Designing and evaluating personalized lifestyle blog using Wordpress

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Designing and evaluating personalized lifestyle blog using Wordpress

by

Sijia He

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ART

Major: Graphic Design

Program of Study Committee:

Sunghyun R. Kang, Major Professor
Andrea Quam
Su Jung Kim

The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this thesis. The Graduate College will ensure this thesis is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2018

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ABSTRACT

“Blog” is a concentrate of “weblog” and was invented in the late 1990s to provide a chronological ordered calendar style method of discussion or informational websites published on the Internet. People are motivated by different reasons to start or run a blog, which means there are many different types of blogs. Some blogs focus on a particular subject such as a lifestyle blog, which is best defined as a digital content representation of its author's everyday life and interests.

Blogging in itself is quite popular, but it would not be what it is today without blog platforms such as WordPress, Tumblr, Squarespace, and others. Setting up a blog with these tools can give people more control and flexibility as they provide niche-specific templates in multiple categories that people can choose from.

This study focused on the lifestyle blog templates provided by WordPress and explores the potential for improvement of lifestyle blog design. This study employed the case study method to investigate examples of lifestyle blogs in current networks. There were two phases in this study. In Phase 1, the researcher analyzed the most popular lifestyle blogs based on the blogger’s Twitter followers and analyzed ten popular lifestyle templates provided by WordPress and examined the design elements like the use of colors, typefaces, layout, and interactions. From the results of Phase 1, the researcher designed three different lifestyle blogs with WordPress using the same content. One design looked similar to the existing lifestyle blog, the other two designed in more creative and innovative ways. In Phase 2, nine experts in web design and user experience design industry were recruited to evaluate the three different lifestyle blogs. These evaluators were asked to compare the three designs and selected their favorite.
Finally, this study concluded with the opportunities as well as the limitations when designing lifestyle blogs by WordPress, as well as gave suggestions on how to balance creativity and content when designing a lifestyle blog.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Blogging has become popular for most of recent generations worldwide. It can be a hobby, a place to express peoples’ feelings, and a respectable career, and now it is a global phenomenon. With the growth of the internet, paper publications are often replaced by screens and readers are targeted on a global basis. Blogging became hugely popular at the start of the 21st century and has been one of the foundations of the internet. It is difficult to determine the number of people who write blogs with accuracy, because blogs come and go often. One infographic (WPVirtuoso, 2013) shows that there were over 152 million blogs (approximately) on the Internet in the year of 2013. The number of blogs is an extremely large number, and more blogs are added to the blogosphere on a daily basis.

There are various types of blogs, mainly categorized on the basis of the genre. A lifestyle blog is a website documenting one person’s life and can be a curated gallery of their personal interests and everyday existence (Sabina, 2016). More and more people have started creating their own lifestyle blog sites. Unless they code their own blog from scratch, setting up a lifestyle blog with a third-party website such as WordPress, Squarespace, or others might give them the most control and flexibility. These web development platforms provide hundreds of templates that have various types and styles allowing people to create the look or feel of their blog site easily. It is easy to use a drag and drop function to add icons and images, type words, and add URL links, which can help to build a blog site quickly. In addition, most of these website builders are free, premium, or self-hosted, and compared with hiring a web designer, are more affordable.
Among all the blog development platforms, WordPress is the most popular. The statistics show that 43% of bloggers use WordPress to build their own blog sites (Blogging, 2012) due to its optimized benefits such as being fast, simple, and user friendly.

However, some problems arise from using WordPress to design lifestyle blogs. For example, the overuse of the generic templates will depersonalize the blogs, especially in regard to the layout of the webpage. For existing lifestyle blog design, most people like to add a big image above the whole article, below the image the page layout with content on the left side and blogger’s information or ads on the right side. In this case, many blogs are far from the individual in appearance, even if they have excellent literary content or posts.

1.2 Purpose of Research

Due to the visual similarity of existing lifestyle blogs, many research questions arise. This thesis will focus on the following research questions:

- How do the templates provided by WordPress expand or limit design possibilities when building lifestyle blogs?
- Will diagonal lines be acceptable for the lifestyle blogs?
- Will kinetic typographic elements be acceptable for the lifestyle blogs?

To answer these questions, this study surveyed the existing literature of blog, popular blogging platforms and blog development strategies. It also investigated the current popular lifestyle blog themes and created three lifestyle blogs based on the same content.

1.3 Thesis Organization

This thesis is presented in six chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction and the objectives of this study. Chapter 2 is a review of relevant literature, which explicates theories related to blogs, especially lifestyle blogs; popular blog design platforms; the strategies for developing blogs; and the evaluation and research analysis methods which were adopted later
in this study. Chapter 3 describes two case studies which were done before this study.

Chapter 4 elaborates methodology of this study—the three blogs design processes and evaluation were conducted. Evaluators were asked to review the blogs and answer a questionnaire which aimed to evaluate the website experience. Study results and analysis are shown in Chapter 5, which discusses the merits and demerits of each blog design as well as their rankings. Chapter 6 concludes this research study, answers the research questions, and points out the limitations and future study.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Blog

“Blog” is known as a short form of “weblog.” It is a digital document or informative website published on the internet consisting of independent, often casual diary-style writing entries called posts. Typically, the display of the posts is followed by reverse chronological order, so that the most recent post shows at the top of the webpage (Rebecca, 2000).

Blog is one kind of network exchanges such as following bulletin board systems (BBS), email, and ICQ which is the first instant messaging client. Blogging is an online dairy with hyperlinks and it can provide a new way of communicating, sharing, and representing a life (Rebecca, 2000).

2.1.1 History of Blogging

Blogging has existed for almost three decades. The history of blogging starts with several precursors. In the early 1990s, websites were developed by web pioneers and the sites consisted of discussion forums and bulletin boards. People were attracted by different topics; then signed up for the corresponding listservs to receive emails about content they were interested in published by experts (CreativeBloq, 2014). The development of blogging is explained as follows: In January 1994, Justin Hall, a student at Swarthmore College, published the first blog, (links.net) which was a personal diary that shared his musings and favorite links with the world. In December 1997, Jorn Barger, the editor of the website Robert Wisdom, pioneered the term to describe a “log” of his internet activity (HubSpot, 2016). He composed “logging the web” into the term “weblog.” In April 1999, a programmer called Peter Merholz introduced the phase “we blog” unintentionally in the sidebar of his blog Peterme.com (Merholz, 1999). Shortly afterwards, Evan Williams, an internet
entrepreneur, used “blog” as both a noun and verb and created the word “blogger,” which made the term well-known (MyTipHub, 2008).

Blogging grew rapidly in the early 2000s, as a few popular blogs got their start during this period, including Andrew Sullivan’s AndrewSullivan.com, Boing Boing, Gawker, and The Huffington Post. Blogging was promoted with general internet users (Rettgerg, 2013). In February 2002, one highlighted event that magnified the influence of blogging was the firing of Heather Armstrong for discussing her job on her blog, Dooce. After that Dooce turned into a verb: getting fired for something you have written on your website. That same year in August, Nick Denton launched Gizmodo as the first broker of blog advertising (Rettgerg, 2013). In December 2002, Talking Points Memo, a political blog, posted the interview of senator Trent Lott that demonstrated his racism and connection to a paleo conservative group. Thirteen days later, Lott resigned from his post as senate majority leader. For the blogosphere, the most remarkable part of this affair was being credited by the mainstream media for breaking the story (Hewitt, 2005).

In June 2003, Google launched the first advertising platform, AdSense, in order to match advertisement on a blog’s content. AdSense also made it possible for any blogger to make money when publishing blogs online (Web Designer Depot, 2011). In September 2003, Weblogs, Inc. was founded by Jason Calacanis; this blog’s business was generating $1,000/day just from AdSense, and was then sold to AOL for $25 million (Arrington, Michael, 2005). In February 2004, Flickr was launched as a photo-sharing community that opened the doors to photo blogging (Wooster, 2014).

Twitter was launched in 2006, as one of the first “micro-blogging” platforms that admits all users to share ideas by publishing short posts on the internet (Carvin, 2007). By the
year 2007, more than 95% of US newspapers had included blogs on their online news delivery (Creative Bloq Staff, 2014). Today, more than 400 million people read blogs actively and the number is predicted to continue to grow.

### 2.1.2 Genre of Blogs

There are different blog types that cover specific topics and they have different methods for writing and delivering content. It is important for new bloggers to understand what blog types are available because it helps them market their blogs more efficiently, as well as grow their brands and narrow down the content and audience.

The topic or subject of the blogs can be written creatively, so some may go beyond the reach of the conventional categories. Therefore, based on the existing and popular subjects, blogs can be sorted into the following categories: art, health, politics, fashion, business, housing, lifestyle, and others (Berger, 2015).

#### 2.2 Lifestyle Blog

Lifestyle has become about the art of living well. It is for people who interested in both leisure and work behavior patterns that differentiate people’s attitudes, activities, interests, opinions, allocation of income, and more (BusinessDictionary, 2017). People can convey their lifestyle approach without giving it a specific explanation in their everyday communications and, indeed, it is challenging to determine an exact definition for the term lifestyle. Thus, lifestyle incorporates what people do, why they do it, and what it means to them and others (Chaney, 2012).

##### 2.2.1 Definition of Lifestyle Blog

Lifestyle blogs mostly write practical tips on a topic which will be useful for the readers which they can apply to their own lives (Sabina, 2016). Lifestyle bloggers share a wide range of subjects revolving around and generated from their personal lives, like food,
fashion, technology, home decor, relationships, career, parenting, and more. As such, lifestyle blogging is a blend of interests pieced together by the author of each individual lifestyle blog. Compared to personal blogs, lifestyle blogs focus more on personal interests rather than personal stories (Coleman, 2016). Because of the audience reach of lifestyle blogs, most lifestyle bloggers have tremendous social influence, requiring large influencer participation across social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, and other social media.

Lifestyle blogging is an online word-of-mouth community that presents extremely resourceful interconnectivity and an ideal environment for potent personal branding and online advertising. Successful lifestyle bloggers need to invest personality and uniqueness into their blog content in order to stand out from others (Chaney, 2012). 2.2.2 Evolution of Lifestyle Bloggers Many popular lifestyle bloggers started their first blogs in a single niche or category, for instance, fashion blogs, fitness blogs, or travel blogs (Evan, 2015). As their popularity grew, by gaining followers and viewership, these lifestyle bloggers expanded the content of their blog by sharing more about their personal lives and interests with people who followed their initial blog.

2.3 Blogging Platforms

A blogging platform is the software or service that enables users to publish articles, reviews or opinions on the Internet in the form of a blog. It is a specific form of a content management system (CMS) (Haines, 2016). A blogging platform is also a place that allows online readers to engage with the host bloggers or other blog participants by leaving comments, sharing posts, and having discussions.
In the early 1990s, blogs were created by web professionals or by hobbyists who had experience using HTML. This group of people had the knowledge to evaluate and the skill to use web design tools.

With the arrival of Web 2.0, web users started to interact and communicate with each other more frequently on the internet and for blogging, it has become increasingly popular. New bloggers, generally, do not have as much technical background or skill. For them designing even the simplest webpage could be an obstacle. The development of open-source and free-to-use blog hosting services was generated near the end of the 1990s. These service providers subsequently offered user-friendly and ready-made blog services that allowed web users with any level of technological skills to create and publish blogs accessible to all internet users (Berger, 2015). Therefore, anyone was and is able to use a simple text-editor program to have unlimited communication with people around the world (Mintert, Stefan, Leisegang, 2008). Nowadays, blogging systems are more functional, still easy-to-use Content Management System (CMS) with a strong focus on interoperability, social interaction, and updating content with other web authoring systems (Berger, 2015).

2.3.1 Different Blogging Development Tools

Most bloggers start out with hosted blog software since it is generally free, although self-hosted blogs might require the bloggers to purchase the domain name, web hosts, and other services. WordPress, Blogger, Tumblr, and Squarespace are examples of blogging platforms that provide free or premium services to internet users. When starting a new blog, it is important to choose the blog design template that most closely matches their needs. The following are comparisons among existing CMS for blogs.
2.3.1.1 WordPress

WordPress is one of the most popular blogging platforms on the internet. It comes in two versions, Wordpress.org and Wordpress.com. Wordpress.org is where users can download the free WordPress software that installs on their private web server for people to host their own blog or website. Wordpress.com is where users can have a free blog hosted by a WordPress server. Users do not need to download any software, buy domain names, or operate a web server.

- Cost

Wordpress.org software is free. However, if users need to buy a domain name and hosting, it will cost $3-$6 per month depend on the different plans (Wpbeginner, Editorial Staff, 2017). For Wordpress.com, the basic package is free. However, there is an additional fee if users need to have a custom domain name, additional storage, or other premium services (Wpbeginner, 2017).

- Level of coding knowledge

WordPress is considered a CMS. It uses HTML and CSS along with PHP and usually JavaScript to render webpages. Therefore, it would be beneficial if the user learns at least a basic knowledge of HTML and CSS in order to use WordPress with confidence.

- Available for own domain

People can have their own WordPress domain after purchasing plans from Wordpress.org. It would be totally their own and have no trace of “WordPress” in the title (Wpmudev, 2017).
• Themes

Wordpress.org offers more than 1,500 themes that users can choose from. It is easy for users to customize these themes or create their own from scratch.
Currently, Wordpress.com has approximately 165 free themes to choose from.
If the users need or want access to premium themes, there are additional fees.
Even then, customization of the design is limited.

2.3.1.2 Blogger.com

The blog-publishing service Blogger.com enables blogs with multiple users to timestamp entries. It was acquired by Google in 2003, and a blogger can host a registered custom domain with 100 blogs allowed per account (Buzz.blogger.com, 2015).

• Cost

Blogger.com is a free blog hosting service.

• Level of coding knowledge

Blogger.com is easy to use without any coding skills. Because Blogger.com is a fine turned service with few tools for the users to modify the website (Wpbeginner, 2017).

• Available for own domain

Blogs can be hosted in the registered custom domain for free.

• Themes

Blogger.com has 20-30 themes. Design options are limited; third-party themes for Blogger.com are often low quality. Because Google acquired Blogger.com, it can suspend or cancel the blog at any time for use of the third-party themes (Wpbeginner, 2017).
### 2.3.1.3 Tumblr

Tumblr is a micro-blogging and social networking website founded in 2007 and owned by Oath Inc. (Tumblr, 2017). The service allows users to post short stories, videos, and photos, follow other users, and engage in communities without constraints (Paul 2009).

- **Cost**
  
  Tumblr is free to use. There are some premium themes and plugins that can be purchased.

- **Level of coding knowledge**
  
  People do not need to understand complex coding knowledge for managing their Tumblr account. However, it would be more convenient to customize the themes if one has basic HTML and CSS skills to achieve personalized Tumblr content.

- **Available for own domain**
  
  People can own their personal Tumblr domain after purchasing an account. It will be completely their own and have no trace of “Tumblr” on the site.

- **Themes**
  
  Tumblr has approximately 1,000 themes to choose from.

### 2.3.1.4 Squarespace

The service-based CMS Squarespace is a software that combines a blogging platform, website builder, hosting service, domain name registrar and commerce platform (John Wiley & Sons, 2013).
• Cost
Squarespace users purchase plans which start at $16/month or $12/month if the user pays for the entire year in advance (Wpbeginner, 2017).

• Level of coding knowledge
Simply designing the blogs by using the themes on Squarespace is easy and does not require users to understand how to code. However, this understanding would be necessary if the user needs to customize the themes or add plug-ins (Make a Website Hub, 2017).

• Available for own domain
People can have their own Squarespace domain after purchase. Each domain name is $20-$70/year, and the price depends on its Top-level Domain (TLD) (Squarespace, 2017).

• Themes
There are around 80 themes for Squarespace users to choose from. The design and layout of these themes have a very clean look and users will have the ability to make a blog with image-focused design (Minayev, 2017)

2.4 Blog Development Strategies
To determine whether a website design is “good” or “bad,” most people consider the usability and the aesthetic along with the content. Same as in the blogosphere, the readers initially are attracted by the visual design, but the content keeps the readers engaged with the blog. In order to attract audiences and grab their attention, a successful blog should not only focus on its functionality and delivering the information efficiently, but also keeping its visual attraction.
2.4.1 Content

Web content consists of various media such as text, images, videos, sounds, and other content. Typical web users may open and close a webpage in very short time depending on whether they are able to find the information that they are looking for. Visitors will leave the website if they fail to find what they want and will move on to other websites (Beaird, 2007).

One research study from the Nielsen Norman Group demonstrated that web users rarely read webpages word by word, instead, they skim and scan the content and sort out distinct words and sentences (Nielsen, 1997, 2008). In Nielsen’s most recent behavior pattern research, the data showed that during an average visit on a webpage, users only have time to read at most 28% of the words, though typically users only read 20% (Nielsen, 2008). The result of the study concluded that the content of the webpages should use scannable text, such as short keywords, useful sub-titles, highlighted hyperlinks, bullet points, text formatting, and so on (Nielsen, 1997, 2008).

Another factor that may influence readers is the credibility of the content since the identity of the author may be unknown. Thus, the credibility of the content can be increased by using high-quality images, improving writing conventions, and also linking to other sites that could support the author’s viewpoint.

Lastly, listening to the web users also helps improve the content of the webpage. Nielson mentioned that the content of the website is important in 1997, his aspect of the web content is still applicable for blogs. Identifying the intended audience enables the authors to communicate more effectively and keep their focus on the right tone and subject. This can be done by reviewing valuable comments from the readers, then incorporating feedback during the subsequent development of the content. The blog might share the same features with the
web content, since there is little research related to blog content specifically. The web users hope that the content talks about their concerns and is written at an understandable level.

2.4.2 Design

Once the subject and content of the website are useful and meet the need of web users, the design style should remain consistent with the web content, and it should be aesthetically pleasing to the users.

2.4.2.1 Web design structure

The basic website structure can be divided into five components: container, site ID, header, navigation, and footer. Although the number of components may be different based on the subject and the size of the website, most common blog designs have the following components:

- Container: Every webpage has a container. This is the place that holds all the other components. When setting up the value of the container, the width can be fluid, which means that the container expands or shrinks to adjust to the size of the browser window. The container also can be fixed, in order to keep the content at a same width no matter what size the window is.

- Site ID: The logo or name that enables users to identify the website is the site ID. It improves the brand recognition of the website as a part of the marketing strategy.

- Header: The header typically contains the site ID, navigation, account information and search box that users most generally find on the website.

- Navigation: Navigation is the tool that allows the web users to visit the website with the most confidence. It contains several navigational pieces that
enable users to discover and explore the different categories of the website more effectively.

- Footer: Footer is located at the bottom of the webpage. It usually includes copyright and legal information, as well as other general functions such as address, contact information, social media and so on.

2.4.2.2 Web design elements

To create an aesthetic web design, several design elements need to be considered:

- Color: The right color choice can attract more users and present the good look of the website. It strongly associates with culture, psychology, emotion, and behavioral effects of human beings.
- Typography: Typography is the vital component of content. The elements of typography are size, weight, font family, color, and more.
- Imagery: It is a visual representation that includes photography, illustrations, signs, and the like. Using images appropriately can be an effective way to draw users’ attention and communicate the information.

2.4.3 Online reading experience

Online reading is the movement of extracting content from a text in a digital format. It is also called digital reading (Nordquist, 2016). Humans may be diverse and dynamic but typically surf through web pages in a similar way. People feel more comfortable when things are in a certain order. Colors, images, and fonts attract attention, serving as little marks on a road map that pull people through a website or blog design (Culbertson, 2013).

One research study from Nielsen Norman Group shows that web users taken 80% of the time looking at the left half of the page than 20% time on the right half (Fessender, 2017).
The researchers did one horizontal attention study in 2010 and this study was done on a 1024x768 monitor. The data show people disproportionately looking at the left side of the webpage 69% of the time, compare to the right side, 30%. (Nielsen, 2010). Since the web has changed significantly, the researchers from Nielsen Norman Group did a similar study in 2017 and yet, the result is still similar to the previous study results.

More than 120 users participated in the Nielsen Norman Group’s most recent eye-tracking research. In this study, researchers used a 1920x1080 screen, which stretched viewing patterns toward the right.

In this study, researchers provided the participants with the examples from “general web” such as news, government, and ecommerce websites. For these webpages, the left half of the screen received 80% of the fixations which was more than the 2010 research found (69%) (Fessenden, 2017). The 2017 analysis shows that the apex of the fixation distribution is about 600 pixels from the left edge of the screen, however in 2010, the fixation distribution was around 400 pixels from the left. Therefore, 900 pixels have been added to the screen which has only right-pushed about 200 pixels for the users’ peak attention (Fessenden, 2017). This means, that although the size of the monitor was bigger, users still focused on the left side of the webpage.

Another key finding from Nielsen Norman Group’s 2017 research is that the first left edge of the screen (around 400 pixels) only has 6% fixation compared with the other regions in the left half of the screen. This result is possibly attributed to two reasons. The first left area where the navigation bars were located fixated on infrequently compared with the rest of the webpage areas. This first reason is positive, since it can be speculated that people have become quite good at recognizing navigation and do not have to spend more time viewing it
until they need it. However, researcher also concluded that the empty “page gutters” in recent responsive web designs “centered” the content more than older website layouts did. This is unfortunate that many layouts of current interface misused available spaces rather than designing it more productively (Fessenden, 2017).

In terms of web design, it is risky to deviate from conventional layouts. If the location of the information differs from the conventional design, the web users may experience confusion when navigating the webpage. Therefore, it is important to ensure the usability of a website, allowing the users to accomplish their goals successfully.

2.4.4 The Use of Hero Image

Hero image is defined as a large, banner-type image that serves as literal background for the initial view for a webpage (Campbell, 2017) and it can occupy a large portion of the browser window (Lopuck, 2012). As the development of networks and devices allows the screen to display large images, more websites incorporate huge and appealing images (Whitenton, 2014). Using a hero image becomes a popular trend in web design (Morrison). It may help the website if the image introduces an overview of the information.

Websites can prompt the user’s positive visceral response (Norman, 2004) by providing charming hero images, such as beautiful landscapes, high technology products, and attractive people. However, web design user experience does not just require the visceral response. It is only successful to use a hero image if it helps improve the functions and delivers content information more effectively (Whitenton, 2014).

To balance the approach of a website, the hero image should support the brand without eclipsing other important content. Recommendations for using a hero image in a website are as follows:
Understand the priority of all webpage goals: identify the goals for both users and the brand.

Assign each design element to support the webpage goals: the design element that relates to the high priority webpage goal should have more visual attraction than the elements supporting the secondary goals.

Choose a hero image that is strongly related with the goals: first, ensure the hero image showcases the intent of the webpage, then try to find out the most compelling image (Whitenton, 2014).

Examine the image size: Images that are too large slows down the loading time. Make sure the hero image can be loaded within 5 seconds under an average internet speed (Sherwin, 2014).

2.4.5 Responsive Web Design

Based on the data from searchenginewatch.com, the number of mobile devices browsing the internet exceeded the number of desktop browsers in 2014. An approach called responsive web design has been brought to web design development (Minnick, 2016). Spurlock, who is the author of Bootstrap: Responsive Web Development, explained the responsive web design is a role for removing all the content that is on the webpage and then rearranged it for the current devices (2013). By applying responsive web design principles, the website should be designed for the multitude of devices available to customers, ranging from small phone screens to large desktop monitors (Figure 2.2).
Breakpoints are defined as the points which the website responds to provide the user with the best possible layout to consume the information (Schade, 2014). They are commonly based on the width of the browser. At these breakpoints, the layout of the website and the movement of the texts change, and there may be significant changes in the way the grid works.

2.4.6 Hamburger Button (evaluation)

In website development, a hamburger button is defined as a specific style of button or icon which hides a list of menu category (Moreto, Lambert, Jakobus, Marah, 2016). Represented as three horizontal lines, a hamburger button generally surfaces navigation options when selected. In mobile designs, the hamburger button has become widely used for
addressing the concern that on small displays, space for navigation is limited, and it is commonly found near the top of a mobile website to serve as a menu button (Minnick, 2016).

**2.5 Evaluation and Research Method**

**2.5.1 Usability Inspection Methods**

User inspections is a generic name for a series of methods that one or more evaluators inspect a user interface or probable user interactions (Jacko, 2012). Inspections in the user experience field are generally considered low-cost, practical, flexible, and relatively fast methods that appropriate for today’s design environment (Wilson, 2013).

Usability inspection methods (UIMs) are analytical approach based on involving experts inspecting user interfaces and the probable user interactions. Typically, the goal of a usability inspection is to find out potential defects in the design (Jacko, 2012). Compared with empirical methods such as usability testing, UIMs do not involve end users in the evaluation. In many inspection methods, the user interface specifications are not ready to be implemented yet, which means the inspection can be used early in the usability engineering stage (Nielsen, 1995).

In UIMs, it is vital for the evaluators to believe that they can detect important usability problems in the design and to understand and employ solutions to be able to suggest useful design advice to eliminate problems (Jacko, 2012). Therefore, the evaluators need to pay great attention to organizing and reflect critically on usability practices (Jacko, 2012).

**2.5.2 Cognitive Walkthrough**

Cognitive walkthrough (CW) (Lewis and Wharton, 1997) is a kind of UIM, which is a method for identifying usability problems in interactive systems and focusing on the accessible for new or sporadic users to accomplish the tasks. CW is critical in developing new applications in which users need to learn how to use the applications (Polson, 1990).
CW also applies when developers evaluate their own applications under the typical constrains of time and other resources.

In the CW process, after exploring the application, a group of evaluators then attempt to find out the potential usability problems. After that, evaluators estimate if users can establish the appropriate goals. Then finally they estimate if users can choose the correct actions to reach goals within the application.

To point out the potential usability problems, evaluators need to make a conclusion on either success or failure based on the overall problems found during the CW evaluation, despite the fact that a CW evaluation cannot guide users through the procedures of the application (Jacko, 2012).

2.5.2.1 Advantages and Disadvantages of CW

Advantages:

- CW is useful in improving requirements because the method includes expert evaluators in the process.
- CW can be conducted early in the process and does not demand a comprehensive prototype (Wilson, 2013).

Disadvantages:

- CW does not focus on efficiency or user satisfaction.
- Professional evaluators may behave differently than the average user when using the application, it requires the evaluators to think as users.
- CW does not provide a large quantity of results (Wilson, 2013)
2.5.2.2 When designers should use Cognitive Walkthrough

CW can be used during any design process, but it is more applicable during creation of action sequences. This is when a design specification and other documents have presented sufficient information to explain what the system does and what the users do, such as the conceptual design, the detailed design, and the implementation (Wilson, 2013).

2.5.3 Mixed Methods Research

This study was optimized the using a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methods, which involved both gathering and analyzing the data from these two research methods.

Quantitative research employs numbers and statistical methods. It adopted to be numerical based measurements of specific features of phenomena; It draws the general conclusion or tests out the causal hypotheses from particular instances; it investigates appraisals and the interpretations and findings that are commonly duplicable by other researchers. (King, Keohane, Verba, 1994). Overall, quantitative research relies on statistical or mathematical analysis of data collected through evaluations.

In contrast, qualitative research method is adopted when the researchers need to seek predictions and explanations which can be established to other people. The data collected by qualitative research consists closed-ended information such as behavior and attitude (Blesne, Peshkin, 1992). In short, qualitative research uses an exploratory method, and aims to gain an understanding of underlying reasons.

The purpose of combining quantitative and qualitative research in this study was to better explain and enrich the results of the evaluation. The researcher adopted qualitative research to establish problems and gathered the information on variables, then generated questions from the qualitative research to be tested through the quantitative approach.
Finally, the researcher used the qualitative data to conclude results which were not anticipated from the quantitative research.
CHAPTER 3. CASE STUDIES

3.1 Overview

To explore the current state of blog theme designs, the researcher did two case studies. The first case study was an analysis of the design of 50 blogs. In the second case study, the researcher examined popular lifestyle blog themes and analyzed the website layout of these themes.

3.2 Study of 50 Blogs by Popular Bloggers

Millions of blogs currently exist online and new blogs are being created and posted every minute while some have been abandoned for years. Such high numbers make it difficult for online readers to decide which blogs to read; therefore, blog rankings and recommendations have been made to help readers choose the blogs they might be interested in. Keepinspiring.me, a personal development and self-improvement website, has a list of the top 50 personal blogs recommended to online readers based on the numbers of Twitter followers (Mendoza, 2015). However, the quality of a blog does not just depend on its Twitter popularity, but also content and design of the blog.

3.2.1 Subjects and Technologies of the 50 Popular Blogs

Overall, 30 of these 50 blogs are related to lifestyle, 7 to business, 6 to psychology, and 5 to health and fitness. In terms of blogging platform, 29 of these 50 blogs were developed in Wordpress.org; 1 was developed in Squarespace; and the platform used by the remaining 20 could not be determined. Based on the analysis of blog subject, lifestyle appears to be the most prevalent topic.
3.2.2 Analysis of the Design of the 50 Popular Blogs

The visual design of the 50 popular blogs based on the web design elements such as layout, color, typeface, and image use was explored.

Because most of these 50 blogs were designed using Wordpress.org, they share more or less the same webpage layout. For example, the site ID is placed on the upper-left corner of the webpage, and the navigation bar is located on the top. The main content, which consists of the brief information and feature image of the recent posts, is placed on the left side of the webpage. Finally, the advertisement and blogger’s personal information is placed on the right side of the webpage.

A wide variety of color is used among these 50 blogs. Most use white, ivory, or light grey as the background colors, and black or dark grey for the text.

With regard to image use, more than half of the blogs use text and images as their primary design element, five added illustration into their blogs and 8 blogs use just text as their only design element.

3.3 Study of the Top 10 Downloaded Themes Recommended for Lifestyle Blogs in Wordpress.org

The analysis on lifestyle blog interface layout came from the themes provided by Wordpress.org.

Wordpress.org has approximately 1,600 blog themes that users can choose from on its website. This broad selection can be good; however, such a huge number may make it harder for them to decide which theme is suitable for their subject and content. Thus, Wordpress.org allows users to search the blog theme keyword and then provides narrowed selection for the users.
A total of 73 themes were recommended for lifestyle blogging on Wordpress.org. In this case study, the researcher looked for the ten most often downloaded blog themes from this pool of 73 lifestyle blog themes. This was carried out by using Themetally which is a free WordPress directory to count the number of download for each of the 73 themes. All download counts were conducted on the same date (i.e., December 6, 2017). Table 3-1 shows the top ten downloaded themes among the 73 themes studied.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme name</th>
<th>Theme author</th>
<th>Downloaded time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MH Magazine lite</td>
<td>MH Themes</td>
<td>1278521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SuevaFree</td>
<td>alexvtn</td>
<td>425350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activello</td>
<td>silkalns</td>
<td>376280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panoramic</td>
<td>Out the Box</td>
<td>202830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kale</td>
<td>lyrathemes</td>
<td>181390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great</td>
<td>benalvele</td>
<td>168906</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td>themehit</td>
<td>109334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEOPress</td>
<td>EWP Theme</td>
<td>95114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CleanBlogg</td>
<td>airthemes</td>
<td>81753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movers Packers</td>
<td>SKTThemes</td>
<td>67079</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3.1 Layout

The top 10 downloaded themes were analyzed for their layout structure in terms of how each theme positioned their site ID, navigation bar, side bar, main content, and footer. An analysis of the top 10 downloaded WordPress themes recommended for lifestyle blogs resulted in six types of layouts which can be seen in Figure 3.2. Each page structure consists of a site ID, navigation, main content section, sidebar, and footer.
Figure 3-1 Six Examples of Template Layout

All of the six layouts in this analysis use a three-column webpage layout. A, B, C, D and E place the main content section which consists of the brief introduction and feature image for the blog posts on the left side of the webpages. F uses fluid, waterfall grid layout, similar to Pinterest. For the use of the hero image, B, C, D and E recommend users to upload the hero image on the homepage of the themes layouts, A and F do not require users to upload this image. The positions of the site ID are found on the top of the webpage, in all
layouts, the site ID of A and C are located on the top-left of the page, while the rest locate this information at the top-center. The navigation bars also show at the top of the webpage. In contrast, the site IDs for B and E are located outside the navigation bar, while the remaining layouts position theirs below the grid layout. B and E locate beyond the site ID, while the rest are below the site ID. For the footer use in these six layouts, B, C, D, E and F have a short footer, which just contain the copyright information; however, A has a longer footer, which contains not only the copyright information, but also the links of recent posts and comments, as well as a search bar.

### 3.3.2 Editing Features

To design blogs via Wordpress.org, users need to first access their Wordpress.org dashboard, which is an administration center of Wordpress.org. The main use for the dashboard is to give users an overview of what function they can adopt in designing their blogs. For example, some of the general functions such as: download and activate themes, build navigation functions, add plug-ins, edit posts. and more. On WordPress, the themes determine the overall layout and design of the blog, but they cannot change the look and feel of the blogs. Therefore, some themes allow users to add more features to design their blog such as: add slides, portfolio, services, employee pages, and so on.

After building the main structure for the blog via the WordPress dashboard, users can start to customize the style of their blog. This theme customizer can be found under the Appearance category in the dashboard. Users can also customize and preview changes before publishing them. The basic functions in the theme customizer are:

- **Site identity:** This menu allows users to specify basic site information, such as uploading Site logo, editing Site title and tagline and changing the Site icon.
• Colors: The color menu allows users to customize background and title colors as displayed by the theme.

• Header image: Some WordPress themes have the header image menu that allows users to select and crop a header image to display at the top of the screen.

• Navigation: The navigation menu allows users to define the placement of the navigation bar.

• Widgets: The widget menu allows users to choose available widgets and place them in the sidebar. Common available widgets are: Recent posts, Recent comments, Gallery, and Achieves.

• Footer: The footer menu allows users to edit Copyright text on the blog footer.

Although the theme customizer allows users to enrich the look and style of the blog, the main layout of the blog is still hard to adjust. Only users who have advanced experience in web design or knowledge in using CSS can edit the code of the blog in order to design it in a creative way.
CHAPTER 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Overview

In Chapter 3, the researcher examined and analyzed the layout and editing of lifestyle blog themes provided by Wordpress.org. Overall, the layout design of the lifestyle blog themes adopts conventional website layout, and the type style has few options to choose from.

To investigate the possibility of designing personalized lifestyle blogs using WordPress existing themes, the researcher used Wordpress.org to design three lifestyle blogs using the same content. The topic for the lifestyle blog was pets, with a specific focus on pet dogs. The pet blog had four categories: Home, Blog, Contact and About. The researcher used three Wordpress.org themes to design each of the three pet blogs. Design 1 was developed on the basis of a conventional layout, which is similar to most existing lifestyle blogs. Design 2 was developed in a manner that was color and shape dominant. Design 3 was developed in order to typography dominant.

To evaluate the design, a user inspection-based method cognitive walkthrough, was chosen since it is an appropriate method to evaluate design processes at an early stage.

4.2 Three Pet Blog Design

4.2.1 Design 1 – sijia.site

Design 1 (Figure 4.1) was created based on the Theme Barletta by Mooz Themes, which is a collection of free to use, open source themes for WordPress. Barletta is a light, elegant and clean design WordPress blog theme which is mainly designed for lifestyle, travel, fashion, food, personal blog and other publishers. Barletta blog theme is fully
responsive and the website will adapt to display on all types of devices. Overall, Barletta is a visually stunning theme with polished simple design.

Design 1 was created based on the website conventional layout suggested by Fessenden, which applied the horizontal attention and the hero image to the blog design. The main color of Design 1 is green. Meanings of green are life, nature and energy, which can be related to the concept of pet blog. Two fonts were used in design 1, a serif font, Playfair Display, and a sans-serif font, Raleway. The Playfair Display font was used for the Site ID, headings, and blog article titles. The Raleway font was used for the navigation and blog article content. These two fonts are Barletta template default settings.

![Figure 4-1 Design 1 Homepage]
4.2.2 Design 2 – sijiahe.site

Design 2 (Figure 4.2) was created based on the WordPress theme Qusq Lite. Qusq Lite is a colorful portfolio theme created by IshYoBoy, which is a WordPress Themes & Plugins, Custom Web Development team based in Slovak. Qusq Lite is a fully responsive theme with color-customize diagonal backgrounds. This theme is described as suitable for designers, freelancers and artist who want to show off their creative work with style. Design 2 highlighted the color and shapes. The main color of design 2 is turquoise (Maerz and Paul a Dictionary of Color New York, 1573), which is a shade of cyan. Turquoise is described as a greenish-blue color. As Edward-Wright, the author of You Favorite Color Has a Meaning states, “In color psychology, turquoise controls and heals creating emotional balance and stability. It presents as a friendly and happy color enjoying life.” (2011, page28). Design 2 also addressed the diagonal background on the website, which create an off-center appearance to the layout. The researcher used two turquoise slanted shapes to divide the header, main content and footer area, in order to create an asymmetrical design. The template Qusq Lite used for Design 2 applied the hamburger button as the navigation system for both of the large screen and the mobile screen. When clicking the hamburger button, the navigation list shows up on a dark grey trapezium area. Design 2 used the font Varela Round for the titles and other large types. Varela Round is based on the well-known font Varela. It
is a sans-serif typeface with round edges which make it perfect for a soft feel and works great at different sizes.
4.2.3 Design 3 – sijiah.site

Design 3 (Figure 4.3) was created based on the WordPress theme Ion, which is designed by Elated-Themes. Ion is a fully responsive theme with extensive typography options. This theme also includes webpage layouts with loading animations.

Figure 4-3 Design 3 Homepage
Design 3 was created as a typography dominant website. The researcher applied huge typography elements with animation on the Homepage, the About, and the Contact page. When loading these three pages, a large typography flies in letter by letter is shown on the screen. These large types moved slightly to the left and the right when hovering the mouse over them. The font (Open Sans) was chosen as the large typography font, since this font is highly legible with different screen sizes. The font Roboto Mono was chosen as the blog article font and it is optimized for readability on screens across a wide variety of devices and reading environments. In order to highlight the use of typography in Design 3, the researcher only used a pure blue as the main color of the blog.

4.2.4 Evaluators

The researcher contacted 15 experts and professionals from web design field, nine of which agreed to help with the evaluation.

4.2.5 Questionnaire

To gather the feedback and recommendations from the nine web design professionals, the researcher created a questionnaire for them to answer. The questionnaire was developed into five sections. The purpose of the first section was to collect the background information of the evaluators. The purpose of the next three sections were to investigate the three blog
designs after the evaluator reviewed them. The last section was for the evaluators to set the ranking of these three designs, as well as explaining the reason of the ranking.

**General Questions**

- What is your current the responsibility?
- Have you worked in the Web Design industry? If yes, how many years of your experience do you have in Web Design?
- Do you code(HTML/CSS/JavaScript), or just visual design, or both?
- Have you used WordPress before? Do you just use templates, or make changes in HTML/CSS and add plug-ins?

**Design 1 Questions**

- Design 1 was created by WordPress templates. Would you please provide feedback on this Design 1 about pros and cons.
- Design 1 is responsive. Please provide feedback with different screen size.

**Design 2 Questions**

- Do you think Design 2 was designed using WordPress templates? If your answer is yes or no, please provide the reason.
- Would you please provide feedback on Design 2 about pros and cons.
- Design 2 is responsive. Please provide feedback with different screen size.

**Design 3 Questions**

- Do you think Design 3 was designed using WordPress templates? If your answer is yes or no, please provide the reason.
- Would you please provide feedback on Design 3 about pros and cons.
- Design 3 is responsive. Please provide feedback with different screen size.
Would you be willing to use this typography animation effect in blog design?

After Evaluation

- Please rank order of preference of these three blogs based on the design, and explain your reasoning.
- Which design is more appropriate for lifestyle blog design? Why?
CHAPTER 5. EVALUATION RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The researcher contacted nine professionals and experts from the website design and user experience (UX) design field as evaluators in this study. Three of the eight web design experts evaluated the three blog designs with the researcher in person and the remaining six did the evaluation remotely and completed the questionnaire sending it back to the researcher by email.

5.1 Professionals Evaluators’ Information

Evaluator 1 – interviewed in person

Evaluator 1 is a designer and an interaction developer primarily for designing websites and some applications development for IOS and Android, etc. He has been working as a designer for about 11 years, he worked for a few studios and a design agency as an interaction designer responsible for helping build websites, maintaining the standard of quality among most of the sites, as well as working on a few large design projects. Now he is managing his own independent design agency. He does visual design and coding. He has used WordPress before and used themes; however, he has also built WordPress sites from the very beginning.

Evaluator 2 – evaluation via email

Evaluator 2 is a senior UX designer, he has over 5 years of experience in web application design. He does not do visual design or coding in his recent work, but rather he focuses primarily on interaction design and information architecture. He collaborates with the
visual design team as well as other front-end developers during his job. He has used WordPress before and he has used templates with modifications as needed.

**Evaluator 3 – evaluation via email**

Evaluator 3 is a UX designer with over six year experiences in web application design and front-end development. He does coding as well as visual design. He has used WordPress but has never used a template before. He designed WordPress website from the very beginning with occasional plug-ins.

**Evaluator 4 – evaluation via email**

Evaluator 4 is a university assistant professor in the Multimedia and Interaction Design program in a higher education institution. She has eight years of web design experience. She does both coding and visual design. She has experience in WordPress and she has used templates, as well as experience coding her own custom templates.

**Evaluator 5 – interview in person**

Evaluator 5 is a director of UX design which generally constitutes management, coaching, and mentorship of the UX team, in particular, the interactive designers team. He has been working on web design and software design for more than 20 years. Currently, he has done neither coding nor visual design; however, he does interaction design. He is an expert visual designer but often in his work, he critiques people’s design works. When it comes to development, he is a self-taught developer. He knows how to code such as: HTML,
CSS, PHP, and a little bit of JavaScript. He has only used WordPress a few times, and generally creates websites without using templates.

**Evaluator 6 – interviewed in person**

Evaluator 6 is a UX designer as well as a front-end developer. She works with users through email to help them successfully complete conversion on landing pages and making sure that the users pass through the websites. She has been working on web development for more than 14 years, but works specifically for UX design for the past five years. She does both coding and visual design. She used templates on WordPress before, but mostly she designs website without using templates.

**Evaluator 7 – evaluation via email**

Evaluator 7 is a UX designer as well as an interaction designer. He has 11 years of experience in web design. He does coding as well as visual design. He has not used WordPress before.

**Evaluator 8 – evaluation via email**

Evaluator 8 is a UX designer as well as a visual designer. She works on end to end user interface design for team collaboration applications running on browser, mobile and desktop. She does not work specifically in the web design industry, but she has been designing web version interfaces for three years. She does not do coding, she just does the visual part. She has not used WordPress before.

**Evaluator 9 – evaluation via email**

Evaluator 9 is department chair of Art & Design program in a higher education institution. She has experience for 15 years in web design. She does coding as well as visual
design. He has used WordPress before. She makes changes to the CSS and add plug-ins. She also makes custom WordPress themes.

Table 5-1 Evaluators’ background information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluator</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Visual or Coding</th>
<th>WordPress Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Educator</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2 Discussion of Each Design

5.2.1 Overview of Design Evaluation

Design 1

Overall, all the evaluators were pleased by the simplicity and clean look of Design 1 and they said this design seems pretty standard. The positive quality of Design 1 is that, it flows well and has a good usability. It also has open spaces, well-contrasted colors, readable text, and the navigation is visible and easy to access. It looks easy to build and maintain, especially for non-technical users or users who do not have the time to build the blog bespoke.

For the downside of Design 1, the evaluators thought it looked under-designed and felt like a WordPress template, which means it needed more unique branding elements. Also,
Design 1 had too many negative spaces, which made the blog look empty and boring. The visual treatment of the recent post title on the homepage was unusual and could be confusing for users. Compared to the laptop version, Design 1 seems to be designed for mobile.

**Design 2**

Unlike Design 1, Design 2 got less positive feedback from the evaluators. The merits of Design 2 can be concluded as the following: evaluators believed that the Design 2 blogger was a fun and friendly person, and the blog design had its personality; the webpage has dynamic angled background, which makes the blog look dramatically. The color used in Design 2 was attractive, and it had a clean layout, and readable text with a clear hierarchy. Overall, Design 2 was a visually grabbing blog and it brought a fun, happy, and energetic feeling to the visitors.

However, there are downsides for Design 2. First, some evaluators questioned the use of the hamburger button on the webpage. They thought it was unnecessary to use it on a large screen size where there is enough space to display the menu, and it was also unnecessary to use the “menu” text along with the hamburger button. Moreover, the diagonal line cut behind the text box on the Contact webpage, which may cause a readability and usability issue for individuals who are sensitive to parallax, which may be distracting to them. In addition, Design 2 had slow loading times compared with Design 1. This is caused by the overload of the large color header. Furthermore, on the Blog webpage, evaluators were confused by the
hierarchy of the individual posts. Finally, just like Design 1, Design 2 seems to be designed for mobile use, but not the desktop.

**Design 3**

Overall, the feedback from the evaluators of Design 3 was very different. For the advantages of Design 3, evaluators admitted that it was a very interesting and thought-out blog; the combination of color and type added more personality to the blog. It had a very clean and clear layout with active negative space. The navigation was concise and easy to access for both desktop and mobile resolutions. Some evaluators liked the way the font size was used to build the information hierarchy. Overall, Design 3 was considered to be very personalized and memorable. However, for the downside of Design 3, evaluators believed the animations could have added interest to the users if it helped with the content. Unfortunately, the animation used in Design 3 did not relate well with the content, and it took too much time to load. Some evaluators commented that the big typography was a distracting, useless and space-consuming feature. For the color use in Design 3, one evaluator commented that the blue color was a very "system" blue, like a generic Windows 95 link or blue screen of computer death. In addition, for the mobile solution, Design 3 had way too much space above the content area, and it felt like something should load there but doesn't. Moreover, in the individual blog post webpage, the text areas were too difficult to read at wider screen resolutions, because the width of the sentence was too long. Lastly, three evaluators commented that they felt the design style for Design 3 was more suitable for a luxury brand, but not a pet blog. Although designing a blog can be very creative and the
design style can be focused more on the personality or preference of the blogger, Design 3 had a pretentious feeling, which may have put off the readers.

**5.2.2 Rank of Preference**

After reviewing the three blogs, the researcher asked the evaluators to rank the order of preference of these blogs. The data is shown in Table 5-2.

Table 5-2 Issues of the areas of each design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Design 1</th>
<th>Design 2</th>
<th>Design 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>- Lacked unique branding elements and style</td>
<td>- Slow loading time</td>
<td>- Not stable - Overwhelmed type animation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigation</td>
<td>- May get lost in each individual blog post page</td>
<td>- Useless hamburger button for the desktop version</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interface</td>
<td>- Too many negative spaces - Underline with blog title on the Homepage is pointless</td>
<td>- Diagonal lines cut behind some images and text box - Empty space between navigation bar and content for the mobile version</td>
<td>- Too many empty spaces between navigation bar and content for the mobile version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User Experience</td>
<td>- No indicator of the location on the site from an individual post page</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>- Hard to get to the content - Uppercase content is over used in “About” page - Titles break into lines when resizing the browser</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the evaluation process, the researcher also observed a phenomenon, the evaluators who have similar current job responsibilities tended to provide similar feedback for these three blog designs. Therefore, the researcher divided the nine evaluators in to two groups based on their background and current job responsibility. Group A consisted of Evaluators 2, 3, 6, 7 and 8, who are currently working in the UX design industry. Group B
consisted of Evaluators 1, 2 and 9, who are working as web designers and application design educators. Table 5-3 shows the nine evaluators’ responsibilities and their favorite designs.

Table 5-3 Evaluator’s current job responsibility with their favorite design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluator</th>
<th>Current job responsibility</th>
<th>Favorite Design</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Web Design</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>UX Design</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>UX Design</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>UX Design</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>UX Design</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>UX Design</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>UX Design</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Group A, the UX designers, automatically read and navigate as blog readers when evaluating the blogs. They navigated through the three blogs then indicated the usability problems. Although at the end of the evaluation, these UX designers ranked the order of their preference from two perspectives, the reader perspective and the blogger perspective. The researcher still perceived that Group A tended to think as a blog reader during the evaluation process. This group evaluators indicated that above all the designs, Design 1 is the most stable and generic one. Some feedback from Group A are: “From an interaction standpoint, Site 1 is the most performant, consistent and easy to read and navigate (Evaluator 2)”. “Design 1, Navigation is simple and accessible. Feedbacks are good. The template seems flexible and easy to grow content in the future (Evaluator 7)”. “Design has calm, muted colors, predictable and organized layout and navigation, lots of open space (Evaluator 3)”.  

Group B, the web designer and the two faculty members from web design related programs in higher education institutions, were more likely to stand at the blogger or web designer’s point of view when evaluated the three designs. They focused more on the creativity of the blog design, and explained their thoughts in relation to creative thinking and
web design experimentation aspects. Similar with Group A, Group B also ranked the order of
their preference of the three blog designs from the blogger’s aspect as well as the reader’s
aspect, however, they stated their opinions and feedback more related to creative and
personalized aspects rather than usability aspects.
CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS

Blogging is a great way to show and share people’s enthusiasm and passion with the public. Many people with no web design or technical background have the possibility to build a blog via web design platforms. Compared to other types of writing, people have more leeway to add in their voice and personality when writing lifestyle blogs. People can also choose any blog design styles since these web design platforms have provided thousands of web design themes, and these theme options are still growing.

This study explored the possibilities of designing lifestyle blogs by using existing themes provided by WordPress. There were three research questions: 1) How do the templates provided by WordPress expand or limit design possibilities when building lifestyle blogs? 2) Will diagonal lines in lifestyle blogs create visual impact? 3) Will typography elements in lifestyle blogs create visual impact?

The researcher designed three lifestyle blogs using the same content but three different WordPress themes by modifying the theme codes. As a result, the three blogs had very different looks. Design 1 simulated the existing lifestyle blog design, which followed the conventional web design patterns. Design 2 and Design 3 were developed using a more creative approach compared to Design 1. Next, the researcher sent the three lifestyle blog URL links to nine web design professionals, along with a questionnaire for them to answer.

The developing of the three blog designs answered the first research question: People do have opportunities to expand and also limitations when using WordPress templates to build lifestyle blogs. WordPress provides a large number of free themes with different design layouts, features and subjects for the users to choose from. The diversity of themes gives the
users a blueprint of what they can do with WordPress. In addition, WordPress provides a resourceful directory of free and open source WordPress plugins. And the plugin development is constantly changing with each new WordPress release. However, one limitation of using WordPress to develop blogs is if the users need to edit the PHP or CSS code of the blog theme, they have to understand almost all the code before modifying any changes. Because WordPress themes are developed by different web developers or web develop teams, and people have different ways to write their codes. For example, some web developers wrote the CSS code in style.css, which is a stylesheet (CSS) file that controls the presentation include the visual design and layout of the website pages.

However, there are web developers who not only wrote the CSS in style.css, they also embedded the CSS code into the PHP file, which makes it extremely difficult for users to find and edit these codes. Another limitation to WordPress is that, many WordPress themes do provide enhanced features and functionality in addition to the basic common functions, but the users fail to use or even notice these capabilities due to the poor quality of tutorials, which were written by the theme developers. However, the second and third research questions were differently answered in the evaluation, dependent upon response emphasis that is, there were two cases for the second and third research questions. The first case was, if the purpose of running a lifestyle blog is to provide resourceful information to the audience, gain more followers, or boost viewership of the blog, then using diagonal lines and typography elements in lifestyle blogs can create visual impact as long as it is conducive for the readers to consume the content. If the visual elements do not relate to the subject of the lifestyle blog, they might add complexity which leads to inconsistent experience with little
benefit to the readers. Bloggers should be clear about the focus of the readers; visual design elements should always help improve blog readers’ concentration and memory.

On the other hand, if the function of the lifestyle blog is simply a way of recreation for the bloggers, and the bloggers are too concerned about the readers’ impressions and opinions about their lifestyle blogs, bloggers could draw more attention to the creative aspect rather than the usability. Therefore, any eclectic style can be applied to the lifestyle blog design, and of course, the diagonal lines, the typography characteristics, and more creative design elements can create visual impact to the lifestyle blogs with less pleasing the blog readers at the same time.

Nowadays, usability is often considered one of the most important aspects when developing a website or an application. Prosumerism, simultaneous production and consumption, was created by Dmitri Siegel in his article “Design Our Own Grave”. People as a consumer also become a producer. Everyone owns their own content, and this prosumer product has allowed thousands of people to publish themselves on the web (Armstrong, 2009). People design lifestyle blogs for entertainment, but they could amuse both the bloggers and the blog readers. Under the present situation of self-host lifestyle blogging, the
best way to balance the usability and creativity is a valuable and worthwhile argument for designers to think about.

Finally, the result of the evaluation may be different depending on various topics of the lifestyle blog. In this research study, many evaluators pointed out that Design 3 is more suitable for a fashion topic because of the simple layout and moody colors.

**Practical contributions**

The results of this study suggest two practical applications for designing lifestyle blogs using WordPress:

1. For WordPress Theme Developer: It is a great place for web designers and developers to publish and sell their themes to the public, as well as a good place for people with no web design background to build their blogs by themselves. A suggestion for people who are trying to publish and sell their WordPress theme is to compose a comprehensive theme tutorial that covers all the characteristics of the theme as well as guidelines for none-web developer users to use the theme.

2. For Bloggers: Compared to other forms of websites such as news, e-commerce, business websites and more, lifestyle blogs are deemed a platform that allows everyone to express stories and ideas on anything related to their daily life. Therefore, it is important for bloggers to understand the purpose of writing their blogs. Is the blog purely an online dairy, that mainly aims to record the blogger’s life? Or does the blogger prefer to provide information and have more interaction with the audience? Or is the goal to combine these two functions together? If content is the key, focus on that. Endeavor to fix the usability problems in order to help the readers traverse the blog smoothly and get the information effectively. If
the blog’s artistry and visual look are of utmost importance, bloggers could spend more time on the design, but they still need to find a way to balance the visual design and the content.

6.1 Limitations

Limitations and problems have arisen while designing and evaluating the three lifestyle blog designs. First is the researcher’s limitation of the understanding of WordPress. Building a website not only needs wide knowledge from visual design, coding, user testing and more; it is also a time-consuming work. The researcher only had one year of web design experience and has spent just four months to design three blog websites via WordPress. The second limitation is the small number of evaluators that participated in this study. Overall, nine experts from the web design and UX design fields have evaluated the three designs, which made the evaluation results not comprehensive and reliable enough. The third limitation is the interview method for the evaluation. Six experts evaluated the three designs remotely and answered the questionnaire without communicating with the researcher. Therefore, the results from these experts clearly showed their independent perspective of the three designs. The other three experts met the researcher face to face and discussed while doing the evaluation. Therefore, their results were more or less affected by the researcher’s explanation. The fourth limitation is the scale and complexity of the blog. Again, because of the limited knowledge and time, the researcher designed the lifestyle blog with a simple information architecture, which just included four categories and four blog posts. Therefore,
these three designs only simulated the most simple and basic structure of the existing lifestyle blogs on the internet.

6.2 Future Studies

The limitations concluded above could be addressed in future studies. First, more blog design options could be created and presented as the researcher practices and accumulates more knowledge and experiences in visual design, coding and user testing. Second, this study could recruit more evaluators from web design and UX design field, as well as general end- users such as bloggers and online readers. Finally, the researcher could develop more categories and pages for the blog so that it would become more comprehensive and functional, and ready to publish online.
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APPENDIX A. THREE DESIGN PROTOTYPES

TIGER & KO

A relaxing afternoon  01/29/2018
What is true relaxation for a dog? It's the comfort of knowing that he's where he is a safe place, allowed to man and play or curl up in the corner and swooz, without being bothered by a dog he doesn't get along with.

Travel with pets  01/29/2018
Family vacations are no longer just for two-legged children. According to a study by AAA and Best Western International, more than half of U.S. pet owners take their cats and dogs with them when they travel...

Enjoy a snow day!  01/29/2018
Family vacations are no longer just for two-legged children. According to a study by AAA and Best Western International, more than half of U.S. pet owners take their cats and dogs with them when they travel...

Friendship  01/29/2018
The sweet bond of my life was devastating for me not because of the feeling of personal loss over the relationship with the man I was with, but because of the sheer heartache I felt in losing my boys Tiger and T_swad.
Enjoy a snow day!

Dogs do not spend snow days at home eating bread. For many dogs, snow means a very big treat. But why? I asked a few canine science experts why dogs love snow. It turns out that when it comes to snow...

Travel with pets

Family vacations are no longer just for two-legged children. According to a study by AAA and PetWest's International, more than half of U.S. pet owners take their cats and dogs with them when they travel...

A relaxing afternoon

What is true relaxation for a dog? It's the comfort of knowing that he or she is in a safe place, allowed to romp and play or curl up to the corner and snooze, without being bothered by a dog or a human...

Friendship

The worst breakup of my life was devastating for me not because of the feeling of personal loss over the relationship with the man I was with, but because of the sheer heartache I felt in having to separate my two dogs Tiger and Kohtaka...
Enjoy a snow day!
Dogs do notospel snow days at home eating bread. For many dogs, new snow is a Very Big Deal. But why? I asked a few canine science experts why dogs love snow. It turns out that when it comes to snow...

Travel with pets
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A relaxing afternoon
What is true relaxation for a dog? It’s the comfort of knowing that he or she is in a safe place, allowed to romp and play or curl up in the corner and snooze, without being bothered by a dog he doesn’t...

Friendship
The worst breakup of my life was devastating for me not because of the feelings of personal loss over the relationship with the man I was with, but because of the sheer heartache I felt in having to separate my tiger...

APPENDIX B. DESIGN 1

Tiger & Ko

Home

Recent Posts

Dog's friendship
February 15, 2019
Tiger and Ko have a special bond, and the two dogs are always ready to greet each other with a friendly wag of their tails. Whether they're playing together or simply enjoying each other's company, their friendship is a source of joy and happiness.

A relaxing afternoon
February 15, 2019
Tiger and Ko enjoy relaxing afternoons in the sun and shade, basking in the warmth and comfort of each other's presence. They love napping and playing in the garden, and they often fall asleep together with their heads on each other's paws.

Travel with pets
February 10, 2019
Family vacations are a breeze when you have furry companions. Tiger and Ko love exploring new places, whether it's a trip to the beach or a hike in the mountains, and they always have fun going on adventures together.

Enjoy a snowy day!
January 15, 2019
For many of us, the winter season is a time of coziness and family gatherings. Tiger and Ko love being in the cold weather, as they get to play in the snow and run around outside. Whether they're enjoying a snowball fight or simply taking a snowy nap, they always have a blast in the winter weather.
Dog's friendship
February 16, 2016 - Leave a comment

When choosing friends, people often gravitate towards those with complementary interests and personalities as them. As such similarities make it easier to start and build a friendship. But no matter how similar they are, some people just won't get along. It's just one of those undeniable facts of life you won't be friends with everyone. (Words)

Corina Haag

A relaxing afternoon
Leave a comment

Tiger and Kohaku took an afternoon nap with their humans in a cozy afternoon. What is true relaxing for a dog? It's the comfort of knowing that he or she is in a safe place allowed to romp and play or curl up in the corner and sleep, without being bothered by a busy day (Words)

Corina Haag

Travel with pets
Leave a comment

Family vacations are no longer just for two-legged children. According to a study by AAA and Best Western International, more than half of U.S. pet owners take their cats and dogs with them when they travel. If you're planning to hit the road or fly the skies with your canine companion or feline friend, (Words)

Corina Haag

Enjoy a snow day!
January 15, 2016 - Comments Off

For many of us humans, we are perplexed as to why our dogs want to be outside on a winter day, instead of curl up in a blanket on the couch with us warming our tootsies. Ever wonder why some dogs love winter and snow? I find Tiger and Kohaku love winter because they (Words)

Corina Haag
About
What to know something about us?

We love dogs and want to be happy at this moment.

So here at Tiger & Ko we're all about making life with your dog sweeter and easier – for both of you.

Whether it's the latest on-trend dog bandanas, a healthy dog treat recipe, or a handy tip sheet to take better photos of your dog – we're all about keeping it fun, simple and stylish. Pretty Puffy. We're for dog owners.

Contact
Do we like what we see?

Let me know & I will try to help!
Whether you want to just say hi, ask for quotes or follow me online, here you will find all necessary information.

Name *
First
Last
Email *
Comment or Message *

Submit
woof-woof!

Tiger the shiba inu
Kohaku the husky
Live in Ames, Iowa
Keep calm and be cute
Nice to meet you all!
Typing with paws

Recent Posts

Dog's friendships
March 5, 2018
When choosing friends, people often gravitate towards those with complementary interests and personalities as them, as these similarities make it easier to start and build friendships. But no matter how similar they are, some people (at least) get along. It's just one of those undeniable facts of life, you won't have friends with everyone. There [...]

A relaxing afternoon
March 5, 2018
Tiger and Kohaku took an afternoon nap with their human in a cozy afternoon. What is true relaxation for a dog? It's the comfort of knowing that he or she is in a safe place, allowed to rest and play or curl up in the corner and snooze, without being bothered by a dog he doesn't [...]

Travel with pets
March 5, 2018
Family vacations are no longer just for two-legged children. According to a study by AAA and PostWestern International, more than half of U.S. pet owners take their cats and dogs with them when they travel. If you’re looking to hit the road or fly the skies with your canine companion or feline friend, we’ve [...]

Enjoy a snow day!
February 28, 2018
For fans of all four limbs, we are perplexed as to why our dogs want to be outside on a winter day instead of curled up in a blanket on the couch with us and our hot cocoa. Even wonder why some dogs love winter and snow? I find Tiger and Kohaku love winter because they [...]

APPENDIX C. DESIGN 2
BLOG
A few maybe interesting stories from my digital life!

4 Posts Here

Dog's friendships
Tiger and Kohaku took an afternoon nap with their humans in a cozy afternoon. What is true relaxation for a dog? It's the comfort of...

Travel with pets
Family vacations are no longer just for two-legged children. According to a study by AAA and Best Western International, more than half...
ABOUT

Want to know something about us?

We do whatever we want to be happy at this moment

Hi there!

So here at Tiger & Ko we’re all about making life with your dog sweeter and easier – for both of you.

Whether it’s the latest antacid dog biscuit, a healthy dog treat recipe, or a handy tip about taking better photos of your dog – we’re all about keeping it fun, simple and stylish. Ruff! Where for dog lovers.
CONTACT

Do you like what you see?
Let me know & I will try to help!

Whether you want to just say Hi!
APPENDIX D. DESIGN 3

Tiger & Ko

RECENT POSTS

DOC'S FRIENDSHIP

Some choose friends, people others gravitate towards those with complimentary interests and personalities as they become more familiar. But no matter how social they are, some people just won't get along. (1)

A RELAXING AFTERNOON

Tiger and Kaku took an afternoon nap both their houses in a cozy afternoon. What is the relationship for a nap? It's the most common of sleeping that is in an are to a soft places, allowed to move and play or (1)

TRAVEL WITH PETS

Family vacations are no longer just for two-legged children. According to a study by Am and Best Western International (1), more than half of 3.3 pet owners take their cats and dogs with them when they travel. If you are traveling on (1)

ENJOY A SNOW DAY!

For many of us hibernators, we are awakened by our pets next to be outside on a winter's day. Instead of curled up in a blanket on the couch with us, our pets snuggle, (1)
BLOG

DOG’S FRIENDSHIP

Many dog owners often believe that their dogs form strong emotional bonds with those around them. However, each dog's relationship with its owner can be different. Some dogs form strong bonds with their owners while others may not be as close. It's important to understand your dog's needs and what works best for both of you.

A RELAXING AFTERNOON

After a long day at work, nothing is better than a relaxing afternoon with your pet. Whether you're planning a trip to the park or just spending time on the couch, it's important to have a little fun together.

TRAVEL WITH PETS

Many pet owners enjoy traveling with their furry friends. However, it's important to plan ahead and make sure your pet is comfortable and safe. Some pets may need extra care when traveling, such as frequent breaks or special diets.

ENJOY A SNOW DAY!

For many of us, snow is a rare treat. When it's cold outside, don't forget to make time for your furry friend. Whether you're building a snowman or enjoying a warm drink by the fire, it's important to keep your pet warm and safe.
Hi there!

SO HERE AT TIGER & KO WE'RE ALL ABOUT MAKING LIFE WITH YOUR DOG SWEETER AND EASIER - FOR BOTH OF YOU.

Whether it's the latest on-trend dog bandana, a healthy dog treat recipe, or a handy tip sheet to take better photos of your dog - we're all about keeping it fun, simple and stylish. Pretty Fluffy. We're for dog lovers.
CONTACT

DO YOU LIKE WHAT YOU SEE?
LET ME KNOW & I WILL TRY TO HELP WHETHER YOU WANT TO JUST SAY HI

Name
First
Last
Email
Consent or Message
Submit

TIGER & KO