013; Meyer et al., 2013; Boxenbaum et al., 2018). During this time, video-recorded communication has become ubiquitous in organizations and societies. For organizational research, the ever-growing volume of video recordings produced in and of organizations provides a fruitful arena for empirical research (LeBaron et al., 2018). Video is interesting, because even short clips are 2
able to create multisensory instances that the receiver can understand immediately, both rationally and emotionally (Bell and Davison, 2013). While visual research is in part justified by the notion that “societies are shaped more by moving images than written words” (Bell and Davison, 2013, p. 170), a significant number of papers that identify themselves as visual organizational research limit their interest to the use of visual research methods (Davison et al., 2015; Christianson, 2018). This is especially the case with videos. While video research methods are increasingly attracting attention as part of the research process, see for example a recent Special Issue in Organizational Research Methods (LeBaron et al., 2018), there has been a dearth of interest in videos produced within organizations as part of the everyday practices, processes and routines of organizational life.

LeBaron and colleagues (2018) criticize the lack of understanding on how and why video is used in organizations, as researchers have mainly focused on using videos produced in organizations as data. This paper answers this call by addressing one form of organizational video, namely self-produced videoblogs. This paper looks to set some bases for distinguishing different types of organizational video, and to discuss how social practices in organizations are changing due to the injection of a visual social media type of communication culture. I present this discussion in two parts. The first part of this paper focuses on defining the phenomenon and understanding how to research it. I begin by contextualizing videoblogging within management and organization studies, in particular contrasting it with the more conventional, professionally produced, corporate videos. I then elucidate implications for research design in studying videoblogs and videoblogging. The second part of the paper comprises the theoretical discussion that illustrates how videoblogging might affect a well-established practice such as organizational strategizing. Since the activity of strategizing (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Vaara and Whittington, 2012)
happens with and through material affordances (Dameron, *et al.*, 2015), meaning the tools, technologies and media that are commonly included in strategy practice (see eg. Cabantous and Gond, 2011; Kaplan, 2011; Plesner and Gulbrandsen, 2015), this literature presents a theoretical grounding for the discussion of what social practices the media and technology involved in videoblogging affords. Further, I show how studies of organizational videoblogging can help strategy research better understand a range of developments currently affecting corporate strategizing, specifically, novel forms of organizational sensegiving, strategizers’ self-branding activities, and strategy-come-spectacle. Adopting this two-part structure, I look to provide a basic understanding of the phenomenon as well as show how studying the social practices related to communication media affects life in organizations. This has been emphasized as a relevant but often overlooked aspect of understanding social media technologies in management and organization studies (Leonardi and Vaast, 2017).

**Why study videoblogs?**

In the first half of the 2010s, on-demand online video was booming in internal organizational communication (BusinessWire, 2012; Ragan, 2013; Zack, 2015), and has since become a regular part of the communications toolkit in large organizations. The proliferation of social media platforms and commonly available digital recording devices has resulted in the rise of different types of video communication in organizations. Organizational videoblogging is introduced here as a type of video genre distinct from the more traditional form of corporate video. Videoblogging is a peculiar development as it enables a completely new level of authenticity and impact in mediated communication, as noted in studies about private videoblogging on YouTube (cf. Griffith and Papacharissi, 2010; Liu *et al.*, 2014).

Furthermore, as it employs a social media style of communication, it is much less formal than other forms of mediated organizational communication (Leonardi and Vaast, 2017).
Therefore, it offers insights into how visuality and the communication culture of social media affects social practices in organizations.

Leonardi and Vaast (2017) reason that organizational scholars have been slow to explore the role of communication technology in organizations because it has been considered secondary to the questions of interest. However, social media communication culture represents practices that many people have become familiar with in their private life, and are therefore likely to affect multiple organizational phenomena (Treem and Leonardi, 2012). When studying how material or technological artefacts affect social practices, the focus is often on affordances (Gibson, 1977). Affordance means that the material or technological artefact enables certain actions for the user while others are restricted. For example, a table affords your placing a coffee mug on it but it blocks walking. The affordance of a table is therefore that it can hold objects for you. In technology, the focus of affordances is on how people enact their goals using the material features of the technology. Thus, the affordances perspective adopts neither a social constructivist nor technological determinist perspective but moves beyond these dominant ways of studying technology (Leonardi and Vaast, 2017). Leonardi and Vaast (2017) continue to explain that with an affordance lens, we are able to focus not on the technology per se, but on how the actions the technology enables become part of the question of interest (see also Hutchby, 2001). Taking social media as a technology, for example: “when adopting an affordance lens, scholars who study, say, identification in organizations would not ask how social media affect identification practices, but rather how the affordances or constraints offered by social media become intertwined in the production of identification” (Leonardi and Vaast, 2017, pp. 152–153). Understanding the affordances of a technology is fundamental to understanding how this technology influences social practices.
This paper examines both affordances and characteristics. Affordances refer here to typical actions associated with videoblogging at a general level, such as communicating authenticity or appearing authentic. Characteristics, on the other hand, describe specific techniques or activities seen on a video, such as recording with a handheld mobile camera or addressing the audience as peers. The affordances of videoblogging are built on the characteristics of its use. In the next section, I will elaborate more on these affordances and characteristics while defining organizational videoblogging and contrast it with corporate video.

**What is organizational videoblogging?**

Videoblogging, also known as vlogging, is a form of self-expression on the Internet that has the rhetorical characteristics of being an “asynchronous, mediated monologue tailored for a non-present audience” (Frobenius, 2014, p. 59). Videoblogging has gained significant popularity over the last two decades as the Internet, mobile phone cameras, and services like YouTube have made creating and sharing videos accessible for practically anybody. Video is a format that enables non-verbal communication of context, emotions and moods, in a manner that outstrips similar capabilities in text-based communication (Liu et al., 2014). In the private sphere, videoblogging has been largely influenced by the style of the early mover amateur-producers of YouTube videos, even though more professional production companies and content producers now utilize the platform (Hall, 2015). In their style, appearing as your authentic and honest true self is crucial for connection and engagement with the audience (Hall, 2015; Morris and Anderson, 2015). Furthermore, the “authentic” style is enhanced by the simple and homemade looking production of the videos, as well as the protagonist’s self-disclosure (sharing information about yourself) and self-presentation through ingratiation (emphasizing your positive attributes in order to be likeable) (Griffith and Papacharissi, 2010; 6
Liu et al., 2014; Hall, 2015; Morris and Anderson, 2015). Leonard (2013) summarizes these characteristics as the affordances of amateurism, authenticity and affinity (see also Bell and Leonard, 2018).

In the organizational context, videoblogging has emerged in the 2010s. In this time, there has been a rapid change in how organizations use video internally. The change is characterized by a shift from traditional corporate video towards the genre of organizational videoblogging. Traditional corporate videos are still largely used in external communication and in cases where the video is expected to have a long lifespan, such as in employee branding videos or training videos. Traditional corporate videos are well-produced and scripted, giving a thought-through, polished impression. In contrast, the videoblog type of videos are short, quickly produced, improvised or unscripted, and often unedited, simple messages with a short lifespan. The videoblogging style is used to share simple internal news items, weekly or monthly updates, and even diary-like documentaries of life inside the organization, in a similar fashion to private videoblogs on YouTube. However, it is unlikely that internal organizational videoblogs will be found on sites like YouTube. The videos may contain sensitive information and are therefore shared on platforms where access is restricted to organization members. Yet, they employ similar affordances as social media videos, specifically, amateurism, authenticity and affinity (Leonard, 2013; Bell and Leonard, 2018). Moreover, these affordances are in line with audience expectations of the media, because the frames we apply to viewing organizational videoblogging are formed from our experiences with private social media (Treem et al., 2015). These frames form expectations and assumptions, such as informality, on how the communication technology is supposed to be used regardless of context (Treem et al., 2015; Leonardi and Vaast, 2017). Therefore, the phenomenon of organizational videoblogging is not only symptomatic of the proliferation of
technology and visuality in organizations, but also an injection of a new communication culture with specific technological affordances that carries implications for social practices. Contrasting organizational videoblogs with corporate videos demonstrates this. Table 1 reviews the differences in characteristics between corporate video and videoblogs.

For the purposes of this paper, I am interested in, both, what the act of creating simple performances to camera means for organizational practices, and, how the affordances of the technology affect organizational practices particularly in relation to strategy. Since organizational videoblogs typically have restricted access, my focus is on videoblogging as an intra-organizational practice. I discuss questions on viewing videoblogging as a strategizing activity in the second part of this paper, but first, direct attention to matters that should be accounted for when planning research on videoblogs and videoblogging.

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**Researching videoblogs and videoblogging**

Videoblogs differ from other types of video data available in organizations. Qualitative organizational researchers have mainly used video to record and analyze face-to-face interaction (Christianson, 2018; LeBaron *et al.*, 2018), but the peculiarity of this media lies in the “screen-to-face” interaction between the vlogger (presenter on the video) and the viewer (Harley and Fitzpatrick, 2009; Frobenius, 2014; Liu *et al.*, 2014). In this section, I will deliberate on how the larger societal phenomenon of social media use and spectacularization (Debord, 1992; Hall, 2016), together with the managerial agenda of a particular organizational context, influence the action of videoblogging and the videoblog messages themselves. Further, I will show how these influences, in addition to the affordances of the media, should be accounted for when planning and designing research that uses videoblogs or
videoblogging as data. To facilitate the discussion, I have divided the videoblogging process into four parts – sender, channel, artefact, receiver – all located in the organizational context but affected by the outside environment. This section does not go into methodological detail, because ultimately the particular research question of a study directs how video data are used (LeBaron et al., 2018). However, I will offer suggestions on how to construct an understanding of the factors influencing the generation and consumption of videoblogs in organizations to research design, focusing in particular on how videoblogging influences social practices in organizations. A similar logic can be applied to research on other organizational new media that also originate from the private sphere of our life. Figure 1 illustrates the various parts of the videoblogging process, which are discussed next.

The outside environment refers to how videoblogging is generally practiced in social media. Videoblogging is a practice that has emerged from early internet use (Hall, 2015), and is a symptom of the greater societal spectacularization (Debord, 1992; Hall, 2016). In the organizational context, it is a practice that has been internalized from outside-in (Leonardi and Vaast, 2017), bringing with it technological frames, i.e. our expectations and assumptions based our private social media use, that influence how the media is used in organizations (Treem et al., 2015).

In the private sphere, social media communication enables voicing matters that might otherwise not have a platform (Sergi and Bonneau, 2016), but in the organizational context, social media behavior needs to be balanced with professional behavior (Oostervink et al., 2016). Therefore, the inside context, that is the context of the specific organization in which the media is used, embeds videoblogs with the managerial agenda of the organization. This
could be the organization’s strategic direction, a change initiative, or brand messages, that shape what is being said on the video, while the social media communication style, adapted from the outside environment, shapes how the message is presented. Therefore, an understanding of both the outside environment and inside context need to be incorporated into the research design when studying videoblogs or videoblogging. Next, I will discuss this in more detail by going through each step of the videoblogging process. I will start by discussing the videoblogging channel (video) and artefact of (the video message itself), because these two bear the greatest resemblance to other forms of video data. Hereafter, I will bring the sender and the receiver into the discussion, to show how each part of the process is interlinked and suggest ways to address this in research design.

The channel – video – has the same qualities as any video data: it is dynamic in form, delivering a constant flow of information (in contrast to a static photo or a document) (LeBaron et al., 2018). It comprises multimodal elements, namely, audio and visual, and sensory (referring to feelings, like empathy with the vlogger, but not touch) (Meyer et al., 2013; Pink et al., 2015; Hall, 2016). The data can be viewed asynchronously, rewound, rewatched, jumping between sequences in the video (LeBaron et al., 2018). A number of books and articles discuss how to consider and use these qualities in analysis (see for example Hindmarsh and Tutt, 2012; Gylfe et al., 2016; Wilhoit, 2017). The qualities may make video data seem able to depict true interactions, but researchers should bear in mind that any video data are always constructed rather than just captured (Ray and Smith, 2012; LeBaron et al., 2018). Therefore, decisions regarding the production of a video have ontological and theoretical implications (LeBaron et al., 2018). In the case of videoblogs, the video is produced by someone other than the researcher, meaning that videoblogs are secondary data (Rose, 2016). Therefore, other sources of data, such as interviews or
ethnographic insight, can be used to inform the researcher of the production decision, while the video itself can be rewatched in interview situations as an elicitation tool (e.g. Slutskaya et al., 2012) or used outside field work for more detailed analysis (e.g. Gylfe et al., 2016).

The technology used in the communication channel influences the output message through its affordances (Hutchby, 2014). Thus, even if the flow of information in a videoblog message is dynamic, the output of the videoblog is still a static organizational artefact, making it comparable to an intranet news piece or tweets about work (see for example Sergi and Bonneau, 2016; Grafström and Falkman, 2017). Certain actions are enabled for this artefact, while others are restricted by the technological affordances of the media (Hutchby, 2014) and characteristics of the genre (Griffith and Papacharissi, 2010). Videoblogs are asynchronous (Frobenius, 2014), meaning they do not enable immediate interaction with the audience, unlike video conferencing. Yet, the presenter on the video is able to establish a conversational and interactional mood by addressing the viewers directly, often as peers, (Frobenius, 2014) and by practicing self-disclosure and ingratiation (Griffith and Papacharissi, 2010; Morris and Anderson, 2015). This affords managers, even high up in the organization hierarchy, the opportunity to present as employees’ peers. While all mediated communication can establish a connection between sender and receiver (Hutchby, 2014), videoblogging does this specifically by reducing the experienced distance between the two parties (Hall, 2015). Sociologists, linguistics and media researchers have looked at how this is established in private videoblogs, focusing, for example, on visual cues (e.g. Liu et al., 2014; Hall, 2015), gestures and rhetoric (Griffith and Papacharissi, 2010; Frobenius, 2014). However, in management and organization studies, questions of power enter the experience, because of the formally established relationships and hierarchies between people in organizations. Therefore, the intentions of the sender and interpretations of the receiver
should to be accounted for. This makes qualitative methods particularly suitable for researching videoblogs and videoblogging.

Videoblogs are always intended messages. Even the more spontaneous videos always bear some intentionality, due to the production needed to disseminate the message. This intentionality is shaped by the sender’s expectations and assumptions regarding the media presentation style (Leonardi and Vaast, 2017), but also by the specific organization context. A communication survey conducted amongst American companies identified that they tend to encourage internal videoblogging when they want their communication to have more impact, be authentic, more visible, engaging, or bring the organization closer (Kaltura Inc, 2014). This can lead us to speculate that videoblogs are used for management propaganda, to create an alternative channel for the dissemination of top management messages wrapped up in different packaging. Videoblogs nevertheless share some common characteristics with CEO letters to stakeholders or CEO tweets: all require a certain degree of authenticity in the CEO’s voice, meaning they cannot seem to be written by someone else or they won’t engage the audience (Patelli and Pedrini, 2014; Grafström and Falkman, 2017). Distinguishing between an authentic voice and propaganda that appears authentic can be difficult for a researcher. In contrast to many other forms of secondary data, such as annual reports, external websites, or even town hall meetings, in videoblogging the sender’s authority and credibility is built on appearing human by being informal and amateurish (Griffith and Papacharissi, 2010; Hall, 2015). Deeper insights into the organization are in place for a proper assessment of this particularly contradictory performance.

The viewers’ point of view enlightens us on how the sender’s performance in a videoblog is understood inside the organization. Whether the viewers accept the presenter as credible
depends on the viewers’ outside expectations and assumptions for the media (Leonardi and Vaast, 2017), and on their interpretation of the presenter’s authenticity and the atmosphere experienced in the video (Hall, 2015; Pink et al., 2015) in relation to the inside context. Viewer perceptions are also bound to differ based on their experiences and levels of familiarity with the media in the private sphere (Treem et al., 2015), which affects the conclusions that can be drawn from empirical material. Ultimately, the viewer’s reactions to videoblogs are fed back to the organizational context, shaping how the media is used going forward. Therefore, a longitudinal perspective might also be needed in the research design.

Having defined organizational videoblogging and reflected how the process of videoblogging affects research design, the next section begins to theorize on videoblogs as a strategizing activity. I demonstrate how the injection of a visual social media style of communication changes social practices in organizations, drawing examples from an ongoing ethnographic data collection in a large retail organization to illustrate my point. Since the data collection is still in progress, my knowledge of the illustrative examples is built on ethnographic insight gained during informal and formal discussions in the organizations. Therefore, the discussion in the next section is mainly at a conceptual level, focusing on the affordances and characteristics of videoblogging and their influence on the social practices of strategizing.

**Strategizing with videoblogs**

In the first part of this paper, I have argued that organizational videoblogging reflects a societal phenomenon that idealizes visuality and authenticity. The following looks to offer insights on how the affordances of videoblogs, in addition to the spoken words and visible interaction on video, opens up new avenues for theorizing on the practices of strategizing. Videoblogging as a strategizing practice is something out of the ordinary. Organizational
videoblogs tend to evoke an element of entertainment or humor, have a short shelf life, and be rather unilateral. Thus, they deviate from the normative ideal of rationality (Cabantous and Gond, 2011), long-term decision-making (Hodgkinson et al., 2006), and personal interaction (Hoon, 2007; Johnson et al., 2010), which we have come to expect of strategy work. I theorize on videoblogging as a strategizing practice using three different lenses: (1) sensegiving, because videoblogs are often used to influence the organization in a desired direction, (2) self-branding, because videoblogs often form around certain individuals, and (3) spectacle, because videoblogs are a form of spectacle inside the organization.

**Organizational videoblogging as a tool for managerial sensegiving**

Strategy as practice scholars have argued that the success or failure of a strategy is dependent on management’s capability to enact the strategy in day-to-day encounters (Rouleau and Balogun, 2011). Sensegiving, as the act of influencing other organizational members and supporting their sensemaking of a strategy, is a crucial part of strategic change (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Hill and Levenhagen, 1995; Rouleau, 2005). So, sensemaking is the way in which people come to understand changes in their environment (Weick, 1995). Rouleau (1995) has shown that management’s sensegiving capability is dependent on communicative micro-practices that managers employ in day-to-day encounters. Sensegiving micro-practices are affected not only by the words used in the communicative action and the socio-cultural context in which the communication takes place (Rouleau, 2005), but also by the material practices that facilitate the transition from individual to group-level sensemaking (Stigliani and Ravasi, 2012).

Organizational videoblogging is an effective tool to trigger strategic sensegiving in post-bureaucratic organizations because it mediates the impact of spatial and temporal distance on
intra-organizational interactions (Ragan, 2013; Mcfarland and Ployhart, 2015). Videoblogs host the ambient stimuli of social media communication, that is, infectious attitudes, emotions and behaviors are able to spread faster and more broadly than in other types of communication context (Mcfarland and Ployhart, 2015). This enables videoblogs to engage the viewers’ emotional registers, which are in themselves central to successful sensegiving activities (Vuori and Virtaharju, 2012; Heaphy, 2017). Thus, the ambient stimuli are a key facilitator of social media communication, which, even when asynchronous, promotes open and instant interaction. In practice, this means we engage more strongly with mediated communication that feels like interaction, in other words, when we feel part of the communication process instead of just a passively informed audience.

In successful strategic sensegiving, managers are able use their tacit knowledge of the cultural context to adapt their words, gestures and other non-verbal cues to match the audience, which facilitates the audience’s sensemaking of the strategy (Rouleau, 2005). Multimodal communication (both audio and visual) through videoblogging enables managers to use the full range of verbal and non-verbal methods to adapt the sensegiving, while still benefitting from the speed and accessibility of computer-mediated communication. The presenter interacts with the audience by making eye contact through the camera and addressing them directly in speech (Frobenius, 2014), while visual cues such as location contribute to the message (Liu et al., 2014) and enable the viewer to “feel” the atmosphere (Pink et al., 2015).

Mcfarland and Ployhart (2015, p. 1671) argue that “CEO blogs describing the company’s strategy, challenges, and financial information may raise support for the strategy and build rapport with the leader”, while acknowledging that the media does not work in isolation.
Thus, the strengths of videoblogging might also be its pitfall. Since videoblogging is asynchronous, the manager has to decide appropriate communicative micro-practices \textit{a priori} and cannot adjust them depending on audience reaction (Frobenius, 2011). A miscalculation on appropriate communication might cause the manager to quickly lose the audience and therefore fail to trigger a sensegiving process. Thus, there is an increased need for videoblogging managers to be aware of the cultural context of their organization, and use their tacit knowledge of the professional, cultural and social practices in their environment to adapt the video message (Rouleau, 2005). This is illustrated in an empirical example: 

\textit{During a large organizational change, which also involved lay-offs, a director from a business unit was appointed the new director of a support unit. She had been very popular at the business unit and sent out a heart-warming, sincere, video message thanking her staff and informing them of her new position. However, the video was shared company-wide, and while she did mention the support unit, she didn’t address her new staff on the video. While employees at the business unit felt the video was a good way to impart the news that they were losing their much loved director, giving everyone the chance to hear it from her directly, the same video was experienced at the support unit as a metaphorical slap in the face. Not only was this unit dealing with the largest number of lay-offs of all units, they were now being informed of their new boss as a side note on a video that was otherwise clearly directed at the business unit. This example shows how the interactional practices used by the leader enabled sensegiving for the business unit but hindered it at the support unit, which had been assigned the role of a passive observer of the interaction that took place through the video.}

In conclusion, while videoblogging technology affords the transmission of emotions, moods and behavior in organizations unaffected by time and space, it requires a certain social competence on the part of the presenter. For a competent presenter, videoblogging can be a...
highly efficient tool for championing (Mantere, 2005) strategic sensegiving initiatives and reaching out with the management’s influence. Furthermore, competent presenters might emerge from a broader conceptualization of strategizers in the organization, not just from the managers (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007), since the technologies have become more widely accessible in organizations (BusinessWire, 2012). From a theoretical perspective, sensegiving with videoblogs uses largely similar communicative micro-practices as face-to-face interactions (Rouleau, 2005). However, strategic sensegiving has emphasized that every manager (top and middle) has an important role in the daily enactments of the strategy (Rouleau, 2005; Rouleau and Balogun, 2011). In contrast, videoblogging is usually done by one central person, who provides the face and voice for change. This does not diminish the sensegiving enacted by others in face-to-face encounters but, as an impactful media, videoblogging might have consequences for other managers who have to deal with the negative feelings caused by a video, as shown in the empirical example. In the next section, I will elaborate more on the videoblogger as a strategic self-branding champion.

**Organizational videoblogging as representational branding of the self**

Brands have become a central element of organizational life, functioning as references for identity, culture and communication within organizations (Kornberger, 2010; Mumby, 2016). Branding within organizations can be seen as meaning-making that incorporates the organization’s strategic vision (Kärreman and Rylander, 2008; Järventie-Thesleff et al., 2011). Recent work on branding has discussed how employees’ identities and lifestyles are mobilized for an outside-in branding process (Land and Taylor, 2010; Endrissat et al., 2017). Employees willingly engage in these emerging brand processes because they give meaning to the employees’ own identity work (Land and Taylor, 2010; Vásquez et al., 2013; Endrissat et
al., 2017), as well as an ability to affect the organization’s trajectory through the brand (see also Kornberger, 2010; Mumby, 2016; Endrissat et al., 2017). Employee-generated videoblogs are a way for organizations to capture and distribute employees’ stories within the organization (BusinessWire, 2012; Melcrum ltd, 2012), and in the process the videoblogger also gains a wider reputation within the organization. This is considered a strength of the medium as it helps “identify natural leaders and stars across the company” (Kaltura Inc, 2014, p. 31). In a way, the videoblog offers the presenter a stage from which to reach the organizational audience, and thus elevates them to micro-celebrity status (Senft, 2013), and also allows them to act as strategy champions (Mantere, 2005).

Self-branding has been considered a necessary survival mechanism in neoliberal late capitalism (Marwick, 2010; Senft, 2013). Social media communication acts as a catalyst for this type of self-representation, as every post is deliberately crafted in constructing our virtual selves (Marwick, 2013; Senft, 2013). Videobloggers build a coherent brand for themselves by choosing which visual cues, images, and storytelling tactics support it (Senft, 2013; Hall, 2015). Authenticity lies at the heart of videoblogger brands, which is enhanced by the choice of media (Morris and Anderson, 2015). In addition to self-representation strategies that promote your expertise or likability (Griffith and Papacharissi, 2010), videoblogging also establishes a sense of familiarity with the presenter, which enables the audience to relate to an otherwise unfamiliar or remote actor (Senft, 2013). For example, videobloggers on YouTube create intimacy by disclosing personal information and presenting themselves engaging in mundane actions that the audience can relate to (Hall, 2015). Similar representations of the branded self are used in organizational videoblogging, summed up in the following example.
When the current CEO of the case company was first appointed to the post, his speeches at town hall meetings left the employees baffled because they felt he was too blunt. This was at about the same time the organization started regularly publishing CEO videoblogs on the company’s intranet. In his videoblogs, the CEO would be seen working on different tasks around the organization, ranging from the warehouse, to the sales floor in stores, to the boardroom at corporate headquarters. In every location, he was true to his direct and open way of speaking about operational problems. The employees, who were initially shocked by this behavior at the quarterly town hall meetings, quickly became accustomed to it thanks to the more regular videos, and started to appreciate the CEO’s frank speaking style. This example shows that the frequency of the CEO’s videoblogs and the visual cues about being present and engaged all around the organization supported the employees’ acceptance of their new CEO’s style.

While videoblogging can be initiated in an organization as a way to spread stories about the corporate brand acted out in everyday organizational life, the self-representational style of videoblogging directs attention to the individual presenter and establishes a brand for him/herself. The presenter may become a strong and legitimate voice in the organization, due to the authenticity and relatability present in the videoblog. For managers, this can be a self-branding strategy to expand their influence inside the organization, but “natural leaders” and “stars” might also arise from less advanced positions in the hierarchy. Kornberger (2010, pp. 40–45) illustrates that when corporate brands become platforms for self-expression, the meaning might take on unexpected and unwanted forms. Thus, providing a stage to reach internal audiences poses risks for the organization, as messages with unexpected content can be widely distributed. Videoblogs can become contested sites where corporate strategy is
Micro-celebrity status, just as for regular celebrities, might also become a burden to the individual (Marwick, 2010; Senft, 2013), especially since brands cannot be controlled and are always evolving in every interpretation (Kornberger, 2010). Senft (2013) explains that micro-celebrity and the branded self are increasingly discussed using the language of identity crisis. The thin line between the branded self and the true self can be difficult to manage (Marwick, 2010), and exposing yourself to super-publicity might have unsettling outcomes (Senft, 2013). While these struggles are more common for videobloggers on YouTube, I argue that organizational videoblogging can have similar consequences. This begs the question, could a videoblogger reach a level of popularity within the organization that elevates them to a celebrity-like subject position, and makes the videoblog as a communication channel the primary tool for strategic messages? And what implications would this have for the work of strategizing? This idea is explored further in the next section.

**Videoblogging - a step towards strategy as spectacle?**

As observed by Knights and Morgan (Knights and Morgan, 1991), strategy is a discourse with its own distinct conditions of possibility. It both contains and sustains its own distinct subject positions (Laine and Vaara, 2007) and power-relations (McCabe, 2010), both constantly cast in a constantly re-emerging shroud of rationality (Cabantous and Gond, 2011). However, the rise of technologies such as videoblogging also highlights the potentially changing nature of corporate strategy as a practice. In particular, it calls into question the rationality, formality and hierarchical structure we have often come to associate
with strategy. Thus, the question becomes, following the general trend towards the visual in society (Bell and Davison, 2013), is strategy itself slowly transforming towards a infotainment-like spectacle?

Guy Debord’s book *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967, 1992) introduced the concept of spectacle as a criticism of mass media and the consumption culture at a societal level. Debordian criticism applies a broad definition of the concept of spectacle, which on the one hand refers to how everything from mundane commodities to politics and education has turned into visual shows, with built-in elements of entertainment and consumption. On the other hand, Debordian criticism views spectacles as ways for power to enact in society, alienating people from what is real and replacing “the real” with a desire for representation – an artificial, magnified, spectacular spectacle. Best and Kellner (1999) brought Debord’s criticism to the age of the Internet, emphasizing how the technological advancements have but accelerated the creation of spectacles. Social media has unmistakably further escalated the creation of and participation in spectacles. While the audience has in Debord’s original analysis been viewed as passive (Seeck and Rantanen, 2015), it is still unclear in Best and Kellner’s (1999) analysis of the Internet era, to what extent spectators blindly consume spectacles or whether they are able to be critical in their interaction with them. While Debords’ criticism is directed at the societal level, I am adapting the concept of spectacle into intra-organizational practice.

Even as a general observation, it is hard to refute that corporate life, including strategy, at least at the level of its artifacts, is an astoundingly bland affair (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012). Thus, for organizational videoblogs to become strategy spectacles in a Debordian sense, they would have to outdo the real subject they represent (Best and Kellner, 1999). For example,
the videoblog would have to outstrip the manager’s personal influence, changing the focus of interactions with the manager from a purely personal/professional interaction into a desire and an opportunity to participate in a spectacle. What would be the implications of such a development? Certainly, we could assume the subject positions of strategy become more associated with entertainment, with firebrands, demagogues and jokers, both appropriating and disseminating strategic narratives in quick consumption cycles to internal corporate audiences. At the same time, the line between fact and fiction blurs, creating novel but potentially problematic spaces in which strategic narratives combining the novel and the familiar (Barry and Elmes, 1997) co-exist.

The internal videoblogs in the case company do not show clear signs of spectacle yet. However, one development in this direction plays with the blurred line of the private and public space in social media: *The case company arranged an Instagram competition for the employees, asking them to display the strategy buzzword of the organization “Courage”. To participate, the employees were asked to post short video-clips and images on public Instagram profiles, using specific hashtags that indicated the company, that they were employees of the company, and that the post displayed “courage”. All the employee competition entries were also used as part of the company’s ongoing marketing campaign with the same theme.* In a sense, the employees voluntarily took part in the spectacle of “Courage” both inside and outside the organization.

**Conclusions**

In this paper, I explore the general turn towards the visual in society (Bell and Davison, 2013) by focusing on organizational videoblogs. Video methods have been on the rise in organization and management research, but little attention has been given to how and why
videos are used in organizations, and what implications their use might have for social practices in organizations (LeBaron et al., 2018). In this paper, I have built a foundation to further study video as an organizational phenomenon, by defining one specific genre of organizational video – the videoblog. I have presented how research with videoblogs is affected by the outside environment and inside context of the organization, by distinguishing how these affect the different parts of the videoblogging process. Finally, I have demonstrated how theorizing on videoblogs as a strategizing activity challenges the assumptions of rationality (Cabantous and Gond, 2011) and long-term decision-making (Hodgkinson et al., 2006) still associated with strategy work, and changes interaction (Hoon, 2007; Johnson et al., 2010) between actors.

Videoblogging is a form of self-representation on the Internet, in which the videoblogger creates an interactional ambiance by addressing the audience directly, and a sense of intimacy and engagement with the audience through humor, self-disclosure, and ingratiation (Griffith and Papacharissi, 2010; Frobenius, 2014; Liu et al., 2014; Morris and Anderson, 2015). This genre of communication was adapted for organizational use during the early 2010s as a result of technological advancements (Ragan, 2013). In organizations, videoblogging is used for targeted internal messages with a short lifespan. Typically, these involve weekly news, diary-like reports of life in the organization, or fun anecdotes and announcements used for culture-building purposes. The easy access to cameras and distribution over the Internet has made the mediation of infections emotions, moods, and context simple and affordable even within large and dispersed organizations (Griffith and Papacharissi, 2010; Ragan, 2013; Mcfarland and Ployhart, 2015).
Videoblogs as a technology offer affordances (Gibson, 1977) for novel tactics in strategy consumption, emphasizing the instrumental, playful and intimate (Suominen and Mantere, 2010). The technology of strategy is intimately entwined with work practices and, thus, by necessity, influences the way people work with strategy (see eg. Kaplan, 2011; Dameron et al., 2015; Golsorkhi et al., 2015). The most significant characteristic of videoblogging is the embedded sense of authenticity in such recordings. That requires the blogger sticks to the genre-specific style of communication, because the media loses its ability to engage and impact directly, if the audience’s trust in authenticity is shattered (Griffith and Papacharissi, 2010; Hall, 2015). For organizational researchers, this means videoblogs need to be examined in their larger context. An interpretive qualitative approach is best suited to capturing the complexities of the videoblogging process, ranging from the analytical qualities of video data to the intentions of the sender and interpretations of the message by the receivers.

Further, these affordances of videoblogs are not without potentially substantial consequences for strategizing. Strategy tends to be viewed as a fairly cerebral and rational activity, where formal decision-making is used to draft long-range action plans based on clear roles, responsibilities, and implementation structures. Characterized as informal, entertaining, boundary breaking, and short-duration in its technological affordances, videoblogs can be the anathema of strategizing. This creates new risks related to asynchronous unilateral communication and self-styled strategy champions without formal authority, while offering a way to capture attention and reach out to the organization, just as society becomes more accustomed to visual communication. But there is a built-in fundamental tension to all this, namely, if strategy is rendered but another genre of media-based consumption, can it still retain its role as the central practice through which society tries to wrest control of the future?
This paper has aimed to lay the ground for future research on the spectacularization of organizations, particularly through the use of video, to answer questions such as this.
References


Melcrum ltd (2012) *Pfizer’s use of employee-generated content to maintain engagement through a change program, Viral communication in the workplace*. Available at: https://kollective.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/VC_pfizer-video_0.pdf.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Corporate video</th>
<th>Organizational Videoblog</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communicative style</strong></td>
<td>Multipurpose videos targeted both internally and externally. Eg. employee</td>
<td>Targeted messages to targeted audiences. Eg. weekly news.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>branding videos. Polished and scripted presentation with language that is suitable</td>
<td>Informal presentation that uses jargon and skips background information. Short lifespan,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation style</td>
<td>for different audiences. Typically a long lifespan, up to a few years. Same</td>
<td>from a few days up to a few weeks. Practically always an internal audience. The</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifespan</td>
<td>video is suitable for internal and external audiences. The audience is invited</td>
<td>audience is addressed directly in speech. Authenticity is expected. The presenter is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audiences</td>
<td>to listen to a story or a conversation but the audience is not an active</td>
<td>expected to present their true self. Human mistakes, like lost words, add to the sense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations on the genre</td>
<td>interlocutor. Similar expectations as for TV-shows: Smooth and professional</td>
<td>of authenticity, which is essential for gaining the audience’s trust and popularity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>delivery from the presenter.</td>
<td>(Hall 2015).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visual style</strong></td>
<td>Professional look and feel, similar to commercials and TV-shows. Typically, the</td>
<td>Homemade look and feel. The presenter is typically in a close-up as a “talking head”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staging</td>
<td>presenter is staged sitting or standing in a distinguishable place within the</td>
<td>but the presenter might be just a voiceover coming from behind the camera, while the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>company premises, looking past the camera as if talking to an interviewer.</td>
<td>camera is focused on showing something from the point-of-view of the presenter. The</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production style</td>
<td>The production is advanced, time consuming and expensive. The production uses</td>
<td>presenter typically talks straight to the camera looking at the audience through the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>multiple high quality sound sources, multiple camera angles, and professional</td>
<td>camera. Even when there are multiple actors on the video, the audience is acknowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>editing. Scenes are shots multiple times for best delivery. Typically, corporate</td>
<td>as if they were part of the conversation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>videos are produced externally unless the company has professional media</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>producers in-house.</td>
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</table>
Figure 1: The videoblogging process in the inside and outside context