THESIS

PERCEPTIONS OF PRODUCT BLOGS IN TAIWAN

Submitted by

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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR

SUPERVISION BY CHEN YI HUANG ENTITLED PERCEPTIONS OF PRODUCT

BLOGS IN TAIWAN BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SCIENCE.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

PERCEPTIONS OF PRODUCT BLOGS IN TAIWAN

A survey was conducted among college students in Taiwan (n=314) regarding their use, perceptions and responses to blogs that discuss products and services. Predictor variables included prior use/experience with blogs, the motivations of blog readers (seeking knowledge/information versus social utility/entertainment), the effects of blogger affiliation (independent, employee of manufacturer, paid), and the effects of balanced versus all-positive language. Criterion variables included assessments of credibility and value, purchase intent, and the likelihood of engaging in word-of-mouth (information sharing) online and offline.

Blog readers in the study were primarily motivated by knowledge/information seeking rather than social utility/entertainment. As hypothesized, assessments of credibility and value were positively related to bloggers being independent and using balanced (versus all-positive) language. However, no statistically significant main effects were discerned based on these variables for purchase intent or for the likelihood of sharing information with others. Notably, respondents were more likely to respond offline than online, and females were more likely than males to engage in information sharing. People with positive attitudes toward blogs also were more likely to assess blogs as more trustworthy compared to either advertisements or news.

Hierarchical regression suggested that attitudes toward blogs and purchase intent were best predicted by a knowledge/information motivation, although independence of the bloggers closely approached statistical significance. Information sharing online was best predicted by motivation based on social utility/entertainment (versus product knowledge), hours of e-mail use, and blogger affiliation. Information sharing online was also positively related to both forms of motivation and to the use of balanced language.

Implications for blog marketing, limitations and directions for future research were discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

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In October 2008, McDonald's invited three famous Taiwanese bloggers to try the

fast food chain's new flavored burgers and write about their experiences in their blogs.

These three bloggers all give positive reviews to the new burgers. At the same time,

McDonald's Internet advertising agency also recruited bloggers to write their own

reviews. Hundreds of bloggers published reviews about the new sandwiches, filling the

blogosphere with "unexpected delicious burgers" blog articles—lots of laudatory

reviews. A famous A-list blogger (top bloggers in Taiwan are often referred to as A-list

bloggers) bought one of the new burgers, but gave an unfavorable review (Christabelle,

2008). Christabelle's review showed up on the first page of a blog search engine. A few

days later, McDonald's Internet advertising agency approached Christabelle and politely

asked her to edit her comments to make them more favorable. She declined.

Taiwan Blog Marketing Status

Huang, Guo, and He (2008) pointed out the blog ethics are not clear in Taiwan.

There is no requirement that bloggers state the products' source or to disclose any

payments they might get from a company. In Taiwan's blogosphere, there are many

"professional bloggers" who write about new products on their blogs, such as *艾瑪隨處*

走走, I am Queen, and *美食摩人.* Many of these blogs are full of laudatory adjectives

about products, and it is not easy for blog readers to differentiate which blog is an

advertisement or an authentic description of a real user's experience ("News finds," 2009;

Huang, Guo, & He, 2008). Marketers for McDonald's, ASUS (a computer company),

Serenity Entertainment International (a movie company), and Procter & Gamble in

Taiwan view bloggers as valuable sources of third-party endorsements and think

consumers deem bloggers' endorsements are more credible than promotional messages

produced by marketers themselves. However, this is how marketers *think* about

consumers' mindset. This research will examine empirically blog readers' perceptions of

bloggers' endorsements.

Cheng, a marketing practitioner, says there are two types of marketing blogs

(cited in He, 2007). One type is a company-sponsored blog intended to promote its

product by increasing product visibility and reader engagement. The second type

involves seeking exposure on the independently produced blogs of famous bloggers who

write commentaries about products. This third-party approach is the more common blog

marketing method.

Cheng said marketers choose the top one or two most popular bloggers to write

product reviews because companies want to see instant effects. A-list bloggers have two

specific characteristics that make them attractive to consumers. First, A-list bloggers are

perceived as ordinary people. Except for non-governmental organizations and

governments, consumers put more trust on "people like me" rather than media or

celebrities (Shi, 2008). Second, product recommendations by A-list bloggers are

interesting to read and do not look or read like an advertisement. For example, a blogger

might write that she bought a netbook. She might explain that the portable computer

looks pretty and is lightweight, and so is suitable for women to carry. But if this blogger

does not disclose this netbook is a freebie, blog readers have no idea whether the blogger is telling the truth or has a relationship with the netbook company.

Blog Marketing

Blog marketing has become a controversial marketing practice that has prompted extensive arguments in Taiwan's blogosphere. Some bloggers and blog users believe that bloggers should engage in full disclosure about their relationships with the manufacturers of the products they write about. This means bloggers need to reveal any conflicts of interest (Huang et al., 2008; Kates, 2008; PipperL, 2008; Rickyli, 2005). One famous Taiwan blogger, Richyli, was a journalist previously. Today he is a director of media business/information at Yahoo. Richyli (2005) wrote in his blog that "Many bloggers 'forget' to tell blog readers which products or trip expenses are provided by the company... it makes the readers who are not familiar with the blogger assume that the blogger purchased the product" (para. 10).

Other bloggers disagree. They think a blog is blogger's private space and that bloggers can write anything they wish. Defenders argue that blog readers do not pay for the information they obtain free from bloggers, and that bloggers work for free (they are not paid journalists). Readers also can choose which blogs to read and believe. If readers think a blogger is not reliable, they do not need to heed the blogger's opinions and can choose other blogs (DearJohn, 2008; Huang et al., 2008). According to DearJohn (2008), another famous blogger and PChome Portal business department manager, " If readers think there are too many advertisements and this affects their willingness to read it, they can refuse to continue reading. It is a free market " (para. 6).

In United States, the Federal Trade Commission requires bloggers to disclose

freebies (free merchandise provided for evaluation, which the blogger can keep or sell) as

well as *payments* (cash compensation from a company) received in exchange for writing

a product recommendation) (FTC News, 2009). FTC commissioners think transparent

and conspicuous disclosure is good and necessary (Yao, 2009). Mass media in the U.S.

have followed similar procedures for more than three decades. For example, many news

organizations have company policies that prohibit journalists and other employees from

accepting gifts or anything of value from the organizations they cover in order to avoid

any appearance of conflict of interest. In a similar way, freebies are prohibited in the

Society of Professional Journalists' Code (SPJ Code of Ethics, 1996) and are discouraged

in the Code of the Ethics of the Public Relations Society of America as part of its concern

about avoiding the corruption of public channels of communication (PRSA, 2009).

In a similar vein, many U.S. media organizations guard against possible conflicts

of interest related to cross-ownership, i.e. the same holding company having an economic

interest in two companies that might be involved in a news report. For instance,

Microsoft and MSNBC have cooperated for 14 years since 1996. When MSNBC covers

a news story about Microsoft, the network tells audiences that Microsoft is MSNBC's

corporate partner. For example, when Choney (2009) wrote news about Microsoft

releaseing a free anti-virus software, she annotated her reporting by adding "MSNBC is a

Microsoft - NBC joint venture" (Choney, 2009, "Microsoft releases free anti-virus

software," para. 2).

In Taiwan, such conflicts of interest are rarely disclosed, particularly when a

corporation owns both manufacturing firms and media properties. For example, Want

Want Holdings Limited is a food manufacturer in Taiwan that also owns hospitals, hotels, and a real estate company in China and Taiwan. In 2009, the company bought China Times Group, which owns two newspapers and two television networks. When one of those newspapers, the *China Times,* reports about San Want hotels, it does not disclose that the hotel's owner and the newspaper office's owner are the same entity (Qiu, 2009). The actions of the Federal Trade Commission in the United States sparked considerable debate within the Taiwan's blogosphere about the need for of disclosure. This controversy prompted this researcher to become interested in what Taiwanese think about product blogs, their motivations for use of blogs, and their expectations about the independence of bloggers, and how those concerns might impact the effectiveness of product recommendations appearing in blogs in Taiwan.

Overview of the Thesis

This study includes five chapters. Chapter 2 is a literature review, which includes a discussion of the principal theories incorporated in this research: uses and gratifications, language expectancy theory and information sharing/word-of-mouth. Chapter 3 outlines the five hypotheses to be tested and reviews the methodology of the survey conducted to assess the opinions of blog readers. Chapter 4 presents and analyzes the results. Chapter 5 discusses the research's findings, implications and makes recommendations for blog marketing in the future.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Blogs Defined

Blogs are becoming influential tools for communicating and marketing. A blog is an electronic diary or journal posted as a web page on the Internet. Although organizations can purchase software to operate a blog on their own Web sites, most blogs appear on blog sites operated by third-party Web site operators. The best-known blog sites include blogspot.com, wordpress.com and typepad.com, but hundreds of blog sites operate around the world. Most blog sites are advertiser-supported and do not charge either the blogger or the blog user for access.

Bloggers (who are blog *creators* versus users or *readers*) control the content of their individual diaries or entries through the use of passwords and usually adopt a theme or topical focus and create a unique name that distinguishes a particular blog from others. An individual entry or posting is usually a 200-500 word entry with a distinct title and date stamp (date and time of the entry) and is automatically assigned a distinct universal resource locator (URL) or *trackback*, which allows users to go directly to a particular entry. Bloggers have the option of allowing readers to post comments, and many readers in turn will comment about other readers' comments. Depending on the site, blogs can be indexed on the major search engines (for example, Google or Yahoo!) as well as search engines that specifically track blog (e.g.,Technorati.com, etc.).

Blogs let people write articles, upload photos and videos to express their thoughts and feelings or to share information. Blogs provide platforms for bloggers (who write the blog) and blog readers to have conversations as blog readers post comments on blog

postings. A blog could be produced by an individual author or multiple authors (Kaye, 2005; Yang & Lim, 2009). Not only individuals use blogs to disseminate their thoughts, but a lot of corporations also use blogs to communicate with their potential and current customers. Nowadays blogs are being considered influential and promotional because of their powerful and quick ability to disseminate information.

A blog is a primary example of the use by marketers of *electronic word-of-mouth* (eWOM). Other examples of eWOM include exposure through discussions on online forums (chat rooms, discussion groups and bulletin boards) as well as on product rating sites and social networking sites. For example, when a person wants to buy a digital camera, eWOM allows people to acquire relevant information from other consumers who used the product before or from digital camera specialists online, who collectively comprise a virtual community. Potential consumers can collect other users' experience about the product and then make a purchasing decision.

eWOM has several unique characteristics. eWOM often occurs between people who have little or no prior relationship with one another (e.g. strangers who are fellow consumers) and can be anonymous (Dellarocas, 2003; Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006; Lee & Youn, 2009; Sen & Lerman, 2007). Anonymity allows people to express themselves about problems they confront and to comment candidly about people or products. For example, a digital-camera expert might be a stranger on the Internet, but he/she can give professional advice for buying a digital-camera nonetheless.

Blogging in Taiwan

Blogging is popular in Taiwan, and thus companies and their marketing and public relations agencies now invite bloggers to write reviews about new products. Numerous bloggers in Taiwan recommend electronic devices, travel tours, cosmetics, foods and other products or services on their blogs—anything that people can imagine. Several famous bloggers even assemble their blog articles into books (Queen, 2009; Wan-Wan, 2005).

According to the Institute for Information Industry (2008), around a quarter of the Internet users in Taiwan have their own blogs—approximately 3 million people. This compares to about 20% of Americans (57 million people) who read blogs and 4% of Americans (12 million people) who produce their own blogs (Lenhart & Fox, 2006).

When Taiwan's blogosphere began in the early part of the decade, most bloggers and blog users were young adults. In 2005, young students represented 50% of blog users (ZDNet, 2006). In 2007, the average age of blog users was 26.7, and young students who are also blog users were 36%. Indeed bloggers have become more mature, and the number adult workers who use blogs has increased (Zhang, 2007). Therefore we can assume the profile of blog readers corresponds to Taiwan's overall demographic profile in terms of age.

Theoretical Foundations

This study draws upon three key concepts as its theoretical foundation: *uses and gratifications theory* as a basis for understanding the motivation of blog readers, the *affiliation* or *independence of the bloggers* as a means for assessing the credibility of the

blog, and *language expectancy theory* as a way to understand the content they expect to find. The study then measures the effect of these independent or predictor variables on four key measures: *readership of blogs*, *attitudes*, *behavioral (purchase) intent* and the likelihood readers will *share information* with others. These variables serve as the dependent variables in the study.

Independent Variables

Uses and Gratifications (Media Use Activities)

Uses and gratifications theory (U&G) is applied to many communication studies to examine why people are motivated to consume various traditional forms of media—newspapers, television, magazines, and radio. According to uses and gratifications theory, people actively choose appropriate media to satisfy their needs and goals, and learn which communication channels can fulfill their needs (Li, 2007).

Although conventional media audiences might be considered passive audiences who might not be particularly purposeful in making media choices, blog users are generally quite intentional and aware of the reasons why they read blogs and select specific contents and information to gratify their needs (Kaye, 2007; Li, 2007; Meadows, 2008; Swanson, 1979). This is because Internet tools, such as blogs, demand that users engage in selecting, responding to, forwarding or otherwise processing the blog messages. They do so by using the keyboard and mouse on their computer or the touchpad on their wireless device.

Conventional mass media provide only limited opportunities for interaction or to provide feedback to information providers. Newspapers, magazines, radio and television

are essentially one-way sources of information (Kaye, 2007; Rubin, 1984, 1994). But a blog is two-way communication tool that makes it easy for users to engage in a dialogue and to interact with others by making comments, and using trackbacks that allow linking to blog posts in e-mails or text messages, or on their own Web sites, or on blogs. Indeed, participation levels are determined by the users (Kaye. 2007).

In considering the motivation of blog readers, Cowels (1989) found that interactive media reveal more information about users' characteristics than noninteractive media. In studying blog readers, Cowles found that readers choose what they want to read based on the bloggers' charisma (e.g., reputation and attractiveness) or blogs' characteristics (e.g., a blog that talks about high technologies or political news). For example, some housewives might focus on housework blogs, while people who are interested in advanced technology devices might read blogs about touch-screen cell phones. Blog readers actively seek information based on their needs and what kinds of information that bloggers provide.

In general, uses and gratifications theory identifies four broad motivations for media use: satisfaction of *cognitive needs* (surveillance of the environment, need for cognition, problem solving), the development of *self-identity*, *social utility* (advantageous use of information for social purposes) and *diversion/entertainment* (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973; Rubin, 2002).

Uses and gratifications theory has provided a well-grounded perspective to study motivations of blog readers (Kaye, 2005; Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Swartz, 2004; Papacharissi, 2004; Trammell, Tarkowski, Hofmokl, & Sapp, 2006). Although no previous research could be found that addressed motivations for reading product information

blogs, previous research suggests that blog readers actively read blogs for several

reasons.

Kaye (2005) for example, identifies: entertainment, communicating with friends

who have blogs, knowledge seeking and serving as an information maven. As for

product blogs readers, the researcher picked three motivations for reading product blogs:

(1) knowledge seeking, (2) social utility, and (3) entertainment (Kaye, 2005).

Knowledge seeking involves users looking to blogs for specific information.

Knowledge seeking is based on the idea that product blogs provide valuable information

to help make a purchase decision (i.e., find the best value or avoid unnecessary risk).

Readers are thought to believe that product blogs provide a wide range of information

(Kaye, 2007). This information can often be more up-to-date news than found in

traditional media (Hamilton, 2003; Hastings, 2003; Kaye, 2005; Levy, 2002b; Ryan,

2003). Schiffman and Kanuk refer to *risk reduction* with regard to buying decisions and

the reduction of search time as "self-involvement motivations." (cited in Hennig-Thurau

& Walsh, 2004, p. 53) These two factors can explain why people use blogs as shopping

guides. Kaye (2007) noted that intellectual/aesthetic fulfillment is one of the motivations

for using blogs. These readers also want to access to experts' opinions and be

knowledgeable.

Social utility refers to the idea that blog readers can benefit socially from the

information obtained, not merely to make a wise purchase decision or enjoy intellectual

benefits. Readers whose motivations are grounded in the social utility of the information

might desire to be influential, or to be affiliated with others, or to be useful to others, or

to be socially accepted, or to be socially recognized as an expert. In other words, they

seek some sort of *social advantage* by using the information they read about products.

Readers motivated by social utility are likely to make recommendations or give advice to thus feel influential because they are affecting other people. This is consistent with the argument that maintaining personal relationships is one of primary factors why people want to use media (McQuail, Blumler & Brown, 1972). Social utility is a potentially useful concept because blogging itself is a form of social influence where ordinary individuals presumably share information with peers or members of an online community. Blog readers, in turn, can share the information they read in blogs with others (see separate discussion about information sharing).

Diversion and entertainment refers to reading a blog simply for fun, relaxation, and enjoyment. Like other forms of Internet communication, such as e-mail or surfing the Web, reading blogs offers an escape from boredom and work (Kaye, 2007).

Affiliation /Independence of the Blogger

Separate from the motivation of readers, the effectiveness of product messages in blogs are posited to be moderated by whether the blogger is perceived by the reader as being an agent of a product producer or service provider, or is perceived as being independent with nothing to gain by making either positive or negative comments. Independent bloggers are defined as unaffiliated authors with nothing to gain by writing about a product. Nonindependent bloggers are defined as product bloggers who received some form of compensation for writing their recommendations. This might be because they a) are salaried employees of a product producer or service provider, b) the recipient of a pay-off or payment in exchange for a writing a positive recommendation about a

product, or c) the recipient of free samples (freebies) that the blogger can keep or personal use, or in the case of expensive items, consider selling for cash.

Perceptions of affiliation or independence have a direct impact on the source credibility of a blogger. In general, source credibility refers to perceptions about the source of information, which can bias how the information is processed and thus the message's effectiveness. In general, the higher the credibility of a source, the more likely the information will be accepted as accurate, believable, reliable and trustworthy (Stanford, Tauber, Fogg & Marable, 2002). A highly credible source is more effective than low credible source and highly credible source causes positive attitude change and behavioral intention (Hass, 1981).

Numerous studies suggest that the perceived trustworthiness and expertise are two most important elements that determine the credibility of a source (Hovland &Weiss, 1951; Ibelema & Powell, 2001; Tseng & Fogg, 1999). Trustworthiness means the source was described as well-intentioned, truthful, or impartial. Expertise suggests the perceived information source can be delineated as knowledgeable, reputable and competent (Tseng & Fogg, 1999). Based on the results of previous studies, independence is directly related to trustworthiness because independent sources are presumed to be capable of being truthful and impartial. Expertise can also be used in this research because bloggers' knowledge about the product and his/her reputation in the blogosphere are crucial factors that affect readers' motivations to consider or make a purchase decision. Information from a source evaluated as highly expert generates greater attitude change while a low-expertise source does not produce attitude change (Milburn, 1991).

Assessments about the credibility of blogs and bloggers vary. According to Princeton Survey Research Associates International (2005), only about 12% of *general Internet users* believed what they read in blogs. About 57% of Internet users did not consider blogs as trustworthy, and 21% said blog news was never accurate. By contrast, Johnson and Kaye (2004) found that *actual blog users* rated blogs as highly credible because of their independence—and more credible than traditional media sources, which blog users believe are controlled by corporate interests. Blogs are independent and thus can discuss issues that traditional media avoid talking about it. According to Banning, Bradley and Trammell's national survey (2006), people who have used blogs or who have higher levels of experience with blogs, think blogs have higher credibility than people who have not used blogs. Once Internet users start browsing blogs, it appears that their perceptions of the credibility of blogs increase.

Research suggests that consumers look at a variety of cues when determining the quality of the online information (Greer, 2003; Lee & Youn, 2009). One Taiwanese blogger, Ms Hong, found that many A-list bloggers recommended the same product almost at the same time. Although some of them pretended they bought the product and gave a positive comment, one of them acknowledged she received the product from the manufacturer (Hong Nana, 2009). Blog readers do not know if bloggers sincerely recommend the product or ally themselves with marketers, but they do not want be de fooled by fabricated word of mouth.

Language Expectancy Theory

In tandem with the idea of independent bloggers versus those who are indebted in some way of a product producer or service provider, this study relied on language expectancy theory as a basis to consider how readers might respond to product reviews that are uniformly positive versus those that might be more balanced (i.e., contain a combination of both positive and negative comments). If a blogger is presumed by readers to be independent, readers might logically expect that blog comments would include both positive and negative, while the same expectation might not apply if the blogger is recognized as being an employee or the recipient of some kind financial consideration.

Language expectancy theory (LET) assumes that people have specific expectations about the language and message strategies used by mass media and other persuasion campaigns (Burgoon et al., 2002), based on their knowledge of language systems.

When considered in a persuasion context, language expectancy theory posits that message receivers develop linguistic expectations about how a communicator will disseminate information. When the language used or a message's word choice or approach is outside the bounds of expectations generally found in the language, cognitive conflicts result. The resulting violations, which can be either positive or negative, affect acceptance of the persuasive messages and also either facilitate or prevent persuasion.

Positive violations happen in two situations: (1) when the enacted behavior is *preferred* over what was expected, or (2) when a communicator is initially negatively evaluated by the receiver but the source then conforms more closely to the expected

behavior. Marketing companies hope that a blogger's endorsements could produce first situation by positively exceeding their expectations and thus prompting positive awareness, attitudes and behaviors (Burgoon, 1995).

Advertising and marketing companies are not certain about readers' expectations about products blogs. If a blogger acts in the same role as a journalist – as an independent observer and arbiter of public opinions – it would be assumed that blogs should contain a balanced assessment of a product, including both positive and negative features. For a marketer, a predominantly positive assessment should be sufficient, even if some incidental or nonmaterial negative comments are included. However, when a blog commentary is exclusively positive, or only features laudatory or effusive language that reads more like an advertising than a news or opinion column, the intent of the blogger might be subject to question.

In theory, readers should expect a product blog to include both positive and negative comments. However, many blogs contain only positive comments are pretty common.   In Taiwan, in particular, bloggers seldom write negative comments about the product, especially they get the product on a complimentary basis (as a freebie). In part, this can be explained by Chinese culture, where it is considered impolite to accept and to then talk negatively about a gift.

<u>Dependent Variables</u>

This study proposes to use four distinct measures of the impact of these independent variables on blog readers: their self-reported assessments of the extent to which they read blogs, their attitudes or predispositions toward product blogs, their intent

to actually purchase the products they might read about, and the probability they would share information (engage in further word-of-mouth) with family or friends, either online or offline.

Readership

One of the fundamental measures of the impact of blogs relate to their level of consumption. Users with higher motivation, as well as users who place a value on the information contained in a product blog, would logically be expected to rely on blogs more than other consumers. Readership can be measured several ways: by actually observing blog use, by electronically tracking patterns of use on a computer, or by simply asking readers to tell how they use blogs. The latter can be operationalized by asking people to report the number of blogs they have viewed, the amount of time spent reading blogs on the previous day or in a typical week, or by asking people to make a subjective self-assessment of the amount of time they devote to consuming blogs, which might range from "not at all" to "a lot " (Li, 2007; Sweetser et al, 2008). Although some studies have relied on random sampling using telephone surveys (Lenhart & Fox, 2006), other studies have relied primarily on snowball sampling (Kaye, 2007), or convenient samples (Eveland& Dylko, 2007) to locate blog users. All of these methods are subject to obvious concerns about reliability.

Attitudes

The impact of blogs can also be measured by focusing on people's attitudes toward them. Fishbein and Ajzen (2010) defined "attitude as a latent disposition or tendency to respond with some degree of favorableness or unfavorableness to a

psychological object" (p. 76 & p. 125). Therefore people may have different

predispositions toward the attitude object—product blogs—based on their motivations,

expectancies, social norms about product blogs and its bloggers. Johnson and Kaye

(2004) concluded that "The more users rely on Weblogs, the higher their assessments of

credibility" (p. 63). The researcher presumed that past use experiences also affect

people's attitudes about product blogs.

Behavioral (Purchase) Intent

Purchase intent is a form of behavioral intent dealing with the probability that a

person would purchase a product or service after being exposed to a persuasive message

about it. According to Fishbein & Azjen (2010, p. 48) asking people about their intention

to take a particular action is a reasonably reliable method to predict an individual's plans

to act, presuming that they are not impaired from taking the focal action and their

personal goals or needs do not change. According to the authors, behavioral intention

can "account for an appreciable proportion of variance in actual behavior" (p.48).

According to Hallahan (1995, p.118), although positive attitude toward the brand

represents a predisposition to purchase, *purchase intent* is an even better predictor that can

be measured as the self-reported probability that such a purchase activity will be undertaken.

Therefore, the researcher assumed when positive attitude toward the product blogs increase,

the likelihood of purchase intent will increase, too.

Information Sharing

   After reading a product blog, blog readers might share the information they read it from the blog to their friends or families. This behavior means blog readers engage in an extension of the word-of-mouth (WOM) promotion associated with blogs. Word-of-mouth is the term most frequently used in the marketing literature to describe the sharing of product information among consumers, but is a special form of *information sharing*, a concept prevalent in the communication. Information sharing is the opposite of *information seeking* and can involve a variety of *online* and *offline* activities.

   Word of mouth is one of the most influential sources of marketplace information for consumers (Arndt, 1967; Lee & Youn, 2009; WOMMA, 2009). Manufacturers or product bloggers hope their messages can change potential consumers' and blog readers' attitudes and behaviors by creating "buzz."

   WOM is a powerful form of recommendation for Asians. Nielsen Consumer Report (2007) pointed that, some 91% of Taiwanese believe that information heard through word-of-mouth communication is trustworthy. Compared to Taiwan residents, Europeans are less likely to trust what they hear from other consumers, particularly people in Denmark (62%) and Italy (64%). Web-based recommendations such as blogs are most trusted in South Korea (81%) and Taiwan (76%), while scoring lowest in Finland (35%). People believe what they are told by their friends or families more than advertisings and manufacturers. That is why some companies create testimonial ads featuring ordinary consumers, such as the recent Dove shampoo advertising campaign. However, advertisements are still messages produced by product manufacturers. Marketers started exploiting eWOM's power through personal blogs and social

networking Web sites because they know that consumers trust their peers more than advertisers or marketers (Lee & Youn, 2009; Sen & Lerman, 2007).

Research estimates that 90% of word-of-mouth conversations take place offline (Keller & Berry, 2006), and that only 15% of consumers account for fully one-third of WOM conversations in America. These "conversation catalysts" rely heavily on the Internet as a resource for the information they pass along to their family and friends (as cited in Brown, Broderick & Lee, 2007, p. 3).

An important extension of the use of blogs as an eWOM tool, is to understand how blog readers engage in information sharing activities. Among common online activities are: posting comments on the product blog itself, posting the URLs (trackbacks) for a particular product blog posting on their own blogs or Web sites, capturing and re-distributing screen images of the posting, and posting comments on another blog or online forum (chat room, bulletin board/discussion group, or product rating site). Blog readers can also create e-mail, text or microblog (Twitter) messages that reference a posting and include the trackback. Offline, blog readers can share the information by talking with friends in person or over the phone, printing and distributing copies of blog commentaries to friends or family, or by writing about the product in letters, articles or newsletters they might produce. Thus, in addition to understanding perceptions about product blogs, this study sought to specifically examine what blog readers might do with the information obtained.

The importance of sharing information obtained from media has been recognized since the original research on opinion leadership and the two-step flow of communication, which showed how interpersonal communication and primary groups

moderated the formation of beliefs and attitudes (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Marketers

have recognized the importance of interpersonal influence with recognition of the *market

maven*, individuals who play a pivotal role in sharing information with others (Feick &

Price, 1987; Goody & East, 2008). Importantly, they do not have to be early purchasers

or users of products about which they have information.

In recent years, considerable emphasis has been placed on word-of-mouth

advertising (Thorn, 2008) and marketing (WOMMA, 2009). Most recently, drawing on

this same idea, marketers have been encouraged to cultivate *citizen marketers* and

customer evangelists. Citizen marketers always feel they should give something to others

and they are willing to devote their time and money to share or advocate the information

that they think is good for people (McConnel & Huba, 2007a, b). Both citizen marketing

and marketing evangelism are advanced forms of WOM wherein marketers encourage

customers to become their free salespeople or voluntary advocates. They spread their

recommendations and recruit new customers, not for money or other compensation, but

to benefit others (Kawasaki, 2004).

Chapter 3

METHODS

Based on the literature review in Chapter 2, the researcher conducted a survey of blog readers in Taiwan—college students at the National Changhua University of Education.

The study addressed five specific hypotheses:

H1 Rationale: Uses and gratifications theory suggests varied reasons why people choose specific media. Information seeking, social utility, and entertainment are important needs that might explain the motivations why people start using blogs. Most blog readers who are motivated by information seeking are likely to want to solve problems and to be highly purposeful when reading other's reviews. Therefore, they may set high expectations for bloggers' impartiality. On the other hand, blog readers who browse blogs for social utility and entertainment probably might not have such high expectations when evaluating blogs. Also, blog readers who are also information seekers are more likely to be prospective customers than other readers. This led to the study's first testable hypothesis:

> **H1**. Blog readers motivated by the information seeking are more likely to
>
> **a)** read product blogs.
>
> **b)** think that independence of the blogger is important.
>
> **c)** favor a combination of positive and negative comments in a blog.

H2 Rationale: Based about the discussion about credibility and independence or affiliation of bloggers in Chapter 2, independent bloggers were predicted to be evaluated as more credible and valuable by blog readers because they have nothing to gain and do not receive benefits from marketers. In Taiwanese culture, if someone obtains advantages from a company, they are not expected to write negative comments about the company's product. A Taiwanese proverb says: When you take advantage of someone, you dare not antagonize him or her. Independent product bloggers do not have this problem; they can tell readers what they really believe about the product without any fear of losing face. The hypothesis tested was:

> **H2**. Blogs written by bloggers that readers believe are independent, i.e., not affiliated with a marketer
>
> **a)** are perceived by readers as more credible.
>
> **b)** are perceived by readers as more valuable.
>
> **c)** are positively related to purchase intentions.

H3 Rationale: Blogs that only include positive or only negative comments do not give a balanced or fair judgment of the product. Based on the literature review in Chapter 2 and the researcher's own observation within Taiwan's blogosphere, bloggers who are affiliated with a company rarely make negative comments compared to independent bloggers. Therefore the researcher predicted that blog readers put more trust in a blog with balanced comments:

H3. Blogs that present a combination of balanced comments (positive and negative versus all-positive) are

a) perceived by readers as more credible.

b) perceived by readers as more valuable.

c) more likely to increase purchase intentions.

H4 Rationale: Blog readers who are motivated by social utility, rather than personal problem-solving needs, were expected to disseminate new information to other people compared to blog readers who read blogs for personal knowledge seeking or entertainment purposes. These socially oriented readers were believed to think "what's happening in this world" is part of their responsibility or merely enjoy doing so. Readers motivated by the social utility of the information they obtain might also think that sharing information earns them respect from people who think they are knowledgeable. Thus, this study predicted:

H4. Blog readers motivated by social utility are more likely to *share* product information or engage in *word-of-mouth* than those motivated by the knowledge/information seeking.

H5 Rationale: Finally, the researcher sought to understand how people's trust affects their blog use behaviors. Therefore she assumed people who enjoy reading blogs would pay more attention to reading blogs than watching advertisements and news. Reading blogs was posited to be an engaging behavior that requires more effort and concentration than looking at advertisements and possibly reading or watching news. Indeed, many people view advertisements casually though a process of incidental (versus intentional)

exposure. For example, the respondents in Kaye's survey pointed out that they turned to blogs because they "distrust and have disdain for traditional media" (Kaye, 2007, p. 138). The researcher also hypothesized that people who prefer reading blogs might think blog endorsements are more trustworthy than advertisements and news and thus more willing to pay more attentions on blogs. Thus, the final hypothesis was:

H5. People with positive attitudes toward blogs.

a) pay more attention to product blogs than advertisements.

b) believe that blog endorsements are more trustworthy than advertisements.

c) believe that blog endorsements are more trustworthy than reading

product information in the news.

For each of the hypotheses the possible moderating effects of gender, age, Internet use and experience with blogs were tested by as possible confound or moderating variables.

Sample

The population used in this study was a convenient sample composed of 314 college students in three large lecture classes at National Changhua University of Education in Taiwan. The student population was arranged through contact with Professor Gwo-Jen Lin, who agreed to allow students in his classes at National Changhua University of Education to participate. The investigator was a former student at the university who visited Taiwan in December 2009. Professor Lin announced the survey in class prior to the day of administration. Students had the option of not participating. The class participants were almost all Taiwanese students, ages 20 to 23, in advanced courses.

Data Collection and Instrument

Data from the sample was collected using a four-page paper-and-pencil questionnaire. Participants in the in-class survey were briefed in Mandarin in Figure 1, which was translated and read by the researcher. Participants were assured that results would remain confidential and that their identity would be anonymous. As an incentive, students had the chance to enter a drawing to win a 7-11 convenience store gift card worth 100 New Taiwan dollars (approximately US$3). In lieu of translating an Informed Consent form from English to Mandarin, and because of the unlikelihood that a Taiwan student would contact Colorado State officials regarding the study, Colorado State's Institutional Review Board was asked to waive the requirement that each participant receive and sign an Informed Consent. To participate in the drawing, interested students simply wrote their names on a card that was be turned in separately from the questionnaire. Thus, names and responses were not be linked in any way. The names of the participating students were not disclosed to the course instructor or university administrators. Upon completion of the drawing, the researcher destroyed the cards with participants' names. The questionnaires were be returned to Colorado State. After tabulation, the questionnaires were placed in storage in Department of Journalism and Technical Communication in keeping with IRB regulations and federal law.

Figure 1. Briefing Script (translated into Mandarin)

_____

Hello everyone,

My name is Chen-Yi Huang. I am a graduate school student in the department of Journalism and Technical Communication at Colorado State University, where I am completing this research for my master's thesis. The title of my project is "Perceptions of product blogs in Taiwan." My thesis advisor is Kirk Hallahan, Ph. D., Professor in the

Journalism and Technical Communication department at CSU. The purpose of the study is to investigate how people such as yourselves read blogs—those online commentaries or journals written by bloggers and that often discuss products. Examples include: 艾瑪隨處走走, 魔鬼甄與天使嘉, 貴婦奈奈的福態日記, and I am Queen. All of these blogs devote a portion of their content to products.

You are very important to my study. Please fill out the questionnaire carefully. Your response will only be used in this study. Your answer is confidential and anonymous. Do not write your name on the questionnaire. Neither your instructor nor any university official will have access to your answers. You have the right to discontinue at any time and to not turn in your questionnaire. But I hope you will complete the entire survey.

This questionnaire will take you about 10 minutes to complete. At the end, you will be asked to write down your name on the card provided. We will have a drawing, and 10 respondents will receive $100 [New Taiwan Dollar$], in 7-11 gift cards. If you have any questions about the survey, please ask me. I can provide a sheet with the name and e-mail addresses of where you can obtain additional information about the study.

_____

Figure 2 contains the text of the information card provided.

Figure 2. Survey Information Card (Copies available upon request)

_____

<div align="center">

部落格問卷調查
Blog Survey

</div>

需要獲得更多此研究的資訊, 請聯絡
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Questionnaire Outline

The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete. The first part of the questionnaire collected information about participants' blog and Internet experience, demographic information and motivations to read blogs. The second and third sections asked about participants' attitudes and opinions regarding bloggers' endorsements, which included bloggers' affiliation with companies, and perceptions about the positive and negative valences of blog messages. The final section of the questionnaire examined participants' purchase intention after reading product blogs and how readers compared blogs to advertising and news as sources of product information. Almost all the questions used 7-point Likert type scale items.

Operationalizations

● Independent Variables

Motivation (Uses and Gratifications)(H1; Question 6)

People's motivations for reading blogs were be addressed using 15 items that focused on three types of needs addressed in users and gratifications theory: *knowledge seeking*, *social utility* and *diversion/entertainment*. Participants were be asked about the reasons they read blogs using an 8-point Likert scale where 0 = *never* and 7 = *a lot*. Knowledge-seeking needs (5 items) included: *seek information, save time gathering information, reduce risk of making a bad purchasing decision, make me knowledgeable* and *obtain experts' opinions about products*. Social utility needs (5 items) included: *connect with friends, being able to chat with others about products, share information with others, help friends solve problems*, and *want to be influential*.

Diversion/entertainment needs (3 items) included: *pass time*, *have fun*, and *for relaxation*. The researcher revised Kaye (2007) blog use motivations items to create these motivations choices.

Affiliation/Independence of bloggers (H2; Questions 8-10, 13)

The perceived integrity of bloggers was be examined by asking participants to assume three different situations and then express their opinions about blogs they might read in each situation. The situations assumed the blogger is (1) *an employee of a company selling the product*, i.e. he/she works for the company; (2) *an independent blogger*, i.e. does not work for a company and does not accept compensation from a company; and (3) *an independent blogger who was paid for writing about marketers' products*, i.e. the writer is remunerated for posting product information on a blog. The items for credibility and believability combined measures used by Hallahan (1995), Beltramini (1988) and Meyer (1988). Participants responded on a 7-point semantic differential scale whether they assessed the message as c*redible/not credible*, *truthful/not truthful*, *convincing/not convincing*, *reputable/not reputable*, *believable/not believable*, *valuable/not valuable*, *persuasive/not persuasive*, *trustworthy/not trustworthy*, *useful/not useful*, and *accurate/inaccurate*. Half of the items were be reversed in direction and later recoded to eliminate possible order demand effects from the items being valenced in the same direction. The items were be factor analyzed to identify possible underlying concepts and subjected to reliability analysis. The scores were being combined, as appropriate, and the means for the resulting indices used in the statistical analysis.

Separately, the importance of affiliation/independence was assessed by asking participants to respond to 7 statements (Question 13) using a 7-point Likert scale where 1

= *not important to m*e, and 7 = *important to me*. The statements include; *Blogger is an*

employee of the company; Blogger is independent; The blogger does not receive money

from the marketer or the company; The blogger states clearly that he/she receives money

from the marketer or company; The blogger does not receive free samples; The blogger

states clearly that he/she receives free samples.

Positive versus negative valence of messages (H3; Questions 11-12)

To measure the possible effects of language in the blog messages, participants

were be presented with a hypothetical situation where the comments in the blog were

described as being either *all positive* (Question 11) or a balanced combination of *both*

positive and negative comments (Question 12). The participants were be asked to then

share their probable assessments of the blog posting using the same ten 7-point semantic

differential scale items used previously to assess the independence of the bloggers:

credible/not credible, truthful/not truthful, convincing/not convincing, reputable/not

reputable, believable/not believable, valuable/not valuable, persuasive/not persuasive,

trustworthy/not trustworthy, useful/not useful and *accurate/inaccurate*. Half of the items

were reversed in direction and later recoded to eliminate possible order demand effects

from the items being valenced in the same direction. Similar to the responses for blogger

independence, the items were factor analyzed and subjected to reliability analysis to

identify possible underlying concepts. The scores were be combined, and the resulting

index mean scores were used in the statistical analysis.

● **Dependent Variables**

Readership (H1a; Question 7)

Readership of blogs was be assessed using a single 8-point Likert scale in which participants indicate the extent to which they read blogs, where 0=*never*, 1=*very little* and 7=*a lot*. This measure was validated by comparing responses to participants' estimation of the amount of time they spending reading blogs (Questions 3 and 4).

Attitudes (H5, Question 5)

Participants were be asked to indicate their attitudes toward blogs using a 4-item 7-point semantic differential scale using the terms *not appealing/appealing, dislike/like, good/bad* and, *positive/negative.*

Purchase intention (H2c, H3c; Question 14)

Purchase intention was measured using 4 statements to which participants were be asked to indicate their probable actions using a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly disagree*. These 4 statements were: *I am likely to purchase a product I read about; I would be willing to purchase a product I read about; I would plan to purchase a product I read about; I definitely would purchase a product I read about.* Scores for the four items were tested for reliability and then combined to compute a mean index score of purchase intention that will be used in the analysis.

Information Sharing/Word of mouth (H4, Question 15)

The likelihood that participants share information found in a blog was be measured with 9 statements to which participants could indicate their probable behavior using a 7-point Likert scale, where 1=*not likely* and 7=*very likely*. The items include: *Leave a comment and post on the blog; Forward the blog to friends; Send messages to*

friends or families; Post a comment or trackback on your own blog; Tell friends; Post

comments or add links on your social networking site(s), such as Facebook; Share the

products' message to families or friends; Talk to families or friends about the

information I learned and *Share the information with others offline*. The scores were be

factor analyzed and subjected to reliability analysis. The aim is to create a single index

of information where the mean can be used for analysis purposes.

Comparative assessments of blogs versus other formats (H5a-c, Question 16)

To assess respondents' opinions about blogs compared to advertising or news,

participants were be asked 5 questions to which they responded using a 7-point Likert

scale, where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*. The statements dealt with

paying more attention to blogs than advertisements, assessing blogs as more trustworthy

compared to ads, assessing blogs as more trustworthy than news, the importance of

bloggers having a large readership or following, and importance of a blogger's

reputation. Responses to these questions are expected to be analyzed individually, not

combined into any index.

● Moderating variables

Potential explanatory or confound variables were be measured as follows:

Gender (Question 1): Gender was be determined by asking respondents to check

a box whether they are male or female.

Age (Question 2): Participants were be asked to check a box with the age range

that best indicated their age in years: 23 and under, 24-29, 30-35, 36-40, 41-45, 46-50,

51-55, 56-60, 60+ and decline to disclose. The majority of college students were

expected to fall in the 23 and under category. It was expected that the categories would be collapsed into a smaller number of categories for analysis purposes.

Internet use (Question 3): The possible moderating effects of higher (versus lower) Internet use was measured by asking people to estimate in hours and/or minutes the time spent on 7 Internet-related activities in a typical day: *reading e-mail, social networking, looking at Web sites, reading blogs (any type), reading product blogs, posting on my own Web site*, and *instant messaging*. The item on reading product blogs was be used to validate the separate measure (Question 7) where people estimated their product blog readership. The scores were be factor analyzed and subjected to reliability analysis. The aim is to create a single index of Internet use where the mean can be used for analysis purposes.

Blog Experience (Question 4). To assess familiarity with blogs, participants were be asked to indicate on an 8-point Likert scale the degree to which they had experience with blogs, where 0=*no experience at all*, 1=*a little* and 7=*a lot*. The three items included: *reading blogs, writing your own blog(s),* and *posting comments on blogs*. The items were be subjected to reliability analysis to create a mean score to serve as an index of blog experience. Blog experience is expected to be highly correlated to time spent with product blogs (Question 3) and frequency of blog use (Question 7).

Statistical Analysis

All the data from the questionnaires were compiled, edited, coded and entered into SPSS 17.0 software for analysis (SPSS, 2009). Scale items that were reversed in the questionnaire were recoded so all scale items were consistently positive (7) to negative (1). Potential scale items were factor analyzed and tested for reliability using the

Cronbach (1951) alpha statistic. Scale items with sufficient reliability (alpha >.70) were be combined, and an result mean index score was be used in the statistical analyses.

Descriptive statistics were compiled for each measure, including means and standard deviations. In general, hypotheses involving interval measures were be tested using Pearson *r* product-moment correlations. To compare the differences between three possible relationships between bloggers and marketers, the mean scores for the individual scale items were be compared using one-way analysis of variance. For the demographic confounds, *t* tests were be used to compare the mean scores of males versus females, and one-way ANOVA was be used to compare the means for the various age categories. In keeping with the custom in social science research, findings were be considered statistically if the chances are less than 1 in 20 that the results obtained were because of chance ($p < .05$).

Factor analysis (principal components extraction with varimax rotation) was used to discern underlying dimension among the items used to measure motivation, source affiliation, balanced versus all-positive language, and responses. The resulting factors were deemed significant if the resulting Eigenvalues were greater than 1 and factor loadings were above .50. No items were found that loaded on multiple factors at levels above .50. The resulting groups of items were then tested for reliability using the Cronbach alpha statistic, and then combined to increase an index and the index mean and standard deviation were used for purposes of the analysis.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS

Description of Participants

A total of 314 undergraduate students from National Changhua University of Education in Taiwan participated in this survey. As summarized in Table 1, 104 (33.3%) were male, while 208 (66.7%) were female. Two participants did not report their sex. There were 283 participants' (91.3%) age under 23, while 27 (8.6%) participants were age 24 or older. Four people did not reveal their ages.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

		Count	Percentage
Sex	Males	104	33.3
(n = 312)	Females	208	66.7
	Not reported	2	
Age	23 or under	283	91.3
(n = 310)	24 or older	27	8.6
	Not reported	4	

Use of Internet and Blogs by Participants

Table 2 summarizes background about participants' experience using Internet and blogs and their attitudes toward to product service blogs. Most questions used a 7-point scale to ask participants; some questions used 8-point scale to evaluate it. The researcher reversed some items on the questionnaire that measured participants' attitudes toward blogs to avoid demand effects from items all valenced in the same direction.

Table 2

Use of Internet and Blogs

---

a) *Frequency of Internet Use (In Hours)*

How much time do you spend on the Internet engaged in the following activities in a typical day?

	M	SD
Reading email	0.46	0.730
Social networking	0.88	1.295
Looking at Web sites	1.58	1.548
Reading blogs	0.74	0.857
Reading product blogs	0.36	0.599
Posting on my own Web site	0.48	0.829
Instant messaging	3.52	4.419

---

b) *Experience with Blogs*

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following sentences. If you have no experience with blogs, circle "none"
7=strongly agree, 1=strongly disagree

	M	SD
I have a lot of experience…		
Reading blogs	4.46	1.748
Writing your own blog	3.68.	1.969
Posting comments on blogs	3.31	1.696

---

c) *Frequency of Product Service Blogs*

How frequently do you read blogs that discuss products and services?
7 = a lot, 0 = never

	M	SD
	3.00	1.844

d) Attitudes toward Blogs
Which of the following best describes how you feel about with blogs that discuss products
and services.
7 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree

	M	*SD*
Appealing	3.84	1.703
Like	3.95	1.534
Good (reversed item)	4.06	1.429
Positive	4.00	1.402

Participants were asked how much time they spent on various Internet-related

activities by estimating the number of hours and/or minutes they engaged in these

activities. (Minutes were then recalculated as percentage of one hour to facilitate ease of

comparison.) The questionnaire listed seven major Internet-related activities and

specifically listed *reading blogs (any type)* and *reading products blogs*. Table 2(a) points

out people spent most time on instant messaging ($M = 3.52$ hours) while they reported

spending the least time on reading product blogs ($M = 0.36$ hours).

Separately, the researcher used a 7-point scale to ask participants' about their

levels of blog experience generally. Table 2(b) shows that most participants have

moderate experience on reading blogs ($M = 4.46$), but have less experience writing their

own blogs ($M = 3.68$) and posting comments on blogs ($M = 3.31$).

Question 7 similarly asked participants about their frequency of using blogs that

discuss products and services based on 7-point scale. Table 2(c) shows the mean score of

participants' frequency of using product service blogs is $M = 3.00$.

Based on Question 5, participants appear to be neutral in terms of their attitudes

toward blog discussions related to products and services. Generally, Table 2(d) revealed

that they think product blogs are good ($M = 4.06$) and the adjectives, which describe

product blogs are inclined in a positive way.

Descriptions of Measures

Motivation Indexes

Table 3 summerizes participants' motivations for reading blogs that mention

products or services. The researcher referred to Kaye's (2007) blog use motivation study

and adapted some items for use in this research.

Table 3

Motivations to Read Blogs

People are motivated to read blogs that talk about products for various reasons. To what degree do you use blogs for each of the following purposes?
7 = frequently, 0 = never use.

	M	SD
Knowledge-seeking factor	**3.79**	**1.648**
α = .92		
Seek information	4.42	1.939
Being able to chat with others about products	3.05	1.856
Reduce risk of making a bad purchasing decision	3.66	2.054
Save time gathering information	3.94	1.935
Make me knowledgeable	3.99	1.864
Obtain experts' opinions about products	3.78	1.947
Social utility/ Entertainment factor	**3.62**	**1.561**
α = .92		
Connect with friends	3.50	2.024
Pass time	3.69	1.878
Share information with others	3.88	1.866
Help friends solve problems	3.41	1.757
Have fun	3.97	1.882
Want to be influential	2.94	1.812
For relaxation	4.05	1.932
Entertainment (3-item sub factor)	**3.89**	**1.683**
α = .86		
Pass time	3.69	1.878

Have fun	3.97	1.882
For relaxation	4.05	1.932
Social utility (4 item sub factor)	**3.43**	**1.586**
α = .87		
Connect with friends	3.50	2.024
Share information with others	3.88	1.866
Help friends solve problems	3.41	1.757
Want to be influential	2.94	1.812

When the 13 items used to measure motivation were factor analyzed, two factors

emerged (instead of the original three) and were used in the analysis. Together, these

factors accounted for 71.9% of the variance among the items. One factor was labeled

knowledge-seeking motivation and included the six items related to *seeking information*,

chatting with others about products, reducing risk, saving time, becoming knowledgeable

and *obtaining expert opinions*. This factor accounted for 62.3.2% of the variance

explained, with an Eigenvalue of 8.23. The second factor combined the seven remaining

items related to the *social utility/entertainment value* of the information. Items in the

second factor included *connecting with friends*, *passing time*, *sharing information*,

helping friends solve problems, *having fun*, *being influential* and *relaxation*. This factor

accounted for considerably less of the variance compared to the knowledge-seeking

motivation factor -- only 8.53% of the variance, with an Eigenvalue = 1.11. Both groups

of items demonstrated high reliability (each Cronbach α = .92).

Table 3 suggests that knowledge seeking and social utility/entertainment were

relatively comparable in terms of their motivation importance (knowledge-seeking

motivation index $M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.648$; social utility/entertainment motivation index $M =$

3.62, $SD = 1.561$). Seeking information is the single most popular motivation that

explains why people read product blogs ($M = 4.42$). Relaxation ($M = 4.05$), being

knowledgeable ($M = 3.99$), having fun ($M = 3.97$) and saving time gathering information ($M = 3.94$) are also important motivations. Being influential ($M = 2.94$) is the least popular motivations about reading product service blogs.

The bottom of Table 3 shows the means when the two originally anticipated dimensions of social utility and entertainment were considered separately. The means suggest that entertainment ($M = 3.89$) is more important than social utility ($M = 3.43$). Although it might be argued that these original measures might be conceptually valid, (especially in light of the high Cronbach alpha coefficients for the separate measures), the researcher opted to analyze them together in keeping with the factor analysis results. In so doing, the focus of the study thus shifted to considering knowledge-driven motivation versus other motivations not based on acquiring knowledge.

Credibility of Affiliation Index

Table 4 shows participants' credibility and believability toward three kinds of bloggers: independent bloggers, employee bloggers, and paid bloggers.

Table 4

Effects of Perceived Affiliations between Marketers and Bloggers

	Independent	Employee	Paid a fee
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Credibility Index	4.40 (1.030)	3.80 (1.033)	3.23 (1.109)
α=	.906	.896	.912
Credible	4.53 (1.276)	3.57 (1.305)	3.02 (1.286)
Convincing	4.39 (1.218)	3.71 (1.193)	3.18 (1.324)
Valuable	4.52 (1.265)	4.07 (1.276)	3.45 (1.366)

Trustworthy	4.29 (1.161)	3.75 (1.184)	3.15 (1.214)
Accurate	4.32 (1.115)	3.95 (1.173)	3.40 (1.250)
Believability Index	4.23 (1.027)	3.90 (.984)	3.52 (1.208)
α=	.886	.863	.912
Believable	4.21 (1.223)	3.91 (1.159)	3.54 (1.402)
Reputable	4.09 (1.181)	3.97 (1.208)	3.51 (1.408)
Persuasive	4.18 (1.315)	3.84 (1.261)	3.50 (1.386)
Useful	4.34 (1.235)	3.95 (1.176)	3.67 (1.345)
Truthful	4.31 (1.289)	3.87 (1.315)	3.46 (1.489)

Combined Index—10 items
All α=   .888   .888   .917

Three separate factor analyses were used to identify underlying dimensions among the 10 items used to measure participants perceptions of bloggers, depending on whether they were independent, employed or paid a fee. The same basic pattern resulted for all three analyzes, suggesting two underlying factors. Together these accounted for 71.5%, 68.2% and 73.9% of the variance, respectively. The first factor was labeled *credibility* and included the items *credible, convincing, valuable, trustworthy* and *accurate* (Independent: Eigenvalue = 5.09, accounted for 50.2% of the variance; Employee: Eigenvalue = 4.89, 48.9% of variance; Paid fee: Eigenvalue = 5.75, 57.5% of variance).   The second factor, which was much smaller, was labeled *believability*, and suggested that *believability, being reputable, persuasiveness, usefulness* and *truthfulness* were related (Independent: Eigenvalue = 2.13, 21% of variance; Employee: Eigenvalue =

1.93, 19.3% of variance; Paid fee: Eigenvalue: 1.64, 16.4% of the variance). Reliability scores ranged from Cronbach α = .888 to α = .917.

Regardless of which factor is considered, Table 4, suggests that participants view independent bloggers as more credible ($M = 4.53$) and more believable ($M = 4.21$) than employee bloggers (credibility $M = 3.57$; believable $M = 3.91$) and paid bloggers (credibility $M = 3.02$; believable $M = 3.54$). In conclusion, participants put most trust on independent bloggers, followed by employee bloggers and lastly paid bloggers.

For purposes of the analysis, it should be noted that the all 10 items might have used a credibility index based on the overall high Cronbach coefficients reported at the bottom of Table 4 ($\alpha = .888$, $\alpha = .888$ and $\alpha = .917$), the researcher opted to analyze the findings separately. As it turns out, the credibility factor proved to a better predictor than the believability factor and a highly most efficient measure with higher Cronbach coefficients than either the 10-item index or the alternative believability index.

Credibility of Language

The researcher asked participants' opinions about two different forms of language that might appear in blogs: balanced versus all-positive language. The researcher applied the same 10-item scale that she used to evaluate participants' attitude toward affiliations between marketers and bloggers.

Table 5

Effects of Language on Responses

	Balanced Language	Positive Language
	M (SD)	*M (SD)*
Credibility Index	4.82 (1.084)	3.99 (1.206)
α=	.932	.935
Credible	4.92 (1.226)	3.91 (1.459)
Convincing	4.83 (1.267)	3.93 (1.383)
Valuable	4.96 (1.245)	4.07 (1.381)
Trustworthy	4.77 (1.225)	3.99 (1.301)
Accurate	4.69 (1.176)	4.02 (1.257)
Believability - Index	4.70 (1.156)	3.99 (1.212)
α=	.928	.919
Believable	4.77 (1.309)	4.01 (1.378)
Reputable	4.61 (1.299)	4.01 (1.375)
Persuasive	4.68 (1.338)	4.00 (1.411)
Useful	4.74 (1.302)	4.07 (1.361)
Truthful	4.76 (1.334)	3.89 (1.432)
Combined Index 10 items α=	.939	.934

Separate factor analyses were used to identify underlying dimensions of the items used to measure responses based on balanced versus all-positive language. Not

surprisingly, because the items were the same as those used to assess the effects of affiliation, the same two factors resulted for both balanced language (accounting for 78.1% of the variance) and for all-positive language (accounting for 77.6% of the variance). The *credibility* factor (*credible, convincing, valuable, trustworthy, accurate*) again accounted for the vast majority of the variance for both sets of measures (Balanced Language: Eigenvalue=6.46, 64.6% of variance; All-Positive Language Eigenvalue = 6.29, 62.9% of the variance). The *believability* factor (*believable, reputable, persuasive, useful, truthful*) again was considerably smaller (Balanced Language: Eigenvalue = 1.35, 13.5% of variance; All-Positive Language: Eigenvalue = 1.47, 14.7% of variance. Cronbach alphas ranged from α =.928 to α = .935).

Based on comparing all variables in factor one and factor two, participants think blogs with balanced language are more credible than all-positive language blogs. Balanced language credibility's mean score ($M = 4.92$) was higher than positive language ($M = 3.91$). In conclusion, participants think balanced language blogs are more credible, convincing, valuable, trustworthy, accurate, believable, reputable, persuasive, useful and truthful than blogs with all-positive language.

Participants Opinions About Bloggers Relationships to Sources

Table 6 reports findings of the series of statements to which respondents were asked to respond regarding their perceptions about bloggers and the relationship between bloggers and sources.

Table 6

Participants Opinions About Bloggers Relationships to Sources

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In reading product blogs, how important would each of the following be to you in making your purchasing decision?
7 = important to me, 1 = not important

	M	(SD)
The blogger does not receive money from the marketer or the company.	4.94	(1.625)
The blogger states clearly that he/she receives free samples, e.g., a cell phone, from the marketer or the company.	4.72	(1.505)
The blogger does not receive free samples e.g., a cell phone, from the marketer or the company.	4.69	(1.613)
The blogger states clearly that he/she receives money from the marketer or the company	4.64	(1.614)
Blogger is independent.	4.48	(1.549)
Blogger is an employee of the company	4.08	(1.635)

Among the statements, the most important thing for participants is that the blogger does not receive money from the marketer or the company ($M = 4.94$). The second most important one is the blogger states clearly if he/she receives free samples ($M = 4.72$). Third most important issue is that the blogger does not receive free samples ($M = 4.69$). Interestingly, participants appeared to have considerably less concern about the fact that a blogger might be an employee of a company. Presumably this is acceptable as long as the relationship is disclosed.

Purchase Intent

Question 14 used a 7-point scale to ask participants' about the likelihood they might purchase a product after reading a product blog.

Table 7

Purchase Intent

Now take a moment to think about how likely are you to actually purchase a product after reading it in a blog. For each statement, indicate the degree you disagree to agree.
7 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree

	M	(SD)
Index (α = .850)	3.58	(1.252)
I am likely to purchase a product I read about	4.15	(1.562)
I would be willing to purchase a product I read about	4.05	(1.497)
I would plan to purchase a product I read about	3.46	(1.532)
I definitely would purchase a product I read about	2.69	(1.435)

The four items – likely to purchase, would be willing to purchase, plan to purchase, and would definitely purchase – together showed strong reliability (Cronbach α = .85) and were combined to create a purchase intent index. The overall index mean score is M = 3.58. Participants were most readily willing to say they were *likely* to purchase a product they read about (M = 4.15). They were least likely to say they *definitely* would purchase a product they read about (M = 2.69).

Participants' Responses to Reading Blogs

Table 8 summarizes participants' reported communication behaviors after reading blogs that discuss products or services.

Table 8

Participants' Responses to Reading Blogs

After reading blog that talks about products, how likely would you engage in each of the following activities?
7 = very likely, 1 = not likely

	M	(SD)
Index – Offline Activities (α = .907)	3.93	(1.397)
Share the information with others offline	4.13	(1.604)
Tell friends	4.05	(1.549)
Share the product information with families or friends	3.88	(1.576)
Talk to families or friends about the information I learned	3.65	(1.600)
Index—Online Activities (α = .884)	2.81	(1.283)
Forward the blog to friends	3.32	(1.620)
Leave a comment and post on the blog	2.92	(1.621)
Post comments or add links on your social networking site(s), such as Facebook	2.74	(1.563)
Post a comment or trackback on your own blog	2.66	(1.500)
Text messages or email to friends or families	2.56	(1.517)

Factor analysis of the 9 items was used to assess possible responses to reading blog messages and clearly grouped into two categories, representing offline and online responses. Together these two factors accounted for 74.5% of the variance among the items. The *offline* actions included *sharing with others offline, telling friends, sharing product information with families or friends* and *talking to families or friends about information learned* (Eigenvalue = 5.262, 58.4% of variance). The *online* actions included *forwarding the blog to a friend, leaving a comment, posting comments or adding links to a social networking site, posting a comment or trackback on one's own blog* and *text messages or email to others* (Eigenvalue = 1.44, 16.0% of variance). Cronbach alpha scores suggested high reliability (Offline α = .907; Online α = .884). The

items were combined to create indices of offline ($M = 3.93$) and online ($M = 2.81$)

responses that were used for analysis purposes.

When the participants were asked what kinds of activities would they do after

reading a product blog, participants are more likely to engage in offline activities ($M =$

3.93) than online activities ($M = 2.81$; paired t-test: $t = 15.946$, $df = 300$, $p < .000$). For

offline activities, sharing the information with others offline is the most likely response

($M = 4.13$). For online activities, participants were most likely to forward the blog to

friends ($M = 3.32$).

Participants' Preferences and Comparisons of Blogs to Other Communications

Question 16, which listed five statements, was intended to ascertain participants'

preferences and opinions about blogs and bloggers using a 7-point scale.

Table 9

Participants Preferences

Finally, please respond to the follow statements.
7 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree

	M	*(SD)*
A blogger with a bad reputation attracts fewer readers	4.39	(1.712)
A blogger who has a large of followers is more believable to me	4.39	(1.516)
Bloggers' endorsements are more trustworthy than marketers' advertisements	4.36	(1.433)
Bloggers' endorsements are more trustworthy than reading about the same product at the news	4.23	(1.355)
For new products, I would pay more attention on looking at bloggers' blogs than advertisements	3.96	(1.467)

These statements were not intended to be used to create any kind of index. But the data suggest reputation is an important criterion—and that a blogger with a bad reputation attracts fewer readers ($M = 4.39$). Respondents also think a blogger with large followers is more believable to them ($M = 4.39$). Interestingly, the results suggest that the participants are inclined to believe that a blog is more trustworthy than either advertising ($M = 4.36$) or reading product information as news ($M = 4.23$). However, participants said they are not more likely to pay attention to a blogger than an advertisement by a marketer ($M = 3.96$). In this section, the researcher did not ask students to disclose the extent to which they read product news in newspapers or other media; such information might have provided a valuable control for interpreting the results.

Hypothesis Tests

H1 – Effects of Motivation

Hypothesis1 predicted that blog readers motivated by the knowledge seeking (versus social or entertainment value) are more likely to a) read product blogs frequently, b) think that the independence of the blogger is important, and c) favor a combination of positive and negative comments (balanced language in a blog).

To test H1, the means for the two motivation indices were first correlated with the measures of frequency of blog use, the index for source independence, and the index related to the importance of balanced information (versus all-positive information).

Table 10 summarizes the correlation results, and shows that all the correlations were positive at statistically significant levels (p $\leq$ .05), except for the secondary

(believability) indices for independence and balanced language (which were then

excluded).

Table 10

Correlational Results for Motivation Variables

	Motivation	
	Knowledge-Seeking	Social/Entertainment
Frequency of use of blogs discuss products or services	.760***	.596***
Important of blogger being Independent (single-item)	.282***	.208***
Independent Credibility	.367***	.190***
Independent Believability	.080	.024
Balanced Language Credibility	.236***	.109*
Balanced Language Believability	.072	.042

***$p < .001$, **$p < .01$, *$p < .05$

To compare the relative effects of the two motivation indices, linear regression

was used with the knowledge seeking and social/entertainment value treated as

independent variables that were regressed onto the dependent variables.

This procedure resulted in significant results.

H1a was supported, suggesting that knowledge seeking and frequency of blog use

are positively related ($R^2 = .569, F(2, 286) = 188.40, p < .000$). Knowledge seeking was

significant ($\beta = .777, p < .000$), while social and entertainment value was not ($\beta = -.030,$

$p < .637$).

H1b was supported for the single-item asking about the independence of the blogger, suggesting that knowledge seeking and the importance of the blogger's independence are positively related ($R^2 = .075$, $F(2,296) = 11.96$, $p = .000$). Knowledge seeking was significant ($\beta = .271$, $p \leq .003$), while social/ entertainment was not significant ($\beta = .004$, $p \leq .969$).

H1c also was supported for the two indices related to the use of balanced language versus using all-positive language ($R^2 = .064$, $F(2,292) = 10.042$, $p = .000$). Knowledge seeking and the use of balanced language are *positively* related ($\beta = .373$, $p = .000$), but the use of balanced language was *negatively* related to social and entertainment value at a marginally significant level ($\beta = -.183$, $p \leq .049$). This suggests that individuals primarily motivated by social or entertainment values might not be concerned about balanced language. (Notably, neither knowledge seeking nor social-entertainment value was related to assessments of using all-positive language.)

H2 – Effects of Blogger Affiliation on Perceptions

Hypothesis 2 predicted that blogs written by bloggers that readers believe are independent, (i.e., not affiliated with a marketer) a) are perceived by readers as more credible, b) are perceived by readers as more valuable and c) result in higher purchase intent.

Table 11, which excerpts data found in Table 4, summarizes a series of t-test comparisons between the scores for the three classes of bloggers and shows the mean differences between the independent and employee bloggers and the mean differences between employee and bloggers paid a fee. The table suggests that the assessments of

independent affiliation are consistently the highest, and the t-values of the comparisons are all statistically significant at the p <.000 level.

H2a and H2b are supported based on the single-item measures for "credible" and "valuable," respectively. Moreover, the same pattern is evident when both the credibility and believability indices are used for comparison purposes. The separate t-tests comparing the differences in scores between independent bloggers and employee bloggers and the differences in scores between employee bloggers and bloggers paid fees were all significant. Thus, it could be concluded that the independent bloggers also are more favorably assessed than the bloggers paid a fee (and a third t-test comparing these two extreme groups was not computed).

Table 11

Differences of Assessments for Three Types of Affiliation of Bloggers

Paired t-test Comparisons
Mean Scores (SD) (7 = positive, 1 = negative)

	Independent	Employee	Paid a free	Difference Independent v. Employee		Difference Employee v. Paid fee	
	M (SD)	*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*	*M*	*t*	*M*	*t*
Credible	4.53(1.267)	3.57(1.305)	3.02(1.286)	.98	9.57	.56	6.63
Valuable	4.52(1.271)	4.07(1.275)	3.45(1.366)	.54	4.97	.62	7.22
Credibility Index	4.41(1.030)	3.80(1.033)	3.23(1.109)	.61	2.85	.57	8.47
Believability Index	4.23(1.027)	3.92(.984)	3.52(1.208)	.31	4.04	.38	5.08

Differences are means between two of the assessments based on affiliation. All t-values significant at *p* = .000 level (*dfs* = 302-310). *Credible* and *valuable* are separate items within the Credibility index.

By contrast, H2c predicted that purchase intent and identification of the blogger dependent were positively related. This was only partially supported because identification a blogger as an employee or as the recipient of a fee also was positively related to purchase intent. In order words, affiliation of the blogger alone appears to make no difference in terms of purchase intentions (R^2 = .140, $F(3,297)$ = 16.114, $p \leq$ .000). Regression results showed positive effects for independent bloggers (β = .281, $p \leq$ .000), employee bloggers (β = .117, $p \leq$ .047), and paid bloggers (β = .122, $p \leq$ .040).

H3 – Effects of Language

Hypothesis 3 predicted that blogs that present a balanced comments (a combination of positive and negative assessments versus all-positive comments) are a) perceived by readers as more credible, b) perceived by readers as more valuable, and c) are more likely to increase purchase intent.

Table 12

Differences of Assessments based on Language Use

Paired t-tests
Mean Scores (7 = positive, 1 = negative)

	Balanced Language M (SD)	All-positive M (SD)	Difference M	t	Sig.
Credible	4.92(1.226)	3.91(1.460)	1.016	10.06	.000
Valuable	4.96(1.245)	4.06(1.379)	.899	9.02	.000
Credibility Index	4.82(1.083)	3.98(1.210)	-.835	-9.62	.000
Believability Index	4.69(1.159)	3.99(1.215)	-.701	-7.85	.000

Credible and Valuable are separate items within the Credibility index.

Table 12, which excerpts data found in Table 5, shows a series of *t*-test comparisons between the scores for the two kinds of language and suggests significant differences between them. Respondents' assessments for balanced language were consistently higher, and the t-values of the comparisons were all statistically significant at the $p \leq .000$ level.

Similar to Hypothesis 2 regarding the effects of blogger affiliation, H3a and H3b were supported based on the single-item measures for "credible" and "valuable," respectively. Moreover, the same pattern is evident when the credibility and believability indices are used as the basis of comparison. Also similar to H2, no support was found for the possible the superiority of using balanced versus all-positive language. Both appeared to have positive effects on purchase intent ($R^2 = .093$, $F(2,299) = 15.30$, $p \leq .000$; Positive language $\beta = .163$, $p \leq .004$; Balanced language $\beta = .236$, $p \leq .000$).

H4 – Information Sharing/Word of Mouth

Hypothesis 4 predicted blog readers motivated by social utility and entertainment value are more likely to *share* product information or engage in word-of-mouth (WOM) compared to those motivated by the knowledge-seeking.

H4 was partially supported, but only in the case of engaging in online information sharing (eWOM).

Table 8 reported the factor analysis of the nine items used to measure WOM activities and showed that participants responded more offline ($M = 3.92$) than online ($M = 2.81$). A further analysis revealed a gender effect where females indicated a higher

likelihood of engaging in offline WOM than males (Females $M = 4.06$, $SD = 1.418$;

Males $M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.327$, $t = 2.362$, $df = 302$, $p \leq .019$). Gender-based differences

were not significant in the case of online responses, although males appeared to be more

likely to respond online WOM (Males $M = 2.99$, $SD = 1.232$; Females $M = 2.725$, $SD =$

1.308, $t = 1.685$, $df = 299$, $p \leq .093$)

In the case of online WOM, regression analysis showed that social

utility/entertainment was positively related to responding to sharing information with

others ($R^2 = .199$, $F(2,290) = 35.942$, $p \leq .000$). The effect for social utility was $\beta = .398$

($p = .000$) while the effect for knowledge seeking was $\beta = .059$ ($p \leq .491$). This suggests

that when the motivation is social or entertainment, participants are willing to share

information online. Stated another way, their motivation and actions are compatible, both

involving social activity.

In the case of offline WOM, a regression analysis took into account the possible

effects of sex as well as both knowledge seeking and social utility/entertainment

motivations ($R^2 = .308$, $F(3,289) = 42.82$, $p = .000$). The effect of sex was non-

significant ($\beta = .049$, $p \leq .325$), while the effects of both motivations were significant

(Knowledge Seeking $\beta = .403$, $p = .000$; Social Utility/Entertainment $\beta = .167$, $p \leq .037$).

H5 – Effects of Blog Attitudes

Hypothesis 5 predicted people with positive attitudes toward blogs a) pay more

attention to product blogs than advertisements, b) believe that blog endorsements are

more trustworthy than advertisements, and c) believe that blog endorsements are more

trustworthy than reading product information in the news.

H5a-H5c were all supported, based on positive correlations with attention paid to blogs compared to advertisements ($r = .334, p = .000$), assessments of the trustworthiness of blogs versus ads ($r = .294, p = .000$), and assessments of the trustworthiness of blogs versus news ($r = .278, p = .000$). Although the finding was not hypothesized, the study also found a positive relationship between attitudes toward blogs and whether the participant felt a larger following of bloggers made bloggers more believable ($r = .332, p = .000$) and the participant believe a bad reputation led to fewer readers ($r = .179, p \leq .001$).

Supplemental Analysis

The findings presented thus far suggest strong effects based on readers' motivation (knowledge seeking is stronger than social utility/entertainment), affiliation of bloggers (independence being preferred), and language (balanced preferred to all-positive comments). To further understand the effects of these variables, a secondary analysis was conducted using hierarchical regression to better understand the effects of these measures on three focal dependent measures that might be used to assess the effects of reading blogs: attitudes toward blogs, purchase intention, and information sharing.

Hierarchical regression is a form of linear regression that analyzes the effects of multiple interval variables on a dependent variable by entering them into the equation sequentially. In general, the basic or inherent characteristics of participants are entered first (demographics, media use, etc.) followed by more theoretical constructs of interest. At each stage, the focal statistics of interest are a) the cumulative variance explained (R^2)

and b) the change in variance explained (change in R^2) based on the calculation of an ANOVA using the number of new variables entered into the equation and the number of subjects in the calculation. Thus the focus is on whether the newly entered variables are significant explanatory variables. As with all linear regression analyses, this procedure also allows analysis of the effect on other variables based on a Beta statistic calculated for each variable then in the equation. Beta is a standardized coefficient that takes into account differences in the measures for different variables by subtracting the mean and dividing by the standard deviation. Beta thus represents a standardized measure of the change in the dependent variable (measured in terms of standard deviations) that results from a change of one standard deviation in an independent variable and allows comparison of which independent variables have a greatest effect on the dependent variable. The effects of previously entered variables can be become non-significant (or explained by the new variable) or can be sustained by maintaining a p value of <.05.

Table 13 shows the results of hierarchical regressions performed on two potentially useful explanatory variables: attitudes toward blogs (based on the 4-item index described in Table 2) and purchase intent (based on the 4-item index in Table 8). For each dependent variable, preliminary regressions were performed to confirm which independent measures were positively related attitudes toward blogs and purchase intent, respectively. Sex was treated as a dummy variable were 0 = male and 1 = female. Only significant measures were then entered into the regression model.

Effects on Attitudes toward Blogs

Table 13a shows the effects of sex, independent affiliation, balanced language and motivation on attitudes toward blogs. Collectively, these explain 44.7% of the cumulative variance (measured in the R^2 for the fourth stage of the model). In the first three steps of the model, both sex and independent affiliation proved to be statistically significant, while the addition of balanced language in the third step was not statistically significant and added little understanding. However, the effects of sex and affiliation became nonsignificant when knowledge seeking was added in the fourth step. This suggests that being motivated to seek knowledge is the best predictor of positive attitudes toward blogs (R^2 change = .294, p = .000; β = .578, p = .000).

Effects on Purchase Intent

Table 13b shows a somewhat similar pattern for purchase intention. However, several additional variables (self-assessment of experience reading blogs, blog use in hours, and self-reported frequency of use) had been proven statistically significant in the preliminary regression analyses and were included in the model. Altogether, the model accounted for 36.2% of the variance for purchase intent (R^2 = .362). The successive effects of adding new variables are evident in the table. In the final step, the addition of language proved to be not significant (R^2 change = .011, $p \leq$ .110). Similar to attitudes toward blogs, the final model suggests that motivation to seek knowledge emerged as the best single predictor of purchase intent (β = .355, p = .000).

Table 13

Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Attitudes toward Blogs and Purchase Intent

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In each analysis, only variables with statistically significant effects in the preliminary regression analyses were entered in the model. Groups of variables were regressed against the dependent variable in the order or steps shown. Bold data show the results for each step, including the change in variance explained (R^2) for each successive step and the significance of the change explained. The beta and significance level of each item are shown at the right for each step.

	R^2	R^2 Change	*df*	*F* Change	*Sig.*	*Beta*	*Sig.*
a) Attitudes Toward Blogs							
Sex	**.035**	**.035**	**1.292**	**10.45**	**.001**		
Sex						.186	.000***
Affiliation blogger	**.143**	**.108**	**1.291**	**36.81**	**.000**		
Sex						.133	.016*
Independence						.334	.000***
Language	**.153**	**.010**	**1.290**	**3.51**	**.062**		
Sex						.127	.021*
Independence						.278	.000***
Balanced language						.116	.062
Motivation	**.447**	**.294**	**1.290**	**153.66**	**.000**		
Sex						.064	.151
Independence						.090	.087
Balanced language						.085	.092
Knowledge seeking						.587	.000**

	R^2	R^2 Change	*df*	*F* Change	*Sig.*	*Beta*	*Sig.*
b) Purchase intention							
Sex	**.031**	**.031**	**1.272**	**8.840**	**.003**		
Sex						.177	.003**
Reading blogs	**.073**	**.041**	**1.272**	**12.115**	**.001**		
Sex						.103	.020*
Reading blogs						.207	.001***

Blog use	.074	.001	1.270	.208	.648			
Sex							.137	.023*
Reading blogs							.194	.004**
Blog use in hours							.030	.648
Frequency of use	.272	.198	1.269	73.181	.008			
Sex							.028	.611
Reading blogs							.087	.151
Blog use in hours							.057	.334
Frequency of use							.472	.000**
Motivation	.331	.049	1.268	23.808	.000			
Sex							.035	.533
Reading blogs							.043	.400
Blog use in hours						.052	.359
Frequency of use							.182	.023*
Motivation: Knowledge seeking							.839	.000***
Affiliation of blogger	.351	.020	3.265	2.708	.046			
Sex							.025	.637
Reading blogs							.042	.467
Blog use in hours							.056	.320
Frequency of use							.162	.042*
Motivation: Knowledge seeking							.548	.000***
Affiliation—Employee blogger							.030	.591
Affiliation—Independent blogger							.100	.068
Affiliation—Paid blogger							.065	.117
Language	.362	.011	2.263	2.222	.110			
Sex							.027	.610
Reading blogs							.040	.489
Blog use in hours							.049	.385
Frequency of use							.143	.073
Motivation: Knowledge seeking							.355	.000***
Affiliation—Employee blogger							-.008	.892
Affiliation—Independent blogger							.061	.311
Affiliation—Paid blogger							.100	.070
Language—All positive							.087	.106
Language—Balanced							.074	.200

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, *$p < .05$

Effects on Information Sharing Online

Table 14 provides a similar analysis of the effects of various variables examined in the study on information sharing activities by participants. Somewhat different were detected for online versus offline.

Table 14a reports the findings for the variables that were statistically significant in the preliminary regressions focusing the likelihood that people would share information online. Responding online was found to be related to sex, self-reported experience reading blogs, the use of e-mail, the frequency of using blogs, motivation for social/entertainment purposes, blogger affiliation (both being an employee and receiving a fee). Sex again was treated as a dummy variable were $0 =$ male and $1 =$ female, and it is notable that responding online is significant related to male (versus female) based on the mean scores reported previously and the negative Beta coefficients in the table. The cumulative effect of the model was to explain 31.2% of the variance (cumulative $R^2 =$ .312). The final step in analysis suggests sharing information online was unrelated to reading blogs or frequency of use, but was related to being male ($\beta = -.170, p < .002$), e-mail use in hours ($\beta = .112, p < .035$), motivation based on social and entertainment purposes ($\beta = .358, p = .000$), and affiliation of the bloggers as an employee ($\beta = .149, p < .014$) or affiliation of the blogger as a paid agent ($\beta = .172, p < .002$). Although a definitive explanation is difficult, one explanation would be that males who are used to corresponding online (using tools such as e-mail) and who might read blogs for social or entertainment purposes are more likely to respond online, particularly to counterargue about postings that they perceived are from biased (employee or paid) bloggers. However, such a conclusion would need to be tested in subsequent research.

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Effects on Information Sharing Offline

Table 14b similarly reports regression findings for the variables that were

statistically related to sharing information offline in the preliminary regressions. These

include sex, reading blogs, frequency of use, motivations (both knowledge seeking and

social/entertainment), affiliation of the blogger (independent and employee), and use of

balanced language. However, a distinctly different pattern emerged. Although females

ostensibly were more likely to share information offline, the effect of sex was negated by

blog use, which in turn was negated by frequency of use. Motivations (both knowledge

seeking and social/entertainment uses) appeared to be the best predictors of offline

information sharing. Affiliation of the blogger had no significant effect (R^2 change =

.006, $p < .297$), and language (whether all-positive or balanced) did not significantly

contribute to the model (R^2change = .010, $p < .125$). An examination of the final step

suggests that motivation is the single best predictor (knowledge seeking: $\beta = .415, p =$

.000; social/entertainment: $\beta = .169, p < .040$). Notably, although use balanced language

was marginally significant ($\beta = .109, p < .053$), a separate regression incorporating only

the two motivation variables and balanced language suggested the use of balanced

language was not significant ($R^2 = .330;\ F_{(3,284)} = 61.0;\ \beta = .080, p < .110$). This suggests

that the original motivation of the blog reader is the best predictor of information sharing

offline.

Table 14

Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Response Measures: Offline v. Online

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In each analysis, only variables with statistically significant effects in the preliminary regression analyses were entered in the model. Groups of variables were regressed against the dependent variable in the order or steps shown. Bold data show the results for each step, including the change in variance explained (R^2) for each successive step and the significance of the change explained. The beta and significance level of each item are shown at the right for each step.

a) Responding Online

	R^2	R^2 Change	*df*	*F* Change	*Sig.*	*Beta*	*Sig.*
Sex	**.008**	**.008**	**1.270**	**2.10**	**.148**		
Sex						-.088	.148
Reading Blogs	**.054**	**.046**	**1.269**	**13.110**	**.000**		
Sex						-.138	.024*
Reading Blogs						.220	.000***
Use of Technology	**.083**	**.029**	**1.268**	**8.421**	**.004**		
Sex						-.159	.009***
Reading Blogs						.196	.001***
E-mail Use in Hours						.173	.004***
Frequency of Use	**.151**	**.069**	**1.267**	**21.580**	**.000**		
Sex						-.217	.000***
Reading Blogs						.153	.010**
E-Mail Use in Hours						.152	.009**
Frequency of Use						.276	.000***
Motivation	**.247**	**.096**	**1.266**	**33.861**	**.000**		
Sex						-.184	.001**
Reading Blogs						.073	.207
E-Mail Use in Hours						.133	.015*
Frequency of Use						.062	.359
Motivation-Social and Entertainment						.392	.000***
Affiliation of Blogger	**.312**	**.065**	**1.264**	**12.380**	**.000**		
Sex						-.170	.002**
Reading Blogs						.073	.186
E-Mail Use in Hours						.112	.034*
Frequency of Use						.029	.659
Motivation-Social and						.357	.000***

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	R^2	R^2 Change	df	F Change	Sig.	Beta	Sig.
Entertainment							
Affiliation—Employee						.146	.009**
Affiliation—Paid Blogger						.173	.002**
Language	**.312**	**.000**	**1.263**	**.011**	**.916**		
Sex						-.170	.002
Reading Blogs						.073	.189
E-Mail Use in Hours						.112	.035*
Frequency of Use						.029	.657
Motivation-Social and Entertainment						.358	.000***
Affiliation—Employee						.149	.014*
Affiliation—Paid Blogger						.172	.002**
Positive Language						-.006	.916

b) Responding Offline

	R^2	R^2 Change	df	F Change	Sig.	Beta	Sig.
Sex	**.020**	**.020**	**1.263**	**5.364**	**.021**		
Sex						.141	.021*
Blog Use	**.049**	**.029**	**1.264**	**8.166**	**.005**		
Sex						.103	.090
Reading Blog						.176	.005**
Blog Use	**.241**	**.192**	**1.263**	**66.599**	**.000**		
Sex						-.003	.960
Reading Blogs						.082	.148
Frequency of Use						.465	.000***
Motivation	**.372**	**.131**	**1.261**	**27.160**	**.000**		
Sex						.019	.712
Reading Blogs						.000	.994
Frequency of Use						.057	.461
Motivation: Knowledge Seeking						.426	.000***
Motivation: Social Utility/Entertainment Value						.161	.049***
Affiliation of Blogger	**.378**	**.006**	**2.259**	**1.282**	**.279**		
Sex						.020	.648
Reading Blogs						-.004	.945
Frequency of Use						.041	.598
Motivation: Knowledge Seeking						.406	.000***
Motivation: Social Utility/Entertainment Value						.165	.045*
Affiliation—Employee Blogger						.072	.150
Affiliation—Independent Blogger						.434	.535

Language	**.388**	**.010**	**2.257**	**2.094**	**.125**		
Sex						.017	.741
Reading Blogs						-.015	.779
Frequency of Use						.019	.810
Motivation: Knowledge Seeking						.415	.000***
Motivation: Social Utility/Entertainment Value						.169	.040
Affiliation—Employee Blogger						.060	.270
Affiliation—Independent Blogger						-.012	.836
Language—All Positive						.028	.597
Language—Balanced						.109	.053*

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, *$p < .05$

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

Summary of Significant Findings

The results presented in Chapter 4 suggest the strongest motivation for reading product blogs is seeking knowledge or information, not social utility/entertainment. Acquiring product-related information is a purposive activity; and these findings differ from the primary motivation identified by Kaye (2007). Her study pointed out a blog's presentation/characteristics provides the primary motivation for using particular blogs. The author thinks the reason for the difference is that Kaye's study focused on general blogs, but this study focused on a specific types of blogs—blogs that discuss products or services.

The findings for Hypothesis 1 suggest that product blog readers are motivated by knowledge, and thus they care about bloggers' affiliations and impartiality a lot. Their second strongest motivation is relaxation (as measured in the social/entertainment factor). Indeed, the evidence suggests that students think bloggers who write product announcements or reviews can provide them a novel experience and offer a channel that lets them escape boredom. Students can fulfill their personal needs (i.e. relaxation or escape) by reading bloggers' vivid product reviews.

As for blog readers' perceptions about the affiliations between marketers and bloggers, the students who participated in this study clearly believe that independent bloggers are more credible, and their information is more valuable, when compared to either employee bloggers or paid bloggers. Paid bloggers were found to be the least trustworthy among three kinds of bloggers. This is not surprising because independent

bloggers have no stake in the success of marketers. Therefore readers put most trust in them. Mackay and Lowrey (2007) pointed out that audiences might consider bloggers to be more personal than staff journalists. Journalists are a group of news professionals who might already develop a collective viewpoint on a particular topic. Thus bloggers might be viewed as more objective and impartial than journalists. The same logic can be used in this study. The students in the sample appear to believe that employees who hold the same thoughts as their employers and who benefit from their relationship with their company. Therefore, they might be experts, but are less trustworthy than individual bloggers, who are independent and develop their own thoughts. Bloggers who receive a fee for writing about products and services were considered the least credible bloggers. This might be because readers have higher expectations about individual bloggers, but also think it is reasonable that employees serve as bloggers and would expect them to express positive ideas about the products and services of their employers. But when readers detect that a blogger receives payments from marketers, they feel deceived.

Participants' responses to the questions about the use of balanced versus all-positive language are consistent with the results of the questions related to bloggers' affiliations. The students in the study believe balanced language is more credible and valuable than all-positive language. According to previous finding, independent bloggers are the most trustworthy bloggers. This is because readers assume that independent bloggers will provide a balanced review about a product or service – an analysis that contains both positive and negative comments. Although all-positive language scored lower than balanced language, its scores are not so bad ($M = 4.77$ v. $M = 3.99$). Colleen Padilla, a famous mommy blogger in America, said if she does not like a product, she

simply does not post anything about it (Joshi, 2009). This could explain why people might still trust all-positive language in a product review. A reputable blogger can wax glowingly about a product and remain credible. These A-list bloggers have enjoyed positive reputations for a long time, thus readers have fewer doubts about what they say.

Although blogger affiliation and the use of positive language had an impact on perceptions and attitudes toward bloggers, it is important to point out that no such effects were found for purchase intent. Indeed, purchase intention is not predictable based on blog readers' preferences. For purchase intent, no discernible differences were found based on whether blogger was identifies as being independent, an employee, or a paid blogger and no differences were found based on whether the language used was balanced or all-positive. The study found that readers whose motivation is social utility/entertainment are more likely to engage in information sharing or word-of-mouth activities. This is consistent with the research that shows customers prefer the research online rather than listening to salesperson (Thorne, 2008). This study found an interesting difference in the on word-of-mouth behaviors between males and females. Males in the study were somewhat more inclined to share information online, while females tended to participate in more offline WOM. Males might thus use online technologies more than females to express what they knew or learned from blogs. Females might share what they read from blogs when they chat with friends. But not all word-of-mouth is positive; sometimes customers spread negative word-of-mouth.

Although WOMMA (2009) wrote that "world of mouth can't be faked or invented," some marketers do not follow the rule. For example, blog readers might detect that a blogger got payments from the marketer, so the blogger said good words

about the product. In this situation, readers might tell other people that this blogger is not honest. This kind of negative WOM activity thus decreases a blogger's credibility and might compromise the marketer's credibility. The data suggest that males who read blogs for social utility purposes might become annoyed about unbalanced articles, and might readily engage in negative WOM online. On the contrary, females' experience and frequency of blog use do not appear to be related to sharing information offline. Female readers' motivations for seeking knowledge/information or for social/entertainment similarly do not have much effect difference on word-of-mouth offline, either. And females who are more likely to share information offline do not care very much about affiliations of bloggers or the language used in the blog. The author surmised that females take part in offline WOM mostly based on seeking product information. Maybe females feel more comfortable about talking to friends and relatives about what they read while chatting. Females might also simply talk more with friends, and thus are more likely to share information offline versus online. After talking with friends, females might develop their own opinions about the product or they might read the blog that is consistent with their own thoughts and ignore what the blogger wrote that is not favorable to them.

Implications

This study suggests that product blogs are potentially useful tools that can be used by marketers to promote products and services by relying on third-party endorsements (Hallahan, 1999) from bloggers. However, blogs are not advertisements—and marketers need keep in mind the importance of a blogger appearing as an independent source of

information, not merely a channel for the distribution of advertising-like information. Balanced language (i.e. including positive, neutral and even negative information) is also important because it enhances the credibility of the source and makes product announcement and reviews more authentic.

From their responses, it appears that the students in the survey think blog endorsements are more trustworthy compared to seeing the same product information in news or in advertisements. This suggests that blog endorsements might enjoy a better reputation and higher credibility than news and advertisements when they provide the same product information. Marketers can deploy blogs as promotion tools, but they have to be aware that blog readers are not naïve. Readers can distinguish between an authentic versus ingenuine recommendation or advertisements.

Blog reading, as a form of electronic word-of-mouth, is a voluntary activity; readers are not forced to read product reviews. And blog readers can come to know and trust some bloggers because bloggers disclose information about themselves. These readers are active and willing to read these products or services announcement blogs. Many people are eager to acquire this kind of product via electronic word-of-mouth and view bloggers as credible and trustworthy. Other readers might not know such details. Marketing and advertising agencies need to be careful that they do not unintentionally compromise the credibility of these sources, or the information they provide, by exerting undue influence through bribes or payments, especially in the event such influence attempts are later disclosed. Similarly, it might be unnecessary to engage in influence attempts to expunge moderately unfavorable or neutral comments in a blog. Such

comments might actually enhance the authenticity and credibility of an otherwise

favorable message.

Limitations of Study

Cross-cultural issues

This study was conducted in Taiwan. There are key differences between the

blogospheres found in Taiwan, the United States, and other parts of the world. People

seldom see negative reader comments on product blogs in Taiwan. There are two

reasons. First, bloggers delete unfavorable comments and only leave the one they agree

with. Second, Taiwan's bloggers are inclined to argue or disagree with other bloggers'

comments on their own blogs, not on the author's blog. In preparing for this study, the

author observed that some Taiwanese bloggers deleted the comments that they do not

like. In turn, blog readers whose comments were deleted, sometimes wrote articles to

complain about the deletion of their comments on the blogs of others. The Pew Internet

and American Life Project reported that nearly nine in ten bloggers in the United States

allow readers to make comments on their blogs (Lenhart & Fox, 2006). But the report

did not disclose whether bloggers would remain unfavorable comments or not. It seems

like American blog readers enjoy a greater probability of seeing a war of words in a blog

compared to Taiwan's blog readers.

Collectivism and individualism also are important differences between eastern

and western cultures. People in collectivistic societies cannot change their communities,

organizations, or societies as easily as do people in individualistic societies (Ito, 1992, p.

241). People in collectivistic societies also tend to be concerned about saving face and

are more cautious about people's feelings and reactions to what they say. The author

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assumed that even though Taiwan's blog readers might have opposite views from a blogger, they might resist giving opposite comments. On the other hand, American blog readers probably do not hesitate to express opposing viewpoints. They express their thoughts with less fear and pressure to comply. In Asian society, especially in China and Taiwan, *guanxi* between marketers and bloggers or between bloggers and blog readers probably affects marketers' willingness to ask bloggers to write product reviews or readers' trust on bloggers. *Guanxi* is similar to networking in western cultures. It focuses on the mutual obligations, assurances and understanding. Different groups or organizations take *guanxi* to exchange favors with each other (Hsu, 2006; Luo, 2007). Therefore, *guanxi* is another issue that make difference between eastern blogosphere and western blogoshpere.

Student population

American college students were used to pretest the scales used in this study. Therefore there were some culture difference between American students and Taiwanese students. The study used quantitative research to investigate blog readers' motivations and perceptions about blogs that mention products or services. For convenience, a student sample was used in the study, but the ages of the participants did not vary widely. Thus the external validity or generalizability of the findings to the entire Taiwan population is limited. A large-scale sample and administered through an online forum (such as the bulletin board systems popular in Taiwan) is a possible way to increase the external validity of the survey by studying the general population beyond college students. Although the nonprobability sampling used in the study is not ideal, the method can be acceptable when random sampling is not possible (Babbie, 1990).

The questionnaire used in the study was originally written in English, and then translated into Mandarin. It is possible that some concepts and words may not translated precisely. For example, *believable*, *credible*, and *trustworthy* are slightly different in English, but it could have the same meaning in Chinese.

Future Directions for Research

This study focused on blog readers' motivations and subsequent behaviors after reading the blogs discuss products or services. It applied uses and gratifications theory to investigate these questions. For future research, it might be beneficial to apply other psychological concepts to study why readers are willing to read blogs. It would also be interesting to focus on why blog readers do or do not post comments, especially if those comments contradict ideas read in the blog.

The study used a questionnaire to find out samples' reaction and preference toward blogs. An alternative method that could be used to corroborate these findings would be to conduct an experiment. In an experimental setting, students might provide more accurate, and reliable responses, and the effects of affiliation and language could be examined by critically comparing responses to different experimental treatments.

The questionnaire asked students to recall their experience on reading blogs that talks about products or services. But the study did not specify the type of products. Sen and Lerman (2007) examined the impact of negative consumers reviews on the Web, differentiated between: utilitarian products (i.e., a language learning CD) and hedonic products (i.e., a music CD). They argued that when consumers look for a hedonic product, they would be more able to refute negative information than consumers who

consider a utilitarian product. For future research, specifying product types on the product blog survey, or varying product type in an experiment, could provide additional insights.

This research asked students about their intention to engage in word-of-mouth after reading product blogs. But it did not specify whether their comments might be positive WOM or negative WOM. In the future research, the researcher should differentiate between the valence of comments when people engage in WOM and under what conditions (i.e., if they are likely to make positive comments or negative comments).

Finally, the role of product blogs vis-à-vis other forms of word-of-mouth channels must be considered. The number of Taiwan's blog readers is increasing. Meanwhile social networking sites are exploding. Taiwan has 5,063,480 Facebook users last and ranked fifth among the 10 fastest- growing Facebook countries (CheckFacebook.com, 2009). Blogging and social networking sites are powerful channels affecting people's decisions on topics ranging from products to career planning. The basic feature of both blogging and social networking is still the direct and instant flow of authentic information among users using word-of-mouth. Although blogging is declining among young adults in the United States (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010), the same decline has not been evidenced to date in Taiwan. Acceptance of word-of-mouth advertising – both in the form of product blogs and social networking sites—is a trend that Internet marketers and advertising agencies need to be pay attention to. Future research might compare the relative effectiveness of blogs versus SNSs, particularly on key measures such as purchase intent. User preferences and perceptions about product blogs versus SNSs

would also be a valuable issue to investigate to better understand the potential

contribution of product blogs in marketing and related promotional activities.

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APPENDIX 1

QUESTIONNAIRE

ENGLISH VERSION

Instructions: For the questions below, check the box or circle the number that best corresponds to your answer

1. You are ☐ male ☐ female
2. Your age is ☐ 23 and under ☐ 24-29 ☐ 30-35 ☐ 36-40 ☐ 41-45
☐ 46-50 ☐ 51-55 ☐ 56-60 ☐ 60+ ☐ decline to disclose

3. How much time do you spend on the Internet engaged in the following activities in a typical day? (You may indicate your answer in hours or minutes, or a combination of both.)

Reading e-mail	_____ hours a day	_____ minutes a day
Social networking (such as Facebook)	_____ hours a day	_____ minutes a day
Looking at Web sites	_____ hours a day	_____ minutes a day
Reading blogs (any type)	_____ hours a day	_____ minutes a day
Reading product blogs	_____ hours a day	_____ minutes a day
Posting on my own Web site	_____ hours a day	_____ minutes a day
Instant messaging (such as MSN)	_____ hours a day	_____ minutes a day

4. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following sentences. If you have no experience with blogs, circle "none".

	None	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree		
I have a lot of experience reading blogs	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I have a lot of experience writing blog(s)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I have a lot of experience posting comments on blogs	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

5. Which of the following best describes how you feel about with blogs that discuss products and services.

Not appealing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Appealing
Dislike	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Like
Good	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Bad
Negative	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Positive

6. People are motivated to read blogs that talk about products for various reasons. To what degree do you use blogs for each of the following purpose?

	Never use	Infrequently					Frequently	
Seek information	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Connect with friends	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Pass time	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Being able to chat with others about products	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Reduce risk of making a bad purchasing decision	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Save time gathering information	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Make me knowledgeable	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Share information with others	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Help friends solve problems	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Have fun			0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Want to be influential			0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
For relaxation			0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Obtain experts' opinions about products			0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

7. How frequently do you read blogs that discuss products and services?

Never	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	A lot

8. If I knew the blogger was an employee of a company, I think the product information provided would be:

Not credible	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Credible
Truthful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not truthful
Not convincing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Convincing
Reputable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not reputable
Believable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not believable
Not valuable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Valuable
Persuasive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not Persuasive
Not trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Trustworthy
Useful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not useful
Inaccurate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Accurate

9. If I knew the blogger was independent, i.e. does not work for a company, I think the product information provided would be:

Not credible	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Credible
Truthful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not truthful
Not convincing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Convincing
Reputable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not reputable
Believable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not believable
Not valuable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Valuable
Persuasive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not Persuasive
Not trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Trustworthy
Useful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not useful
Inaccurate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Accurate

10. If I thought the blogger was paid a fee to write for a marketer, I think the product information would be:

Not credible	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Credible
Truthful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not truthful
Not convincing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Convincing
Reputable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not reputable
Believable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not believable
Not valuable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Valuable
Persuasive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not Persuasive
Not trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Trustworthy
Useful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not useful
Inaccurate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Accurate

11. If a blogger wrote only positive comments about a product, I think the product information would be:

Not credible	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Credible
Truthful		1	2	3	4	5	6	7 Not truthful
Not convincing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Convincing
Reputable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not reputable
Believable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not believable
Not valuable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Valuable
Persuasive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not Persuasive
Not trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Trustworthy
Useful		1	2	3	4	5	6	7 Not useful
Inaccurate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Accurate

12. If a blogger made balanced comments about a product, i.e. included positive and negative comments, I think the product information would be:

Not credible	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Credible
Truthful		1	2	3	4	5	6	7 Not truthful
Not convincing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Convincing
Reputable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not reputable
Believable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not believable
Not valuable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Valuable
Persuasive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not Persuasive
Not trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Trustworthy
Useful		1	2	3	4	5	6	7 Not useful
Inaccurate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Accurate

13. In reading product blogs, how important would each of the following be to you in making your purchasing decision ?

	Not important to me					Important to me	
Blogger is an employee of the company	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Blogger is independent.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The blogger does not receive money from the marketer or the company.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The blogger states clearly that he/she receives money from the marketer or the company	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The blogger does not receive free samples e.g., a cell phone, from the marketer or the company.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The blogger states clearly that he/she receives free samples, e.g., a cell phone, from the marketer or the company.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

14. Now take a moment to think *how likely are you to actually purchase* a product after reading about it in a blog. For each statement, indicate the degree to which you disagree or agree.

	Strongly disagree						Strongly agree
a. I am likely to purchase a product I read about	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. I would be willing to purchase a product I read about	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c. I definitely would purchase a product I read about	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
d. I would plan to purchase a product I read about	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

15. After reading blog that talk about products, how likely would you engage in each of the following activities?

	Not likely to					very likely to	
a. Leave a comment and post on the blog	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. Forward the blog to friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c. Text messages or email to friends or families	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
d. Post a comment or trackback on your own blog	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
e. Tell friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
f. Post comments or add links on your social networking site(s), such as Facebook	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
g. Share the product information with families or friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
h. Talk to families or friends about the information I learned	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
i. Share the information with others offline	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

16. Finally, please respond to the following questions

	Strongly disagree						Strongly agree
a. For new products, I would pay more attention on looking at bloggers' blogs than advertisements	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. Bloggers' endorsements are more trustworthy than marketers' advertisements	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c. Bloggers' endorsements are more trustworthy than reading about the same product at the news	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
d. A blogger who has a large of followers is more believable to me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
e. A blogger with a bad reputation attracts fewer readers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Thank you for the filling out this questionnaire.

APPENDIX 2

QUESTIONNAIRE

MANDARIN VERSION

針對下面的問題，請根據你的狀態打勾或是填入最適合的選項

1. 你是　☐ 男性　☐女性
2. 你的年齡介於　　☐ 23 以及23以下　☐ 24-29　☐ 30-35　☐ 36-40　☐ 41-45
　　　　　　☐ 46-50　　☐ 51-55　　　　　☐ 56-60　☐ 60以上　☐ 不願意透露

3.平均一天來說，你花多少時間在使用網路上的資源？(可以使用小時、分鐘或是一起使用)

閱讀Email	平均一天 _____	小時	一天_____	分鐘
瀏覽社交網站 (ex: Facebook)	平均一天_____	小時	一天_____	分鐘
瀏覽一般網頁	平均一天 _____	小時	一天_____	分鐘
閱讀部落格 (任何形式的)	平均一天_____	小時	一天_____	分鐘
閱讀有談到『產品』的部落格	平均一天 _____	小時	一天_____	分鐘
在自己的網站或是部落格發表文章	平均一天_____	小時	一天_____	分鐘
使用即時通訊軟體 (ex: MSN)	平均一天 _____	小時	一天_____	分鐘

4.針對下列敘述，請圈選你的同意程度。如果從來沒有下列敘述的經驗，請圈選『從來沒有使用經驗』

	從來沒有使用經驗	非常不同意				非常同意		
我經常閱讀部落格	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
我有很多撰寫部落格的經驗	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
我經常回應其他人的部落格	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

5. 你對『介紹商品或是服務的部落格』有什麼想法

無吸引力	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	有吸引力
不喜歡	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	喜歡
好	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不好
有負面觀感	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	有正面觀感

6. 你會為了哪些原因去瀏覽『介紹商品或是服務性質的部落格』 請圈選使用的程度

	從來沒使用部落格	不常使用				經常使用		
尋找資訊	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
跟朋友聯繫	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
打發時間	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
可以跟朋友聊從部落格看到的商品	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
減少購買到不好商品的風險	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
減少搜尋產品資訊的時間(部落格已幫你過濾)								
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
增加知識	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
跟朋友分享從部落格看來的資訊	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
幫助朋友解決問題	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

部落格內容有趣	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
想要變得有影響力	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
放鬆心情	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
獲得專家對於商品的意見	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

7. 你使用『談論到商品或是服務的部落格』的程度

從不使用	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 經常使用

8.如果你知道此部落客(部落格的作者)是提供此商品的公司職員，你覺得他提供的商品資訊會是：

不可靠的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	可靠的
真實的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不真實的
不可信服的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	可信服的
有信譽的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	無信譽的
可相信的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不可相信的
沒有參考價值的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	有參考價值
有說服力	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	沒有說服力
不值得信賴	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	值得信賴
有用的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	沒有用
不正確的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	正確的

9.如果你知道這個部落客是獨立的(非提供商品的公司職員)，你覺得他提供的商品資訊會是：

不可靠的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	可靠的
真實的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不真實的
不可信服的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	可信服的
有信譽的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	無信譽的
可相信的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不可相信的
沒有參考價值的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	有參考價值
有說服力	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	沒有說服力
不值得信賴	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	值得信賴
有用的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	沒有用
不正確的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	正確的

10.如果你認為此部落客是有得到稿費而寫了這邊介紹文，你覺得他提供的商品資訊會是：

不可靠的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	可靠的
真實的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不真實的
不可信服的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	可信服的
有信譽的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	無信譽的
可相信的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不可相信的

沒有參考價值的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	有參考價值
有說服力	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	沒有說服力
不值得信賴	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	值得信賴
有用的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	沒有用
不正確的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	正確的

11.如果此部落客所寫的商品或是服務介紹文都是給予正面評價，你覺得他提供的資訊會是：

不可靠的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	可靠的
真實的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不真實的
不可信服的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	可信服的
有信譽的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	無信譽的
可相信的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不可相信的
沒有參考價值的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	有參考價值
有說服力	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	沒有說服力
不值得信賴	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	值得信賴
有用的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	沒有用
不正確的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	正確的

12.如果此部落客對此商品或是服務給予一個中立的評價(有正面也有負面)，你覺得他提供的資訊會是：

不可靠的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	可靠的
真實的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不真實的
不可信服的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	可信服的
有信譽的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	無信譽的
可相信的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	不可相信的
沒有參考價值的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	有參考價值
有說服力	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	沒有說服力
不值得信賴	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	值得信賴
有用的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	沒有用
不正確的	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	正確的

13.在閱讀談論到有關商品的部落格時，下列哪些因素會影響你的購物行為？請圈選其重要程度

	一點都不重要						非常重要
部落客同時也是提供商品的公司職員	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
部落客是獨立的(非提供商品的公司職員)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
部落客『沒有』接受廠商的任何酬庸	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
部落客清楚說明他『有』從廠商得到酬庸	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
部落客『沒有』從廠商那							

得到任何贈品(ex:手機) 一切自費

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
部落客清楚說明廠商『有』提供他免費試用品	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

14. 根據你部落格閱讀經驗，請圈選你對於下列敘述的同意程度

	非常不同意					非常同意	
a. 我可能會去購買我從部落客介紹文看到的商品	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. 我願意去購買我從部落客介紹文看到的商品	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c. 我一定會去購買從部落客介紹文看到的商品	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
d. 我計畫去購買從部落客介紹文看到的商品	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

15.閱讀完『談論到商品或服務有關的部落格』後，你有多少可能性去從事下列敘述的活動

	幾乎不可能					非常有可能	
a. 在閱讀部落格後留下評論意見	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. 轉貼此部落格給朋友或家人	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c. 傳簡訊告訴朋友或家人	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
d. 引用到自己的部落格	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
e. 告訴朋友	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
f. 在自己的社群網站(ex:Facebook)發表評論或是轉貼到社群網站上	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
g. 與親朋好友分享商品的資訊	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
h. 告訴親朋好友你從此則商品資訊中學到了什麼	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
i. 在不使用網路的狀態下分享此商品資訊(ex:聊天時告知)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

16. 最後，請針對下列敘述狀態，選擇你的同意程度

	非常不同意					非常同意	
a. 對於新產品，跟廣告相比，我會比較留意部落格提供的資訊	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. 部落客『商品推薦文』比廠商『自製的廣告』更值得信賴	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c. 部落客推薦『某商品的文章』比『提及同樣商品的新聞報導』更值得信賴	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
d. 我比較相信『有較多瀏覽人數』的部落格	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
e. 一個『不良信譽』的部落客，他的部落格瀏覽人數會比較少	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

問卷結束，謝謝你的作答