Online media creation and L2 motivation: a socially-situated perspective

ABSTRACT

Digital technologies are increasingly common in language learning. While online media creation provides scope for agency, and spaces for identity construction, empirically-grounded conceptualizations of the influences on learners' motivation are lacking, the digital technology–L2 motivation interface remaining largely unexplored. Using a grounded theory ethnographic approach (Charmaz, 2006), and with the aim of developing a theoretical account of the emergence of motivation in online media creation, a blog project in an English language classroom in Sweden was investigated. Engaging with multiple data sources, and using Ito and colleagues' (2010) theory of participation in media practices as an analytical framework, motivation is conceptualized as stemming from the desire to create a visually appealing and authentic artefact, from a perception of audience, and through the documentation of identities. Variations in motivational intensity between student groups could be traced to varying investments in digital media practices. Primarily, differences were between validation-seeking locally oriented in nature, and validation-seeking conditioned through actions within a genre of practice. These conceptualizations are of importance for English language teaching. In language developing activities that involve online media creation, motivation can be enhanced when space for genre exploration is provided.

INTRODUCTION

Digital technologies are increasingly common in language learning in and outside classrooms (Lai, 2017). Although evidence of directly beneficial influences on linguistic outcomes is "slight and inconclusive", technology "may impact indirectly and positively on learner attitudes and behaviours" (Macaro et. al., 2012, p. 1). While positive motivational influences have been associated with a number of digital technologies (Golonka et al., 2014), they appear most noticeably in activities involving media production (Blake & Sh'iri, 2012; Kessler, Bikowski, & Boggs, 2012; Oskoz & Elola, 2014). As Blake (2016) has suggested, the use of digital technologies may "stimulate more effort, if not better writing" (p. 136). Speculating about the reasons for positive responses, Blake (2016) points to opportunities for interaction, personal expression, creative thinking and text-sharing, and argues that multimodal contexts provide learners with "greater agency and autonomy to produce language through digital forms" (p 137).

Providing enhanced possibilities for self-presentation and the creation of alternative identities, online environments constitute "primary settings through which routine constructions of identity are created" (Thorne, Sauro & Smith, 2015, p. 216). As Darvin and Norton (2016) have suggested, it is through participation in online discourse communities that identities are "performed, curated, and transformed", and in the negotiation of online relationships that learners are provided with often unique possibilities for "differentiating themselves through ways of speaking, seeing, thinking or acting" (p. 22). While it is recognised that the social and collaborative spaces of online interaction provide scope for agency and identity work (Blake, 2016; Darvin & Norton, 2016; Thorne et al., 2015), in the absence of research grounded in specific contexts of digital practice, and without robust conceptualizations of motivational influences arising when language learning involves

digitally-mediated interactions, the digital technology–L2 motivation interface remains somewhat of a black box.

Beyond generic conceptualisations of situated motivation derived from established models, L2 motivation research has little to offer in understanding the influences on learners' behaviour when social interaction and text production takes place online. As is in other areas of SLA, innovations in learning and teaching brought about by digital technologies demand increased disciplinary plurality (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016). In order to develop understandings of motivational processes involved when learning takes place in digital environments, L2 motivation research needs to broaden its conceptual horizons, and to draw on theorizing in epistemologically divergent fields.

Because online interaction takes place within social networks, the conceptualization of the emergence of L2 motivation in digital environments requires a shift from "researching isolated individuals, to exploring more explicitly relational perspectives" (Mercer, 2015, p. 80). Online communities provide spaces where people share common interests, and engage in recognizable forms of interaction (Gee & Hayes, 2010). In designs for learning that incorporate digitally-mediated interaction, an important aim is to forge connections between the textual genres of formal instruction, and the textual genres of online communities. Through such types of "bridging activity", the relevance of learning can increase (Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008). In developing understandings of the motivation that can arise when bridging activities involve participation in discourse practices online, sociocultural theories of young people's media engagement can provide important insights.

GENRES OF PARTICIPATION

In work exploring the media practices that contemporary youth experience as meaningful and motivational, and in line with the 'social turn' in literacy studies, Ito and her colleagues (2010, 2013) have developed an analytical framework for understanding young people's

engagement in online media production. Informed by Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of situated learning, young people's engagement with digital media is viewed as an interactive social activity where knowledge development occurs within particular communities of practice. Aligned with Jenkins (2006), who identifies distinct skills-sets deriving from modes of participation specific to particular media cultures, and Karaganis (2007) who describes how the various uses of digital technologies can be understood as specifically structured forms of social participation, Ito and colleagues (2010) argue that these communities constitute a legitimate focus of enquiry. In their construction of a broad-ranging conceptualization of the nature, forms and incentives for young people's participation in media practices, Ito and colleagues emphasize the link between social structures and social activities. They use the term *genres of participation* to describe the modes and conventions that structure patterns of engagement with particular media forms. In a genre of participation (GoP) people become part of the genre's shared cultural system, their engagement constituting a particular form of specialised and collective social action.

Identity projection online

In highly-digitalized networked societies, people recognize particularized patterns of representation, and engage in online interaction in routinized ways that constitute genre-specific and participatory forms of social response (Ito et al., 2010). In their engagement with online media, young people's social interaction takes place in both mainstream and niched mediums of networked communication. They become involved in processes of creating and distributing media that have genre-characteristic features, in genre-specific ways. As everyday media practices, these creative activities function to shape and reshape modes of expression and sociality (Ito et al., 2010).

In young people's communication and social networking, the development of an online profile is an essential part of peer-interaction and relationship-building. Digital

media production is integral in the creation and projection of identities. Developing an online presence places high demands on young people's creativity; not only does the media they produce circulate freely within local networks, it can also reach more widely-dispersed publics. Consequently, media production is always open to the critical gaze and assessment of other network participants, and of audiences removed in time and space. In this sense, Ito and colleagues' work has similarities with Norton's (2001) theory of investment in the recognition that membership of a digital community involves elements of imagination (Wenger, 1998). Real or imagined, audiences are ever-present and responses are always anticipated. This has the effect of ramping up the creativity stakes.

Visibility and validation as motivational forces

In online participation genres, the presentational skills involved in creating attractive images and videos are of the highest importance in successfully communicating messages and identities (Ito et. al., 2010). Just as in the world of professional video production and photography, in online digital media production and image-sharing, standard-setting and reputation-building are part of an ongoing process of social evaluation. This makes it difficult to exactly define the boundaries between serious media production (for example, when young people have their own YouTube channels), and the everyday documentation of a young person's life in social networking practices.

Even though young people recognise that the responses of online audiences may not be trustworthy sources of appraisal, in the production of digital media visibility and validation are central motivational influences. As Ito and colleagues (2010) explain, "the desire for sharing, visibility, and reputation is a powerful driver for creative production in the online world. While fellow creators provide the feedback that improves the craft, audiences provide the recognition and validation of the work that is highly motivational" (p. 280). Continuing, they explain that since media production is integral to young people's everyday

social interaction, the desire to gain status within a community of co-producers – who function both as collaborators and critics – is a major source of motivation in creating media that has appeal within the genre.

Across the range of media creation online, the construction of personal websites and personal blogs is a practice particularly driven by desires for recognition and validation. Placing high demands on digital self-projection, blogging is fundamentally about producing content that is aesthetically and technically appealing to others. Because blogging is a practice that anticipates constant updating, and because others' appraisals are actively solicited, in evaluating modes of self-expression people who blog develop high levels of reflexivity. Spurred by a need for recognition that is satisfied by attracting readers and stimulating communication within a community of followers, bloggers are motivated to constantly improve production quality, and to find innovative ways of representing the self (Korten & Svoen, 2006; Weber & Mitchell, 2008).

PURPOSE

Increasingly common in language learning, digital technologies can have positive influences on students' motivation (Golonka et al., 2014; Macaro et al., 2012). This may be particularly the case in relation to digital text production, the creation of online media offering opportunities for personal expression, creative thinking and audience interaction (Blake, 2016). Responsive to the need to integrate varying theoretical frameworks in studying aspects of learner psychology (Mercer & Ryan, 2016), and heeding Ushioda's (2016) call for L2 motivation research that is "grounded in specific contexts of practice" (p. 566), the purpose of this study is to develop a theoretical understanding of motivation that emerges in activities involving online media creation. Adopting a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006), and viewing blogging as a participatory process (Ito et al., 2010), the research was guided by the

question: *How can we understand L2 motivation that arises when learners create online media?*

METHODOLOGY

The MoTiSSE project

This study is part of a larger, multiple-case study carried out in Sweden. In the Nordic countries, students have extensive encounters with English outside the classroom, and a major motivational challenge facing teachers is to create learning opportunities that connect with these out-of-school experiences (Henry et al., 2018). In the Motivational Teaching in Swedish Secondary English (MoTiSSE) project, ethnographic research was carried out in the classrooms of 16 English teachers identified as knowledgeable about and interested in students' out-of-school activities involving English, as having a professional practice informed by these insights, and having students who were generally motivated. A detailed account of the recruitment procedures is provided in Henry and Thorsen (2018a, 2018b).

The case in focus: a blogging project

The exploration of motivation arising when students work with online text production has not previously been a focus of L2 motivation research. This makes it suitable for case study investigation. In case study research, the case selected is always a case of something (Duff, 2008). Here, the phenomenon studied is the ways in which the creation of online media influences students' motivation. The context within which this case is situated is a project in a 7th grade class where 13-year-old students created a blog about an imaginary trip to an English-speaking country. The project stretched over 5 weeks, and students worked in groups of four. The project requirements, in the form presented to the students, are provided in Appendix One.

I carried out all of the fieldwork which included observations of work in 9 English lessons. In common with other classroom ethnographic studies (De Costa, 2014), and studies

examining identity-construction in digital environments (Thorne et al., 2015), the analyses

drew on multiple layers of data. These are (i) fieldnotes from observations of the working

practices of four groups, (ii) posts on online blogging platforms created by these groups, and

(iii) a single 45-minute focus-group interview with students from the four groups[i]. Fieldnotes

were made in English. Interviews were conducted in Swedish and transcribed verbatim.

Information on group composition, blog content, and the number and length of posts is

provided in Table 1.

Table 1. The groups and the blogs.

Group	members	number of posts / average length (words)	Destination(s) and activities
'Alaska'	1 girl, 3 boys	15/55.5	*Anchorage* and *Montreal*. Excursions to Alaskan wilderness; road-trip from Anchorage to Montreal; NHL game in Montreal.
'Capital Cities'	4 girls	22/126.5	*London, New York, Washington, Miami*. Sightseeing (Madame Tussauds, The London Eye, The White House, The Pentagon), Disney World, SeaWorld.
'India'	2 girls, 2 boys	33/64.5	*Hyderabad*. Visit to an orphanage; a day at a water theme park; visit to a hill station; excursion to a wildlife park
'Florida'	4 girls	25/86	*Orlando*. Shopping, swimming with dolphins, trips to Disney World, Universal Studios, SeaWorld and Miami Beach.

Ethics

The research in the MoTiSSE project was conducted in accordance with the ethical

guidelines of the Swedish Research Council. Students in the observed classrooms (and their

parents/guardians for those under 15) were informed orally and in writing (students), and in writing only (parents/guardians), about (i) the purposes and procedures of the research, (ii) that participation was voluntary, (iii) that withdrawal was possible at any time and without need for explanation, and (iv) that confidentiality would be ensured. Researcher contact information was provided. In the current study, signed consent forms were received from the students and their parents/guardians. Return visits were made to the school and students were informed about the findings, and the ways in which their work would be presented.

Analytical procedures

In ethnographic research interpretive categories and conceptual insights emerge during the collection and analysis of data (De Costa, 2014). In a grounded theory ethnography, successive levels of analysis take place where, as result of interpretations that are increasingly informed by theory, initial descriptive codes become conceptually more sophisticated (Charmaz, 2006). While Hadley (2017) views this as an exercise in "thick theorization" (p. 37), Charmaz (2006) describes the interaction of data and ideas as a continuous process where "fleeting thoughts and immediate questions … prompt you to give your ideas concrete form in analytic writing" (p. 179).

Modelled on the methodology described by Gleason (2014) in a grounded ethnography case study of technology use, the following steps were taken. In a *first step*, understandings gained during the observations, from writing up the fieldnotes, from the interviews, and from reading the students' blogs, together formed the basis for a series of initial, open codes. Here I wrote memos of the insights I gained. In the *second step*, I carried out extensive reading of literature on young people's media practices. It was here that I identified Ito and colleagues (2010) theory of genres of participation as providing potentially valuable insights. In a *third step*, I read the coded data together with the literature in an iterative manner. Here my aim was to develop conceptually-informed understandings of the

motivational influences associated with creating the blogs. In this stage, closer analyses of the discourse features of the blog posts was carried out. I wanted to develop insights into the ways that, linguistically, and in the blog's assemblage, production could be understood as a digital media practice. From these back-and-forth analyses, three conceptual categories of motivational influence were identified; influences associated with (i) the artefact, (ii) the perception of audience, and (iii) the documentation of identities. In a *fourth step*, for each conceptual category, and across the whole dataset, I extracted examples. Here the purpose was to test and refine emerging conceptual understandings. Throughout this process my aim was to arrive at an abstract theoretical understanding of the students' engagement processes and, based on this, a conceptual account of influences on motivation.

A note on chronologies

In studies adopting grounded theory approaches, the research process and the research product do not necessarily share similar chronologies (Hadley, 2017). Although presented first, the theoretical framework set out in the literature review was applied following in-depth exploration and consideration of the research data.

RESULTS

From the lesson when the project was first introduced, students' responses were positive. In the group interview, students talked about how they enjoyed blogging, how this was different to anything they had previously encountered in school, and how the blog had become a priority:

> *EXTRACT 1*
>
> *I: So, you are saying that you were motivated these recent weeks?*
>
> *R1: Yes*
>
> *I: The whole time, or some of the time?*
>
> *R2: Mostly*

R1: The whole time

R3: The whole time!

R4: Like, with the blog, we have been talking about it during the breaks and it became a full-time thing. 'We need to fix it like this, so that it will be right'. Stuff like that.

Motivational influences

In classroom learning activities, motivation can arise from individual, relational, contextual and linguistic sources, all of which interconnect. Here, the novelty of the activity, and the opportunity to write about imaginary events in appealing destinations constitute important motivational preconditions. Additional to these motivational influences, students appreciated the activity because it involved a merging of schoolwork and leisure-time practices:

EXTRACT 2

I: So what is good about it?

R1: It is fun. Free-time. Stuff at home.

R2: We have never done anything like this before.

I: So is it completely new?

R2: Yes.

R3: It combines free-time and school.

I: Is that good?

R3: It is fun that you can come here, sit down and start reading a blog, like a story, so you read it and then start writing.

R1: And in that way you learn a lot more.

R2: It's very much like free-time, writing a blog

I: Is it something you do in your free-time? Or check other peoples?

R1: No.

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R3: Yes.

I: Not all of you but some? What more ... has been motivating?

R4: We get a lot of time to do it.

Turning to motivational influences stemming more specifically from the creation of online media, three core categories emerged in the analyses: *the desire to create a visually appealing and authentic artefact*, *the perception of an audience*, and *the documentation of identities*.

Attention to detail, and the desire to produce an appealing artefact were motivational aspects associated with the creation of the blog posts:

EXTRACT 3

I: How important was it to be able to create something attractive and nice?

R1: It was like a good motivation.

R2: I think it can more appealing to others.

R3: It is much more fun to go into a blog and check it out.

I: Was it something you discussed? Or was it just that appearance was an important thing?

R3: Of course you put in pictures and write about them. That's what all bloggers do.

I: But when Charlotta [teacher pseudonym] goes in and grades, she is not grading the pictures. She looks at the texts and evaluates your narratives. But the pictures and the appearance are still very important?

R2: It is easier to identify with if there are also pictures.

R4: I think it's more about the reader being able to understand much easier. It can feel as if you really have been to the places and taken a picture there, maybe.

> *R5: And it is more fun than just text.*

As the following responses indicate, although the students suspected that people outside school and families were probably not reading the blogs, they were nevertheless aware of a potential audience:

> *EXTRACT 4*
>
> *I: That you have been writing a blog, has that been of importance? You could have done something similar, like writing an essay, going away and finding information. That it was actually a blog?*
>
> *R1: You get more of a sense of involvement in it.*
>
> *I: Did it sometimes feel real?*
>
> *R2: Yes. It feels like you are writing to somebody. That it is not just… it feels as if there really is someone who is listening.*
>
> *R1: Yes.*
>
> *I: Were there any groups that actually had people looking at the blogs?*
>
> *R3: No. It was you and Charlotta.*
>
> *R4: My mum.*
>
> *R5: We got a follower once, but after a day they stopped subscribing. So it didn't go so well.*

Working collaboratively to produce a narrative form not normally encountered in school, the students talked of valuing opportunities for self-expression:

> *EXTRACT 5*
>
> *I: Is there anything more that has been fun?*
>
> *R3: That you get to work with English in different ways.*
>
> *R5: That you get to work with others.*
>
> *I: So working in groups with each other, and variation?*

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> *R1: Collaboration.*

> *R4: And in the blog project that you can write a lot about yourself.*

Differential influences

Each of these core categories was identified as a motivational source for each of the four groups. However, the nature of the influences differed. For the group who blogged about an imaginary trip to Florida, engagement was intense and enduring. In content, assemblage and use of rhetorical strategies, the posts they created mirrored those of other blogs on the platform they used. For these students, motivation can be understood as deriving from participation within the GoP of young women's lifestyle blogging. In the other three groups engagement fluctuated. Although motivation is traceable to similar desires for authentic self-projection, their blogs did not replicate genre conventions in ways characteristic of the 'Florida' group. For these students, engagement with online media was more generally characteristic of social networking, validation-seeking being primarily locally-conditioned within the immediate peer-group.

First, analyses of the 'Florida' group's work are presented. Then, in the analyses of the work of the other groups, contrasts between the differing forms of participation are highlighted. In the discussion, I draw on Ito and colleagues' (2010) categorization of youth engagement with digital media to conceptualize the differing motivational influences.

THE 'FLORIDA' GROUP

For the girls in the 'Florida' group, the opportunity to create a blog about an imaginary journey was highly motivational. Arriving to lessons together, they would go directly to the corner of the classroom established as 'their' space and begin working. Although appearing as posts written by individual members, entries were jointly discussed and edited. When lessons were over, the girls would often continue working into the break, the teacher having

to interrupt and remind them to go to the next lesson. Two years later, on a return to the school to show the students how their work would be presented in this article, the girls recalled the activity as the best thing they had ever done in school, and as having had an enduring influence on their motivation to learn English.

From a list prepared by the teacher, the 'Florida' girls chose a site hosting young women's lifestyle blogs, and which included popular blogs within the genre. For young women who blog, other bloggers function as role-models, the self-presentations of better-known bloggers providing inspiration for their own productions (Dmitrow-Devold, 2017). Like many of the other bloggers who used the site, the 'Florida' girls wrote about things of concern to young females, such as dining out, consumer choices and outfits (Lövheim, 2011; Sinanan et al., 2014).

A visually appealing and authentic artefact

With dozens of well-known attractions in Florida, the girls' classroom discussions often involved decision-making about excursions. Replete with eye-catching images, their posts described trips to Disney World, SeaWorld and Universal Studios, a day at Miami Beach, swimming with dolphins, and an overnight trip to Florida's west coast. Also included were numerous visits to restaurants and shopping malls. Central in these discussions were concerns of authenticity; a desire to produce something recognizably 'real' influenced the content, construction and assemblage of the blog. An example of the importance attached to creating authentic and visually appealing posts is seen in extract 6, where the girls were searching for pictures:

EXTRACT 6 (fieldnote)

There are constant exclamations and discussions back and forth of different pictures. It seems that this is proving to be difficult. They have different ideas and preferences. They also seem to be very concerned that the picture should be right. They have different ideas about the scene, what the girls in the pictures they look at are doing, and how they look. A picture which they all seem to like – and which prompts immediate positive responses – is of girls on a sunset

beach, their hands stretching to the sky. "That one! That one!" "Yes that's it!".
They settle on the picture of girls on the beach in the sunset. (I note that picture
is quite shady and it could indeed be them). When they seem to have decided on
this picture, they then import the image and start editing the picture. This
appears to involve some shading, but also fixing the dimensions so that it will
fit in the space on the blog site. (AH note: This work is not only highly
engaging – the girls spending the whole lesson peering into the screen – but the
assessing of pictures and the editing seems completely natural. A practice that
they are wholly used to (perhaps from their own free-time activities). They also
seem to be very concerned about the aesthetics of the blog and the profile
picture).

For young women bloggers, the need to create an appealing aesthetic is of singular importance (Lövheim, 2011). The girls took great care in selecting and editing images they judged to be appealing and authentic representations of blogged-about events. In the absence of local settings deemed to be suitably authentic, rather than taking real pictures of themselves, the girls searched online sources for images of young women in appropriate settings. The girls' concern with authenticity also involved the selection and presentation of images of objects and places. In the assemblage of young women's blogs, aspects put on display are carefully selected, "the frequency with which certain images appear (e.g. product descriptions, food, clothing, travel destinations)…reflect[ing] everyday preoccupations and concerns of young female consumers" (Sinanan et al., 2014, p. 201). The images included in the blog posts display and reflect interests and activities that are self-defining for these girls, and include food, travel, leisure activities and shopping destinations (see figure 1 and figure 2). Characteristic of the genre of young women's lifestyle blogging (Dmitrow-Devold, 2017; Sinanan et al., 2014), the images are similar to those to be found in other blogs on the platform.

[*FIGURE 1*]

[*FIGURE 2*]

References to self-defining consumer choices similarly characteristic of young women's blogs also feature in the text, as seen in extract 7. Here, in a post telling about preparations for an excursion, the writer carefully describes how each of the girls is dressed, and references the brand-name clothes they wear ("`Disa had some black shorts, one white vans t-shirt, vansshoes and a white vans bag`").

EXTRACT 7

```
                        UNIVERSAL


Today we woke at nine o'clock. We jumped up from our beds to
do some breakfast. We aet littel youghurt, nutella sandwich
and some juice. A typical breakfast for us. After the
breakfast we put on our chlotes. Disa had some black shorts,
one white vans t-shirt, vansshoes and a white vans bag. Clara
had one flowerskirt with a black tank top and some brown
flipflops. Alva had a blue dress and one pair of sandals. I
have one jumpshuit with big flowers and some "ballerinashoes".
When we all were done we took our bags and Went out. Alva
wanted to drive so yeah..
                         Have a nice day from Bella
```

The spacing, and space taken up by the text, are also part of the creation of an aesthetically appealing and authentic artefact. In a manner similar to young women bloggers in Singapore (Sinanan et. al., 2014) and Norway (Dmitrow-Devold, 2017), and to the other lifestyle blogs on the platform, visual images are accorded the greatest prominence. Texts are kept concise, and generally placed beneath catchy titles (e.g., 'HORROR NIGHT UNIVERSAL!', 'THE BEST DAY OF MY LIFE' and 'SHOPPING!!!!'), and attractive images. As Dmitrow-Devold (2017) observes, keeping textual content concise is a feature that adds to a blog's appeal.

Perceptions of audience

As Myers (2010) makes clear, with blogs "the audience is always at least potentially there in the text" (p. 9). Even though the girls' blog is a school project which they acknowledge is not frequently read by outsiders, they are aware of the evaluative gaze of an implied audience. Here, the presence of a potential audience is accentuated in that the blogs are posted on a platform used by other young women bloggers. As Ito and colleagues (2010) explain, in the creation of online media, audience validation and the desire for "sharing, visibility, and reputation" (p. 280) constitute significant sources of motivation.

In addition to the influence that the critical gaze of a potential audience has on the blog's content and assemblage, a presumed audience also influences the authorial stance. People who write blogs create an "audience-in-the-text". As Myers (2010) explains, while this implied audience "may not be the same as their actual audience", it "provides an impression of a friendly but sometimes mocking circle of people who share the bloggers' interests and views" (p. 77). Like other lifestyle bloggers, the girls' texts are written in ways that signal engagement with readers. This can be seen in extract 7, where the writer offers a lively account of the start of a day: `Today we woke at nine o' clock. We jumped up from our beds to do some breakfast.` and continues, `When we were all done we took our bags and Went out. Alva wanted to drive, so yeah..`

The expressions 'to **do** `some breakfast`', and, 'when we were all **done**' not only evidence genre competence and media literacy (New London Group, 1996), but also signal affinity with an implied audience of young females who follow lifestyle bloggers. Specifically, the writer's use of this hip vernacular demonstrates how she too is a culturally savvy young woman. In a similar way, the girls' posts include interactive language characteristic of blogging, for example the use of conversational particles (Myers, 2010). In

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this post the words '**so yeah..**' at the end enact a personal conversation between writer and audience. While the writer indicates acquiescence in her friend's desire to be their driver, she at the same time invites an implied audience to share in her skepticism.

Similarly, in extract 8, when the same writer describes a visit to a restaurant and some shops, she digresses from the description of events to impart personal information to imagined readers: **Yay, I love cheesecake very much** and later **Again, I love cheesecake.** Later, at the end of the post, further private conversation is enacted when the writer describes an event where she wanted to go home, and how this caused a conflict: **'they get littel mad on me** but we went home **anyways'**. This private conversation between the writer and the implied audience continues when the post ends with another conversational particle: **Keep running ;)** //Bella, the closing remark and the typographic emoticon emphasizing a personal connection.

EXTRACT 8

CHEESECAKE FACTORY

When we came to Sawgrass we went to CHEESECAKEFACTORY!!! Yay, I love cheesecake very much. The resturant was so big andcool. We all bought pasta and a oreocheesecake and some coca cola. Every thing tasted so good. Again, I love cheescake. After we ate we shopped candy and snacks on the target. I bought chocolate, reeses and snacks. After that we walked in to VS and Holister. After that I was so tired so I said that I wanted to go home. They get littel mad on me but we went home anyways.

The day was fun. Keep running ;) // Bella

The desire to create a relationship with an implied audience also extends to the presentation of the self. Even though young women lifestyle bloggers are expected to engage in desirable social activities, ostentation and provocative self-performance are eschewed. Such behaviors risk alienating followers, who can react negatively to activities indicating self-obsession and greed (Lövheim, 2013). It is therefore noteworthy that while visits to brand-name clothing stores are frequently blogged about, little is written about purchases. For example in extract 8, while the writer describes in detail the mundane activity of buying candy in a convenience store, she makes no mention of any purchases made in the more up-market stores they visit.

In the interview, the girls in the 'Florida' group were asked specifically about why they had not blogged more about making purchases of consumer goods, and why they had instead written about more everyday activities, such as buying sweets and playing cards in their hotel room:

> *EXTRACT 9*
>
> *R1: There was a lot of shopping the whole time so we tried to keep it realistic.*
>
> *I: Why did you try to keep it realistic?*
>
> *R1: Because, I don't know, it is much simpler so to say, if you do it like it could have happened for real.*
>
> *R2: Or if we had written that we bought this and that, it would have been a little tiresome.*
>
> *R3: A little irritating.*

While the girls' concern with authenticity can be understood in describing shopping activities that might reasonably be possible for a thirteen-year-old, it can also be understood within the context of the GoP of young women's blogging. In young women's lifestyle blogging, the greatest challenge for a blogger is to create varied and appealing content that enables them to

stand out in a competitive environment, while at the same time maintaining an empathetic relationship with their followers (Dmitrow-Devold, 2017, Lövheim, 2011, 2013). Consequently, even though the girls do not have an actual audience of followers, their downplaying of the material aspects of blogged-about activities can be understood as congruent with lifestyle blogging, where writing too much about shopping can alienate readers.

The documentation of identities

As friends outside the classroom, the activity provided the girls with an opportunity to give expression to social bonds. Women's blogs are often driven by relational concerns (Hans et al., 2010). Alongside consumer choices and materialistic values, young women's blogs often feature demonstrations of friendship, empathy and mutuality (Lövheim, 2013). Indeed, because in young women's blogs the discussion of values, identities and relationships takes place within a wider arena, their blogging can be understood as "a communicative practice where the performance of self becomes the message as well as the mode of communication" (Lövheim, 2011, p. 625).

In detailing everyday events, blogs provide spaces for the display of social connectedness, and the performance of identities and relationships (Rettberg, 2008). Writing about young people's digital media production, Weber and Mitchell (2008) explain that "identities, whether individual or collective, are not unitary wholes cut out of a single cloth—they are constructed in action, using whatever cultural and life material is at hand" (p. 43). Seen this way, the blog provides the girls with opportunities to document both *personal* and *relational* identities. While personal identities reference personality aspects of the self (being shy or self-confident, friendly or aloof, serious or fun-loving), relational identities are personal identities that involve relationships. As Tracy and Robles (2013) explain, "there is a certain kind of self-presentation that is specifically about the kind of person one is *in a*

relationship: as a particular sort or quality of friend, lover, mother, brother, and so forth" (p. 232, original emphasis). Writing about everyday events, the girls' posts give expression to a collective identity (who they are *as* a group), and to relational identities (who each one is *within* the group).

EXTRACT 10

ANNA MARIE ISLAND

The trip went really well. Bella sleep the whole trip, it was a bit quieter in the car now, haha.. We thought she need to sleep. For now she feel great. Finally, we are in the amazing house. It's really big. Everyone has there own room and bathroom, the beds are huge. The best thing about the house is the swimmingpool, kitchen and smart TV that has youtube and Netflix. Alva has never been so lucky. We live in a paradise. The first thing we did when we got there was to pack up our clothes and take on the bikini. It was so hot, so we jump in the pool and play volleyball. It was really fun. After a while we went up and made ourselves *prepared*. I have a dress with flowers on me and my new sunglasses. At 6 PM, we went and ate on a cozy place out on a pier. All ordered hamburgers and a large glass of water. When we finished the meal we went back to hang around. Bella and I bought ice cream on the way home. The ice cream was really good!! It's been a fantastic day, we'll never forget.

Goodnight

❤️

Clara

In this extract the writer describes a drive to the coast, the girls' excitement on arrival at a rented beachside house (`Finally, we are in the amazing house`), and the things they do immediately afterwards (`The first thing we did when we got there was to pack up our clothes and take on the bikini. It was so hot, so we jump in the pool and play volleyball. It was really fun.  After a while we went up and made ourselves`

prepared.). In a post highlighting togetherness and collective belonging, the systematic use of 'we' functions to emphasize social cohesion. However, while the projection of a collective identity is mostly prominent, the text also gives expression to the girls' relational identities. As Myers (2010) observes, the pronoun 'we' can be inclusive and exclusive. These differing functions are revealed in the opening sentences where the writer voices a stance she shares with two of the others, lightheartedly poking fun at their fourth member: (`We thought she need to sleep`).

As the text unfolds, relational identities are further revealed; Bella is outgoing and extrovert (`it was a bit quieter in the car now, haha..`), Alva is passionate about TV-series (`Alva has never been so lucky`) and Clara, the writer, is fashion-conscious (`I have a dress with flowers on me and my new sunglasses`). In the context of descriptions here, and in other posts describing how activities are done collectively, the light-hearted comments about individual preferences and personal idiosyncrasies reveal how the blog provides opportunities for the projection of collective and relational identities. These enactments of relatedness can be understood as reflecting an external social reality that, in the online spaces created in this classroom project, stimulates investment in self-expression.

THE OTHER GROUPS

Similarly focusing on the three core categories of motivational influence emerging in the analyses, I now look at the other groups. Like the 'Florida' group, these students were also excited about the project. Throughout, from the first lesson to the last, they periodically demonstrated high levels of engagement. However, compared to the 'Florida' girls, energy levels fluctuated. There were also noticeable differences within each group. For example, while students would sometimes continue working after class, unlike the 'Florida' group this did not happen frequently. Periods of intense excitement and frenetic activity could be

followed by periods doing other things, such as visiting websites unconnected with the project, and walking round the classroom. While in the 'India' and 'Capital Cities' groups, two girls consistently demonstrated greater motivation than their colleagues, in the 'Alaska' group work was largely driven by the sole girl member. When on two occasions she was absent, the boys could struggle to maintain focus.

A visually appealing and authentic artefact

In all three groups students were extremely concerned about the aesthetics of the blog, and about authenticity. Like the 'Florida' girls, choosing pictures was highly important. Long discussions would precede any decision to include a particular image. However, while the images included in the blogs were exotic and appealing, less attention was paid to the layout of a post. While like many of the other blogs on the hosting site, the 'Florida' girls' posts had a systematically cohesive format – a catchy title, an attractive image and a concise text – for the other three groups assemblage was more haphazard. Sometimes text would appear without a title or an immediately accompanying image. Equally, pictures could be included without any text. Further, while the texts written by the 'Florida' girls were always concise and compactly-spaced, in each of the other groups posts varied in length and structure. For example, in the 'Capital Cities' group, posts varied from a single line, to in excess of 300 words.

In extract 11 and extract 12 two posts about a visit to SeaWorld are presented for the purpose of comparison. While the first, written by the 'Florida' girls, ('SEAWORLD LUNCH TIME'), is compositionally similar to many other posts on the host platform, the post by the 'Capital Cities' students ('SEA WORLD (DAY 10)') differs in significant respects from the format more generally typical of lifestyle blogs. Even though it contains an emoticon, and has a light-hearted and engaging tone, the length, the spaced paragraphs, the strict narrative chronology, and the lack of immediately adjacent visual images all function to

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distinguish it from blogs typically found on the platform. Rather, the text appears and reads more like a school assignment:

EXTRACT 11   (blog post, 'Florida' group)

```
                    SEAWORLD LUNCH TIME


Sea World lookedsoooooooo cool!!!!! We thought it would just
were some animals but no. We saw somany attractions. Alva said
"Foooooooood timeee!!" We laughed and I just said "Alva, we ate
for about twenty minutes ago." We started to se a some sharks,
really interesting animals. I saw some churros and get panic!
I LOVE churos. I said "INEED CHUROS IN MY LIFE NOW!!!!"
Everybody laughed and just said "Alright". We bought 20 st. I
ate 15 of them. hehe. We just headout some attractions, itwas
so funny! We decided to ate fish and chips. Yummy:)
```

Have a nice day from Bella

EXTRACT 12   (blog post, 'Capital Cities' group)

```
               SEA WORLD (DAY 10)


Hey you guys!


Right now we're in Orlando, Florida. Today we've been at Sea
World, and we've had so much fun. There were so many things to
do, for example: Watch dolphin shows, ride water slides and
attractions, visit parks and much more. We spent the whole day
there. We ate at the first fast food place we could find,
because we were sooo hungry! Especially me, i'm always hungry.
The place was called 'Sharks underwater grill' and it was
really good food.


This is definitely worth all of the money, the time went so
fast, and we laughed all the time! ☺
```

```
Here in Florida there are lots of exotic animals, and since
we're on a place that are known for having cool (underwater)
animals, which drags lots of people. The weather was really
good and hot, but we made it through the day!


Today was really fun, but i'm actually much more excited for
tomorrow when we're going to disney world. i'm a big disney
fan (always have been) so it'll be superfun. Something that is
not as fun is that this trip is over soon, we are already on
day 10, and we're going home in just four days, we'll make
sure to have lots of fun these last days.


Now the four of us are really tired, and soon we're going to
go to bed. Personally I really like this hotel. I think the
name is Florida resort and hotel.


Anyways, I'll see you guys next time.


Goodbye<3 // [Girl 1]
```

The blogs created by the other three groups also differed from the 'Florida' blog in another important respect. Unlike the 'Florida' girls, whose striving for authenticity precluded the use of photographs of themselves due to the unavailability of authentic settings, in the other three groups achieving authenticity took another form. In these groups, students took great care in taking pictures of themselves using appropriately authentic props (e.g. travel bags), and in parts of the school viewed as representationally authentic (figure 3). For example, a cafeteria bench substituted for an airport-lounge sofa, and a nondescript corner of the classroom functioned as the floor of a bus station waiting room:

[*FIGURE 3*]

Perceptions of audience

The sense of engagement with imaginary readers is another aspect in which posts by the other groups differed from those of the 'Florida' girls. Recalling how people who blog create an audience-in-the-text (Myers, 2010), it is instructive to return to the posts written about the visits to SeaWorld. In the post by the 'Capital Cities' girls (extract 12), other than the disclosure of personal information in paragraph four `I'm a big disney fan (always have been),` there are no rhetorical moves directly addressing an imagined audience. In the 'Florida' girls' post however (extract 11), the audience-in-the-text is more prominent. In the first line, when the writer says `We thought it would just were some animals but no,` this self-revealing insight provides imaginary readers with information about the girls' naivety. The playful self-depreciation continues when the subject of lunch arises. Not only does the writer poke fun at her friend, `we ate for about twenty minutes ago,` but in conversation with the implied reader, also at herself: `hehe` and `Yummy:).`

As we saw previously, sensitivity to the value judgements of imaginary readers meant that the 'Florida' girls took care to avoid acts of ostentation that could be perceived as tiresome and alienating. For the other three groups, blogged-about activities could also be low-key. Often, meals were taken in McDonalds and Starbucks, rather than more up-market restaurants. Neither did these groups write about luxury purchases, or meeting celebrities. Like the 'Florida' group, the 'Capital Cities' girls also blogged about going clothes shopping, but sometimes not finding things to buy. Nevertheless, the concern with keeping things down-to-earth was not as systematic. The 'Alaska' and 'Capital City' groups both stayed at five-star hotels. The 'Capital Cities' girls jetted from one metropolis to another, and the 'Alaska' group purchased a vintage car for a transcontinental road-trip.

The documentation of identities

In young people's everyday communication, the creation of digital media functions "as a way of documenting their lives and as a means of self-expression" (Ito, et al., 2010, p. 290). Blogs provide spaces for displaying social connectedness, and for the performance of identities and relationships (Rettberg, 2008). In this respect, the blogs of all four groups evidence displays of identity, the students' posts containing plentiful examples of identity performances where the interests and preferences of individual group members are put on display. However, there are two noticeable differences between the 'Florida' group and the other three. First, in the other groups' blogs, posts written by a particular member could sometimes involve positioning themselves in oppositional ways to the others, for example by describing doing things separately (see also Henry & Thorsen, 2018c). On occasion, a post could reflect a real-life conflict or disagreement within the group, and a deliberate self-distancing by the writer. As shown in extract 13 and extract 14, this could involve not participating in a common activity, or not travelling with the others:

EXTRACT 13 (blog post, 'India' group)

```
CHALA


Hi!


We have eat on a restaurant now so we are full. We will now go
to the mountain. it's not far from the orpanage so we will
walk there. I don't know exactly what we are going to do there
but it will be fun. [Boy] is super taggish, he is so happy and
that is great.

[Girl 1] did not feel good so she walked home after the
restaurant, so she will not be with us up on the mountain.

Tomorrow we will leave because we are going back to Hyderabad
we will go to Jalavihar for some swimming. I think we will
have a great time there. It will be fun!!

// [Girl 2]
```

EXTRACT 14   (blog post, 'Capital Cities' group)


```
                WESTFIELD STRATFORD CITY (DAY 2 FRIDAY)


Hi guys! How are you? We are exhausted after a long day full
of shopping. It's been so much fun trying on sooo much clothes
and outfits. We also met some wonderful new people. They were
also headed to the USA so they decided to join us on our
journey, and we thought that it would be a great idea. Their
names are [Girl 3] and [Girl 4] and they were total strangers
to us at first, but in a very short time we got know
eachother. We thought it would be fun if we met tomorrow again
when we should look at Buckingham Palace and big ben. We also
want to try fish and chips, since that's a really known dish
for English people.


We hope [Girl 3] and [Girl 4] want to write about themselves
here on the blog as soon is possible.


Bye bye!


// [Girl 1] and [Girl 2]
```


The second sense in which the blogs of the other three groups differ is that, unlike the

'Florida' girls, whose posts reveal the creation and projection of collective *and* relational

identities, these do not emerge in the other blogs. While there are explicit expressions of

togetherness and affiliation (for example in the final posts where they reflect on the journey),

and the students often describe themselves collectively (e.g. "the crew" in the 'India' group),

there are no expressions of relational identities (i.e. who each person is within the group).

DISCUSSION

Hanging out and messing around

Using an ecological framing to describe young people's media practices, Ito and her colleagues (2010) identify three types of investment: 'hanging out', 'messing around' and 'geeking out' (p. 35). *Hanging out* describes participation in media practices that are driven by concerns of friendship, such as everyday social networking, and where engagement is motivated by the desire for interpersonal connection. *Messing around* represents the emergence of more intense forms of media engagement. It is a practice that transitions between the more friendship-focused and communication-driven forms of media use in 'hanging out', and more niched and interest-driven activities such as gaming and fanfiction writing which Ito and colleagues conceptualize as 'geeking out'. As Ito and colleagues explain, "motivations for messing around can vary from the desire to establish or maintain connections with others through new media, to aspirations to learn about new media because of an interest in the subject or in a topic that is well represented through new media" (p. 53). In the context of blogging, 'messing around' is an in-between phase of online participation where media use involved in social networking evolves into more technically-focused modes of engagement. As Ito and colleagues (2010) observe, in creating a blog young people can find themselves "tinkering, learning and getting serious about particular modes or practices" (p. 76).

For the 'India', 'Alaska' and 'Capital Cities' groups, the creation of online texts in the blog project is akin to media practices more generally associated with social networking, and where presentations of the self are relevant primarily within immediate peer-networks, and in relation to people with whom they have real-life connections. For these groups, the creation of online media can be understood as a form of 'hanging out' that involves "lightweight social contact that moves fluidly between online and offline contact"

(Ito et al., 2010, p. 38). As a means of self-representation, the students' motivation to create an aesthetically appealing and authentic artefact is driven by the anticipated evaluations of immediate peers, the documentation of identities thus having *local* significance.

For the 'Florida' girls, engagement in the blog is more serious and more intense. Achieving a higher degree of aesthetic finesse and greater representational authenticity, the girls' engagement with the media practice of lifestyle blogging stretches beyond simply 'hanging out'. Differing little in content, assemblage and rhetorical style from many of the other lifestyle blogs on the host platform, blogging about their imaginary journey can be understood as a form of legitimate peripheral participation in the GoP of women's lifestyle blogging (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and an investment having the characteristics of 'messing about' (Ito et al., 2010). For these girls, the evaluative standards that motivate their work in creating online media are different from those motivating the investments of the students in the other groups. Rather than a desire simply for local peer-group validation, it is the experience of participating within a more interest-driven activity that generates the "affinity, passion, and engagement" that is characteristic of their working practices (Ito et al., 2013, p. 64).

Other influences on motivation

While Ito and colleagues' (2010) framing of media practices as variously involving 'hanging out' and 'messing around' provides a conceptualization that can help account for these students' motivation, other factors are also influential. The activity was unlike anything the students had ever done before. It was the first time they had worked in ways that involved bridging between worlds in and outside the classroom. Consequently, the simple fact of being able to work creatively with 'real' material online is likely to have been highly motivational (Henry, 2013).

A factor additionally accounting for differences between the 'Florida' girls and the students in the other groups involves group dynamics. Not only were these girls friends outside the classroom, they had also chosen to work together. Group cohesiveness (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003) was thus present from the start. This was not the case for the other groups, the teacher pairing students she expected to be more positive with those whose interest might not have been as great. In addition to lacking this motivational cohesion, in the other groups students took on particular roles. For example in the 'Alaska' group the girl (who coincidentally maintained a blog in real life) would often acquiesce in some of the boys' more outlandish ideas. In the 'India' group the two boys would often allow the girls to decide about content and presentation. Similarly, in the 'Capital Cities' group, while two of the girls were highly engaged in writing the posts, the other two were often less involved.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In conceptualizing L2 motivation as emergent in interactions between people in unfolding contexts of cultural activity, Ushioda (2009) argues for the integration of varying theoretical frameworks. Such integration, she contends, can inform the analysis of interaction processes, and can generate understandings of how "motivation shapes and is shaped through engagement in L2-related activity" (p. 225). In a spirit of transdisciplinarity (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016), the current study seeks to extend understandings of L2 motivation as emergent within socially situated practices in language classrooms. Viewing motivation as relationally shaped (Mercer, 2015; Ushioda, 2009), and drawing on theorizing of youth media practices (Ito et al., 2010, 2013), conceptualizations of motivational influences deriving from the creation of online media are developed. When online media creation takes place in unfamiliar genres, and when expressions of identity are mostly of importance in the context of local communities, the motivation to engage in online media production may be mostly generated by desires for recognition, connection and belonging more generally characteristic of social

networking. However, when media creation occurs in a GoP within which students are, or *become* active participants, motivation can be understood as generated through engagement in legitimate peripheral practice, and in knowledgeable forms of acting.

These insights have importance for English language teaching. In situations where students have extensive experiences of English in online environments, teachers' instructional repertoires increasingly include digital technologies (Henry et al., 2018). In understanding the emergence of L2 motivation in networked spaces, it is important that influences stemming from digitally-mediated social interaction are adequately conceptualized. As language learning continues to move into digital environments, so too do opportunities for media production in online communities. With an increased presence of networked publics, the circumspection and evaluation of real and imagined others is a motivational influence likely to be of growing importance. For teachers of English, the insight that it may not only be immediate peers, but also anonymous networked publics that serve as critical audiences for students' media creation has implications for practice. In activity design, the motivational affordances associated with online identity-construction and self-representation may be more optimally exploited if space is made available for genre exploration, and if students have the opportunity to generate media within communities of practice with which they may be familiar.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Spending time with these students, one of the most important ethical considerations involved not taking advantage of accommodations that would have interrupted their workflow (De Costa, 2014; Mahboob et al., 2016). Not wanting to impinge unduly on lesson-time or recess periods, interviews were kept to a minimum. Thus, rather than separately interviewing each group, I carried out a single focus group interview that included students from all of the four groups. Similarly, and also as a consequence of the design choice of following four different

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groups, in-depth on-site conversations were not carried out. In future research, staggering

lesson observations (De Costa, 2014), and limiting focus to one particular group, would

provide ethically justifiable opportunities to talk with students in greater depth about their

motivational state during media creation processes. Situated insights gained in this way could

enable more refined interpretations to be made. Similarly, classroom ethnographies could be

usefully complemented with student-created process logs documenting text-production

activities occurring outside class time. In situations where ethical considerations permit, the

video and audio-recording of students' work practices would be of significant value, not only

as a complementary data source, but also in frequently-spaced stimulated recall interviews.

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i In this interview three of the four girls in the 'Florida Group' took part. Two students from each of the other three groups also participated.

Appendix One

WHAT IS A BLOG ?

Like a Diary

- What you do and what you see.
- What it smells like and how it tastes.
- Your feelings and thoughts about it.
- Comparisons - between what you are familiar with and what is new to you.
- Maby like a smorgasbord with a lot of things you have done and seen that you perhaps would like the readers to envy...

What to think of?

- Write every day.
- Make sure you tell which day it is and the date.
- Tuesday 12 January.
- Don't forget to be thorough concerning your spelling, names of sights (The Statue of Liberty) and VERBS.
- Check your facts before writing about it – don't make any guesses.

Where should you check your facts?

On the internet of course.
BUT – do not use Wikipedia. It's not a safe page...
IF you still *have* to use Wikipedia, you need to use another source as well, to make sure you get the facts right.
Maby you have actually been there – then **you are** the source and we rely on you, right?

What should you blog about?

- A journey, a fictive trip that you make together with your friends.
- To an English speaking country.
- The journey will last for a fortnight (fourteen days/two weeks).
- You should write at least one blog post every day. Some of them, you write together BUT you will have to write FIVE individual blog posts during these two weeks.
- Every blog post has to be signed by the one/the ones who have written it.
- You should also post ONE video blog during your journey – and you do this together in your group.

What about sports then...???

- Since you all take an active part in sports, both in school and on your sparetime – maby you feel like including some sort of sports event into your journey...
...and that is just okay!

You should write about...

- The journey itself – by car, bus, boat, train, plane, taxi.
- Where you stay – hotel, apartment, caravan, tent, staying at someone's house...
- What you do, where you go, sights you visit...
- What things cost...
- What you can or can not buy...
- What you eat and drink...
- Animals you see or have an encounter with...
- Weather...
- Climate...
- Religion...
- Traditions...
- Time differences...

AND make sure you...

- Talk about it and COMPARE between Sweden and your "new" country.
- Similarities?
- Differences?

Don't forget...

...pictures.
Not of everything, but of some of the things you write about.

And think about the fact that your readers have not been there, they don't know a thing about what you write about, or what you show in your pictures, so you need to be thorough in your text as well when you choose pictures.

And maby you actually have pictures of your own that you can use...

Which English speaking countries are there?

- Great Britain (England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland)
- Ireland
- South Africa
- Australia
- New Zealand
- India
- The USA
- Canada
- The West Indies

BLOGGPORTALER

- Devote
- Spotlife
- Blogg.se
- Nouw
- For.me