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Under the influence of a blogger: the role of information seeking goals and issue involvement.

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Abstract

Bloggers in the post-modern era can influence the behaviour of consumers and alter their perceptions. The current study looks at the blogger influence phenomenon from a different theoretical perspective than existing literature did. By combining information behaviour and communication theory, it proposes a new conceptual framework by relying on the characteristics of the blogger, the blog content, motivation and goals of information seeker. In this model, information seekers' objectives and issue involvement are important drivers of blog selection and determinants of the blog's influence. The framework was empirically tested in a sample of American users of beauty blogs. The results provide a confirmation of the postulated relationships. Three types of blog visits are identified and their effects and their attributes that make a blog influential are examined.

1 INTRODUCTION

Bloggers' influence on consumers has been explored in the current literature as a crucial aspect of the post-modern era. One study claimed that blogs outrank social media in terms of consumer influence (DiRago, 2016) and top business publications urge companies to include such influencers in their marketing initiatives (Forbes, 2017). Based on client testimonials, the best ROI comes from blog tours or paid sponsored posts of bloggers in comparison with all marketing initiatives (Forbes, 2017). A McKinsey & Company study (Bughin, 2017) calculated that social recommendations account for 26% of purchases across all product categories. The emerging power of bloggers on consumers has captivated academics and triggered a number of studies. Several academic studies have tried to decipher what makes bloggers influential. Most of the studies used data mining techniques and assessed on visible characteristics of the bloggers like the number of in-links, comments received, connection between users and/or social network indices (see Khan, et al. 2017). The outcome of these efforts are the development of aggregate metrics on how influential a blogger is. These metrics measure the extent to which a blog post will be viewed. However, social influence is defined as "change in an individual's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, or behaviours that results from interaction with another individual or a group" (Rashotte, 2009, p.563). A blog post may be shared or viewed widely because a blogger might have a large number of followers or in-links but it may not have actually influenced them in terms of changing their cognition, emotions or behaviour. This poses certain constraints in the modelling approach to blogger influence and the attendant metrics reviewed by Khan, et al. (2017) as the occurrence of influence is not actually assessed.

Other studies have taken a different approach and looked at the blogger influence as a change in cognition, emotion and behaviours. This approach has treated bloggers as opinion leaders

(Uzunoğlu & Kip, 2014; Liu-Thompkins and Rogerson, 2012), micro-celebrities (Lee, 2016; Lee and Watkins, 2016) or decision support tools of consumers (Lamberton and Stephen, 2016) and relied on the allied communication model theories. Accordingly, the emphasis was on the interplay between the characteristic of the information source, message and recipient, as are exemplified in Lasswell's (1948) traditional communication model. Each of these approaches put more emphasis on one of the elements of this model. Bloggers as celebrities' approach emphasised the characteristics of the blogger (e.g., attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise). Similarly, the blogger through an opinion leader perspective focused on bloggers' characteristics (e.g., how authoritative inspirational or approachable the blogger is), attributes of the message content (e.g., usefulness, quality) and relationship with recipients (e.g., homophily). A weakness of the communication models and emphasis on source, message and recipients is that they do not take into account that the recipients are in a position to choose the information source they wish to utilize. Depending on their information needs and other factors, people may select different information sources. Some information sources are selected without an objective in mind. The influence of an information source as described in the communication models materialises only if the information source has the appropriate attributes to attract the attention and be selected by the information seeker.

The present study deals with these limitations by employing models that combine information seeking models with communication models (Robson, and Robinson, 2013). The study is aiming to link information search motivations with the characteristics of the bloggers, the attributes of the information content and the bloggers' influence on their audience.

2 CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on the influence of bloggers is limited on a specific characteristic of the blogger and the content dispensed. For example, studies have examined aspects like blogger reputation, trust, usefulness of information provided, whether the information dispense is sponsored or not, blog design and so on (Chu et al. 2008; Hsu, et al, 2013; Cosenza et al. 2015, van Reijmersdal et al, 2016). However, most of the studies assume that the influence of the blogger on visitors is not related to the objectives of the visitor or his level of involvement with the issues published in the blog. The present study examines how the characteristics of the blogger and blog's content interact with visitor's involvement and blog visitors' goals of visit.

2.1 Characteristics of the blogger

Persuasion literature has identified different mechanisms on how the characteristics of a source lead to persuasion. Brinol and Petty (2009) review on the effects of sources on persuasion identified four mechanisms through which an information source leads to persuasion: "(a) by serving as simple cues and heuristics; (b) by affecting the amount of information processing; (c) by biasing the thoughts that are generated; or (d) by serving as persuasive arguments or evidence". Over the latest years, bloggers act as information sources and as such, they carry the same characteristics that make them to be seen as micro-celebrities. Companies also approach them to endorse their products on different platforms, like blogs or YouTube videos, which resulted to the "paid endorsement" phenomenon (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). Employing the celebrity perspective on bloggers, the focus is on three key attributes: physical attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness (Ohanian, 1990, Pornpitakpan, 2004). Expertise refers to the recipients' perceptions in regards to the amount

of knowledge the source possess and its ability to provide accurate information. Trustworthiness on the other hand refers to the honesty or motivation of the source to provide accurate and reliable information. Attractiveness refers to both facial and physical attractiveness of the source (Ohanian, 1990). In general, evidence suggest that the more message recipients like the information source, the more persuasive it is likely to be. Pornpitakpan's (2004) review of the literature identified differential weights for each of the three source characteristics with trustworthiness being more important than physical attractiveness and expertise. Based on the above, we can hypothesise that:

H1a: Bloggers who are perceived by the recipients of information to be attractive are expected to be more influential than others.

H1b: Bloggers who are perceived by the recipients of information be trustworthy are expected to be more influential than others.

H1c: Bloggers who are perceived by the recipients of information to be experts are expected to be more influential than others.

People are more likely to like similar sources more than dissimilar sources with themselves. This phenomenon became known as the similarity-attraction effect (Byrne, 1971). Pornpitakpan (2004) cited evidence that the similarity of source to the recipient play a more important role in persuasion than that of the sources expertise. This effect is similar to the theory of homophily proposed by Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954). This theory suggests that communication volume is higher when the source and the recipient are similar or homophilous. Homophily helps make the flow of information easier as perceived communication barriers are lower and people feel more comfortable to choose a homophilous source due to common needs and product needs. In general, review evidence (Pornpitakpan,

2004; Steffes & Burgee, 2009; Reichelt, Sievert & Jacob, 2014) suggest that homophilous sources are more persuasive than other sources. Hence,

H1d: Bloggers that are perceived as homophilous to the information seeker are more influential than others.

Information seekers have the ability to access information from multiple online sources ranging from excellent to dubious quality. Kleinberg (1999) found that what makes a difference is the authoritativeness of the source. Lin et al (2016) presented empirical evidence from social media suggesting that authoritativeness of a source is the most important attribute of a source's influence. A source is authoritative when it is perceived as powerful and important and as such it is more likely to be believed and followed. The creation of links to a blogger in different websites may be one way to confer authority to the blogger according to Kleinberg (1999). The term cognitive authority was coined (Wilson, 1983) to explain authoritativeness of a source. Cognitive authority refers to sources whose "opinions and advice are taken more seriously with more weight being placed on their words than on the words of others" (Rieh, 2010, p. 1340). According to Rieh (2002), cognitive authority (usually determined by source's credentials) is the most common criterion used by experienced information seekers on the web. Evaluation of a source's cognitive authority is subjective and depends on the situation, topic and information needs (Swanson, 2005).

Based on the above, the following hypothesis is put forward.

H1e: Bloggers that are perceived as authoritative to the topic of interest are more influential than others.

Kang (2010) argues that blog approachability was a desirable attribute by information seekers. Approachability refers to the perception that a source is warm, caring, and easy to be

communicated or to interact with. However, it has not been examined in different contexts and inter-personal or professional relationships (Hargie and Marshall, 1997). In Robson & Robinson's (2013) information-seeking and communication model (ISCM), accessibility of the information source is an important attribute that affects the use or non-use of information and affects as a result the information seeker's decision. In general, perceived approachability breaks communication barriers and makes it easier to seek information from a blog. Based on the above, we hypothesise that ceteris paribus:

H1f: Bloggers that are perceived as approachable are more influential than others.

Blogs in specific sectors like fashion or beauty, apart from sources of information, are sources of ideas and inspiration. McQuarrie et al. (2012) study of fashion blogs' strategies to attract and maintain visitors by providing novel and authentic ideas highlights the importance of such factors. A study by Saak (2014) indicates that blogs are commonly used as a source of style and design inspiration. Customer inspiration is defined as "a customer's temporary motivational state that facilitates the transition from the reception of a marketing-induced idea to the intrinsic pursuit of a consumption related goal" (Böttger et al., 2017 p. 121). They found that inspiration of customers from a source leads them into pre-purchase deliberation and eventually into purchase behaviour. According to Böttger et al. (2017), the delivery of inspirational content and imagery stimulate consumers to imagine the product experience and encourages purchases (Böttger et al., 2017).

On that basis, it can be postulated that:

H1g: Bloggers who are perceived as inspirational are more influential than others are.

The number of blog followers also appears to affect how influential a blog is. Morris et al (2012) argues that microbloggers who have high number of followers are perceived as more influential. Similar finding by DeVeirman et al (2017) lead to the conclusion that the number

of followers increases perceptions of popularity and likeability of the blogger. Popularity and likeability may also make them more influential than other sources. Metzger and Flanagin, (2013) called this a bandwagon heuristic of the sources credibility. It appears that some kind of herd behaviour may be in place and the number of followers may be used as indication of the blogs credibility (Raafat et al, 2009).

H1h: Blogs with high number of followers/subscribers are more influential than blogs with lower number of followers/subscribers.

2.2 Blog content

The content of the information provided is a key feature in Lasswell's (1948) classic communication model. More recent studies (Wathen and Burkell, 2002, Robson & Robinson, 2013; Hsu et al, 2013) have recognised the importance of information content. Specifically, the ISCM model (Robson & Robinson, 2013) suggest that the usefulness, relevance, timeliness, reliability and lack of bias in the information provided will influence how this information will be used in information seeker's decisions. Some of these elements can be described as quality of information. Specifically, Arazy and Kopak (2011) in line with Taylor (1986) defined information quality to rely on the following broad attributes: accuracy, completeness, objectivity and representation.

Based on the above we hypothesize that,

H2: Blog information that is perceived of high quality is more influential than lower quality information.

2.3 Motivation and goals of information seeker

Information seekers visit a site either randomly or goal-driven to collect information (Bailey 2005; Goldsmith and Horovitz 2006). According to Goldsmith and Horovitz (2006), people may visit online sources either to get more information about a product they want to buy because someone recommended the source (a person or a link directed them there), randomly or to gain more general knowledge on the topic. Information seekers goals has serious ramifications on the influence of the information source. For example, the ISCM model (Robson & Robinson, 2013) proposes that consumer motivations and goals are important for both selecting information sources but also for using or ignoring these sources in their decisions.

One of the key motivators to seek and process information is the information seekers involvement with an issue (see Pornpitakpan, 2004 for a review). People are involved with an issue when the issue has intrinsic importance or personal meaning to the individual. Involvement is found to increase the amount of contemplation and deliberation people expend on an information source and information content. As contemplation increases evaluation of information sources and content is more thorough which may lead to meticulous and stricter evaluation of both the information source and content. On the other hand, it is postulated that when involved with an issue, individuals may have more favourable thoughts on information sources dedicated to the issue (Pornpitakpan, 2004).

Savolainen (2012) applied expectancy-value theory on information seeking. According to this study, the value of the information available and information seeking activity will determine an individual's information search behaviour. As such, four motivators (values) are proposed: intrinsic interest value (e.g. , the enjoyment an individual gets from searching information on an issue); attainment value (e.g., searching information for confirming or disconfirming prior belief about an issue); utility value (how well an information sought can fulfil an individual specific goals, like buying a new product), and relative cost (e.g., the

effort required in getting good information and the risk of selecting the wrong information source) .

Based on the above, involvement can be linked to the first two motivators, intrinsic interest value and attainment value. Involved individuals will get involved into more information search on the issue of interest because they enjoy more such an activity and because they will be more keen to confirm or disconfirm their views about the issue of interest. For goal based, purposive information searches the utility value of the information source and content for the goal in hand will be more important. Hence, involved individuals who are more active in information searching are expected to have identified and use more expert and authoritative sources. Issue involvement affects both the type of information sources used and the effect of that sources on persuasion.

Based on the above we can hypothesise that

H3a: The level of issue involvement of an information seeker will determine the choice the blog accessed (blogger characteristics and information content).

Pornpitakpan's (2004) study proposes that the issue involvement interacts with credibility of a source and information content in determining. Petty and Cacioppo (1979) argue that low in credibility sources are less influential in highly involved individuals. Similarly, when the quality of information was high it was more persuasive to highly involved individuals than less involved ones. The key justification behind these findings is that high issue involvement provokes more meticulous processing of the information accessed. Whereas, low issue involvement means the audience will put in less effort in assessing source and information quality and lower chances to change their attitudes (Pornpitakpan, 2004). Hence,

H3b: The level of issue involvement of an information seeker will moderate the effects hypothesized in H1 and H2 series of hypotheses.

Goal-directed information searches will focus on sources and content that can help them achieve their objectives. For example, if the goal is to buy a specific product, credible sources that provide high quality information will be used. If the objective is to get inspiration and new ideas an inspirational source will be used. How well a source and the information content of the sources matches the information needs of the individual will determine how influential the source is.

Hence, we can hypothesize that:

H4a: Goal-directed information search will determine the choice of blog accessed (blogger characteristics and information content).

H4b: The effects hypothesised in H1 and H2 series hypotheses will be moderated by the goal the information seeker.

The above rlationships are depicted in figure 1.

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Figure 1 about here
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3 METHODOLOGY

We collected data using an online panel from Qualtrics in the United States. Such panels offer an acceptable sampling frame for testing relationships among variables (Baker et al., 2010; Callegaro, Villar, Yeager, & Krosnick, 2014). Consumers were screened based on their gender, and only female respondents were included in the study. The key reason for focusing on female respondents was related to the choice of beauty blogs as the stimulus in this study. Beauty is one of the sectors where bloggers play an important role on influencing consumers (Arnold, 2017). All respondents passed the attention and time filters used to eliminate careless respondents. Of the 260 respondents, we eliminated 21 because they answered "no" to the final quality screener ("In your honest opinion, should we use your data?"). We used the remaining 239 responses to test our hypotheses. Of the sample, ages ranged between 19 and 65 years (average = 33.172 years of age, SD = 8.970 years). 43.1% of them had an undergraduate degree, 18% had a postgraduate qualification, 9.2% had finished high school, 20.9% had some college and the remaining ones had some type of a professional degree.

3.1 Control variables

Susceptibility to informational influence was used as a control variable following Bernerth, and Aguinis (2016) recommendation. Chen et al (2016) found that susceptibility to informational influence is important in the assessment of the information provided third party sources like bloggers.

3.2 Measures and measurement model

To avoid giving respondents to test a random blog, the following research procedure was employed. Respondents were asked to specify the most recent beauty blog they have visited.

They were also asked to provide a link to the blog. The link was used to identify information about the blog like the number of followers/subscribers. Respondents that failed to provide this information were screened out of the study. The next question was to specify the reasons of their visit in a multiple choice question. A list of seven reasons adapted from Goldsmith and Horovitz (2006): to find out information about a specific product; to get more beauty-related knowledge in general; friends or family recommended me to visit this beauty blog; this blog was on the "recommended for you" list (on social media); out of curiosity as it attracted my attention; out of habit; I accidentally clicked on it and other reason, please specify. The responses were converted into proxy variables and latent class analysis was performed (see below) to identify the key categories of reasons of the visit. Then the respondents were asked to evaluate the blogger and the blog on content on the hypothesised characteristics. Established measures were used wherever possible, such as perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness as these were developed by Ohanian (1990). Homophily between the respondent and their blogger was also measured using six items from a scale that originated from McCroskey et al. (2006). Information quality items were adapted from Setia et al. (2013). Involvement with beauty products was measure on four items adapted from Bloch's (1981) scale. Susceptibility to informational influence was measured on Bearden et al (1989) scale.

The influence of the blogger on beauty brand purchases was assessed with two ways. First a single item self-reported measure of influence of the specific visit to the blog on a 7 point Likert scale (1=no influence at all, 2=minor influence, 3=weak influence, 4=moderate influence, 5=strong influence, 6=strong influence, 7=very strong influence). For the second measure of influence, respondents were asked to specify their latest three purchases of beauty products. For each purchase (through the use pipetext function in the online questionnaire platform) they were asked to indicate how influence was the blogger in their purchase. The

same scale as in the self-reported measure was employed. As responses were highly inter-related to each other, the scale was used as a latent scale

The full measurement model also showed a good fit (χ^2 (539) = 758.059, p < .001; comparative fit index [CFI] = .946; Tucker–Lewis index [TLI] = .936; root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .041; standardized root mean square residual [SRMR] = .051). Reliability and validity statistics of the scales used are included in the Appendix. Discriminant validity of the constructs was checked by the method of comparing the unconstrained with the constrained measurement models. Chi square differences indicated that the unconstrained model has better fit in all cases.

3.3 Common method variance

To check common method variance, we used the CFA marker technique (Williams, et al 2010). As an ideal marker, we used the blue scale, as recommended by Simmering et al (2015). The fit of the noncongeneric (unequal marker variable effects) CFA marker model (Satorra-Bentler $\chi2$ (616) = 838.753, p< 0.001) was compared with the fit of the baseline model Satorra-Bentler $\chi2$ (652) = 880.498, p < 0.001). The chi square difference test (Satorra-Bentler Scaled Delta: $\chi2$ (36) = 42.579, p = 0.209) indicated that CFA marker model is not better than the base model. This provides evidence that common method variance is not a problem in this data.

4 RESULTS

To identify different configurations of reason, when participants visited the blog we performed a latent class analysis (LCA) on the seven reasons identified (binary variables). The first step was to choose the optimal number of classes by specifying LCA models with various numbers of classes. We evaluated the number of classes in the LCA models by comparing several statistical criteria, including the Akaike information criterion (AIC), the

Bayesian information criterion (BIC), the adjusted BIC, entropy, the Vuong-Lo-Mendell-Rubin likelihood ratio test (VLMR) and the Lo-Mendell-Rubin adjusted likelihood ratio test (LMR) (Nylund, Asparouhou, & Muthén, 2007). The three-class model was the most ideal choice to make (Loglikelihood (23) = -795.438, AIC= 1636.877, BIC= 1716.835, adjusted BIC= 1643.932, entropy =.783) The VLMR and LMR difference tests for 3 vs. 4 classes models (VLMR difference= 13.253, difference in parameters=8, p= 0.5423; LMR difference= 12.957, difference in parameters=8, p= 0.5491) indicate that the 3 class model is more appropriate than the 4 class model. The identified latent classes are depicted in Figure 2. The first latent class refers to people that visited the indicated blog without a specific purpose in mind. Curiosity was the key reason of their visit. This latent class is labelled "undirected visit" and represents 25.7% of the visits. The second latent class (purposeful visit) refers to blog visitors driven by the desire to get information about a specific product and enhance their knowledge on beauty products. This is the biggest group of the three (52.5% of visits). The third class (recommended visit) refers to blog visitors that select the blog after the recommendation of a friend or a family member. This group of blog visitors also tries to get information about a specific product or to enhance its knowledge on beauty products.

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    Figure 2 about here
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The hypothesised relationships depicted in Figure 1 suggest a moderated mediation model (Preacher, et al., 2007). To test this model Haye's (2013) PROCESS SPSS module was used as it provides more robust results than other methods (Zhao et al, 2010). One of the limitations of the Hayes' (2013) model is that it cannot examine the effects of two independent variables at the same time. For this reason, Figure 1 model will be tested

separately for issue involvement and goal of visit. To avoid possible confounding effects, the excluded independent variable will be controlled for and will be included as a covariate. As the model does not use categorical variables, proxies of each of the three classes of goals identified are created and used as independent variables.

Table 1 reports the complete results of moderated mediation analysis which models an interaction effect between goal of visit and issue involvement. As can be seen in the results, H3a is supported and so the issue involvement influences the selection of bloggers. Results in Table 1 indicate that highly involved visitors tend to select blogs that they believe they are authoritative, approachable, inspirational, attractive, trustworthy and homophilous. This provides some empirical support for H3a.

Similarly, purposeful visitors tend to select blogs that they view as authoritative, trustworthy, expert and homophilous. The same is not true for recommended visits, for which the audience is not attracted by any specific type of bloggers. Moreover, blogs visited after a recommendation do not affect visitors' perceptions. An examination of the "undirected visits" in a separate analysis (it could not be included in one model due to collinearity problems) showed a similar pattern as in the "recommended visits". The results provide support H4a. Purposeful visitors tend to select blogs that possess certain attributes, however, the same is not true for recommended or undirected visits. In the last two cases, it appears that not any blog selection across the specified criteria takes place. Regarding the purposeful visits effects on blog selection, Table 1 results indicate that there is an interaction effect with issue involvement. Highly involved purposeful blog visitors seem to be more likely to choose blogs they believe that they are authoritative, that provide high quality information and have higher number of followers.

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Regarding the H1 series of hypotheses, results in Table 1 indicate that authoritative (H1e) and homophilous (H1d) bloggers are universally (by all types of visitors identified) perceived as the most influential. Similarly, blogs that provide high quality information (H2a) are perceived influential in one of the two measures of perceived influence. Hence, hypotheses H1e, H1d and H2a are empirically supported.

Results in Table 1 indicate that the one-way interaction effects of goal of visit and blogger attributes hypothesised in H4b are not empirically supported. Additionally, Table 1 provides some non-hypothesised insights. Results indicate that bloggers have more influence on issue involved visitors as well as those who purposefully visit the blog or after a recommendation. They do not seem to have an influence on the undirected visitors who are visiting the blog by curiosity.

An examination of the two-way interaction effect reported in Table 2 indicates that homophily makes a blogger more influential to visitors who are not purposefully visiting the blog or do not visit the blog through a recommendation. These are the undirected visitors. Similarly, authoritative bloggers are more influential when the visit is purposeful and not triggered by a recommendation. The findings are constrained to one of the two measures of blogger influence (perceived influence in general). This evidence provides some support for H4b.

The interactive effect of issue involvement with blogger's characteristics and blog content quality on the two measures of perceived influence was also tested using the two reasons of visit proxies (i.e., "purposeful visit" and "recommended visit") as well as susceptibility to informational influence as control variables. Results indicated that issue involvement does not interact with any of the blogger characteristics or quality of the blog content. Hence, hypothesis H3b cannot be accepted. However, an examination of the conditional effects of issue involvement on homophily suggest a non-linear interactive effect. Specifically, the results in Table 3 represent the effects of homophily on the two measures of perceived influence at different values of issue involvement. Values include the mean (0) of issue involvement and plus/minus one standard deviation from the mean. The two 95% bootstrap (5,000 bootstrap samples were drawn) confidence intervals (lower and upper) are reported as well as the bootstrap standard error. Based on the results (Table 3), when homophily is combined with average levels of issue involvement the influence of the blogger is statistically significant. However, there is no interaction effect when issue involvement is low or high. It appears that the homophily with a blogger is more effective to individuals with average level of issue involvement. Homophily does not influence uninvolved or highly involved individuals.

5 DISCUSSION

The present study departs from previous studies which take for granted that consumers will visit a blog which is credible. The study combines information seeking and communication behaviours and examines blogger influence within the content of information seeker goals and motivation. While a number of consumers bumps into blogs accidentally or visit them without a purpose in their mind, a number of blog visits are deliberate and purposeful. Many visitors consciously choose the blogs they visit to fulfil their objectives. As a result, the influence power of a blog cannot be assessed independently from the goals of the visitors. The study proposes a conceptual framework which identifies two determinants of blog selection: goals of the information seeker and their involvement with the issue. These two factors are influencing blog selection and also determine blog attributes which make them influential.

First, the study identified three types of visits: purposeful visits, recommended visits and undirected visits. In the first two types of visits, consumers actively search for information of a product or the issue of their interest, driven by the recommendation of someone they know or autonomously on their own initiative. Undirected visits are driven by consumers' curiosity. The last type of visits may fall into Wilson's (1996) passive attention or passive search modes.

Second, information seeker goals and issue involvement were found to affect blog selection. It does not come as a surprise that information seekers who are involved with an issue are more meticulous in their selection of blogs. Involved visitors seem to choose blogs which are perceived by them as authoritative, approachable, inspirational, attractive, trustworthy and homophilous. A similar pattern is observed for the purposeful blog visitors. They are more

likely to select blogs which are authoritative, trustworthy and with bloggers who are experts and homophilous. However, people who visit blogs after a recommendation or out of curiosity (i.e., undirected visits) do not seem to select particular types of blogs. Interestingly, a personal recommendation to visit a blog do not seem to affect the perceptions of the blog across the examined attributes.

Surprisingly, the "most influential blog" ranking was not found to be an important attribute in selecting a blog and does not influence visitors' decisions and behaviour. The number of followers/subscribers that a blog has appeals only to purposeful blog visitors who are highly involved with the issues featuring in the blog. In a post hoc analysis, the number of blog followers is not related with how authoritative, trustworthy or expert a blogger is. None of the blog attributes examined here was related to the number of followers.

Third, the study established that of all the attributes examined only authority, homophily and information quality make a blog influential. However, some of the effects are conditional on the goals of the visitor and their issue involvement. For example, homophily makes a blog more influential to drifting blog visitors (undirected visits) and/or people with average levels of issue involvement. Homophily does not have the desired effects to uninvolved and highly involved individuals. On the other hand, authoritative blogs are more appealing to self-directed purposeful visitors

Overall, the main theoretical contribution of the study is that a blogger's influence should not be examined separately nor as a communication effect without taking into account information seeking. This study provides a new theoretical approach to examine the blogger's influence phenomenon.

Managerially, the study has certain implications on the reputation blogs need to build and the target audience they can attract; the type of visitors which the blog will have more influence

on. It also provides insights on the metrics used to assess blogger influence. The use of the number of followers as a key influence metric needs to be re-examined in view of the visitors' goals and issue involvement.

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Table 1. Moderated mediation. The effects of type of visit

	Autho-ritative	Approa-chable	Inspira-tional	Attra-ctive	Trust-wort	Exper-tise	Homo-phily	Info qua-lity	# of follo-wers	Pcved influ-ence	Influe-nce to brand purchase
	coeff	Coeff	coeff	Coeff	coeff	coeff	Coeff	coeff	coeff	coeff	Coeff
Issue invol-vement	0.099*	0.135**	0.189**	0.192**	0.131*	0.118	0.203*	0.052	-0.057	0.227*	0.269*
Purposeful visit	0.349*	0.273	0.267	0.028	.568*	0.540*	0.391*	0.237	0.268	0.484+	1.126*
Involvement × purposeful	0.178*	0.124	0.171	0.16	.034	0.209	-0.048	0.251*	0.056*	-0.065	0.071
Recomme-nded visit	0.275	0.181	0.265	-0.145	.309	0.465	0.245	0.16	0.297	0.611*	1.476 *
Involvement × reccomend	-0.051	-0.120	-0.114	-0.263	-.361	-0.172	-0.076	0.017	0.120	-0.104	-.380
Susceptibi-lity to info-rmation influence	0.073	0.077	0.06	0.065	0 .147	0.141	0.108	0.100*	0.039	0.034	.075
authoritative										0.431*	0.560*
approachable										-0.126	-0.206
inspirational										-0.012	0.041
Attractive										0.117	0.001
trustworthy										0.012	-0.133
Expertise										-0.258	-0.175
homophily										0.191*	0.261+
Info quality										0.413*	0.295
number of followers										0.029	-0.041
authorit × purposef										0.115	-0.021
approach ×										0.103	-0.634

purposef												
inspira_ × purposef											0.184	0.319
attracti × purposef											0.266	0.269
trustwor × purposef											0.148	0.152
expertise × purposef											0.003	-0.075
homophil × purposef											-0.422	-0.529
Info qual × purposef											-0.68	-0.127
follow × purposef											-0.372	0.111
authorit × reccomen											0.435	1.269
approach × reccomen											0.03	-1.172
inspira_ × reccomen											-0.202	-0.241
attracti × reccomen											0.279	0.217
trustwor × reccomen											0.006	-0.018
expertis × reccomen											-0.235	-0.145
homophil × reccomen											-0.342	0.074
info_qual × reccomen											-0.495	-0.472
Follower × reccomen											-0.516	0.276

R^2	.118	.129	.153	.088	.102	.093	.122	.124	.021	.382	.279
$F_{(6,232)}$	6.981**	6.152**	8.176**	3.260*	4.803**	4.535**	4.686**	5.262**	1.382		
$F_{(33,205)}$										4.291**	4.615**

Table 2.

Perceived blog influence. Interaction effects between goal of visit, homophily, and authoritativeness

	Purpose-ful visit	Recom-mended visit	effect	SE	boot LLCI	boot ULCI
Perceived influence of blogger						
Homophily	0	0	0.123	0.088	0.006	0.386
Homophily	0	1	0.027	0.043	-0.019	0.168
Homophily	1	0	0.016	0.022	-0.02	0.07
Homophily	1	1	-0.032	0.093	-0.383	0.067
Authoritative	0	0	0.003	0.049	-0.071	0.147
Authoritative	0	1	-0.029	0.072	-0.261	0.068
Authoritative	1	0	0.073	0.042	0.002	0.168
Authoritative	1	1	0.113	0.154	-0.058	0.646

Table 3.

Perceived blog influence: Interaction effects of homophily and issue involvement

	Issue involvement	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Perceived influence of blogger to brand purchase					
Homophily	-1.516	.057	.043	-.015	.152
Homophily	.000	.059	.032	.011	.145
Homophily	1.516	.060	.040	-.002	.160
Perceived Influence					
Homophily	-1.516	.036	026	-.009	.095
Homophily	.000	.033	.018	.005	.079
Homophily	1.516	.030	.021	-.001	.083

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: information, involvement and influence

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│       -Information seeker's goal      │
│                                       │
│        -Issue involvement             │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
        │                    │
        │                    │
        ▼                    │
┌──────────────────────┐     │
│ Blogger's:            │     │
│ -attractiveness       │     │
│ -expertise            │     │
│ -trustworthiness      │     │
│ -homophily            │     │
│ -authority            │     │          ┌────────────────────┐
│ -approachability      │     │          │ Blogger's          │
│ -inspirational        │     ▼          │ influence on the   │
│ -number of subscribers│─────────────▶  │ information seeker  │
├──────────────────────┤                │                    │
│ Blog's:               │                └────────────────────┘
│                       │
│ -quality of information│
└──────────────────────┘
```
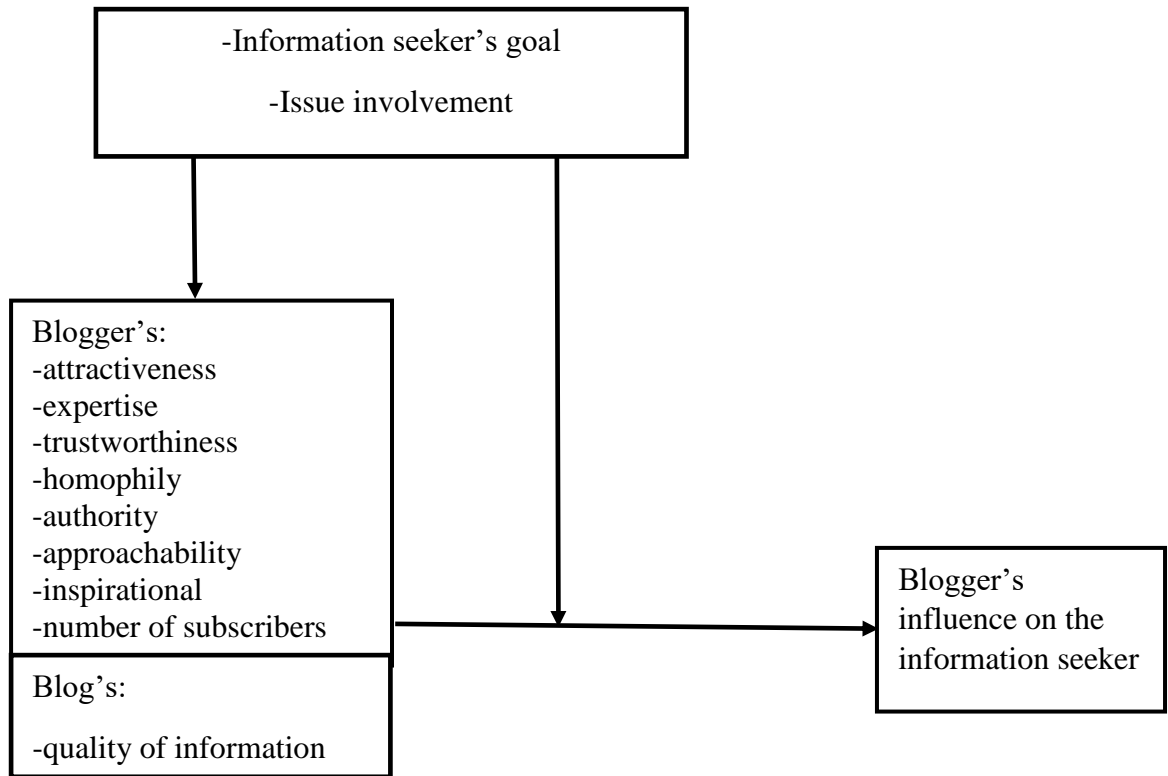
Figure 2. Latent class analysis: reasons of visiting a beauty blog

- - Undirected visit, 27.5%
—— Purposeful visit, 52.5%
···· Reccomended visit, 21.8
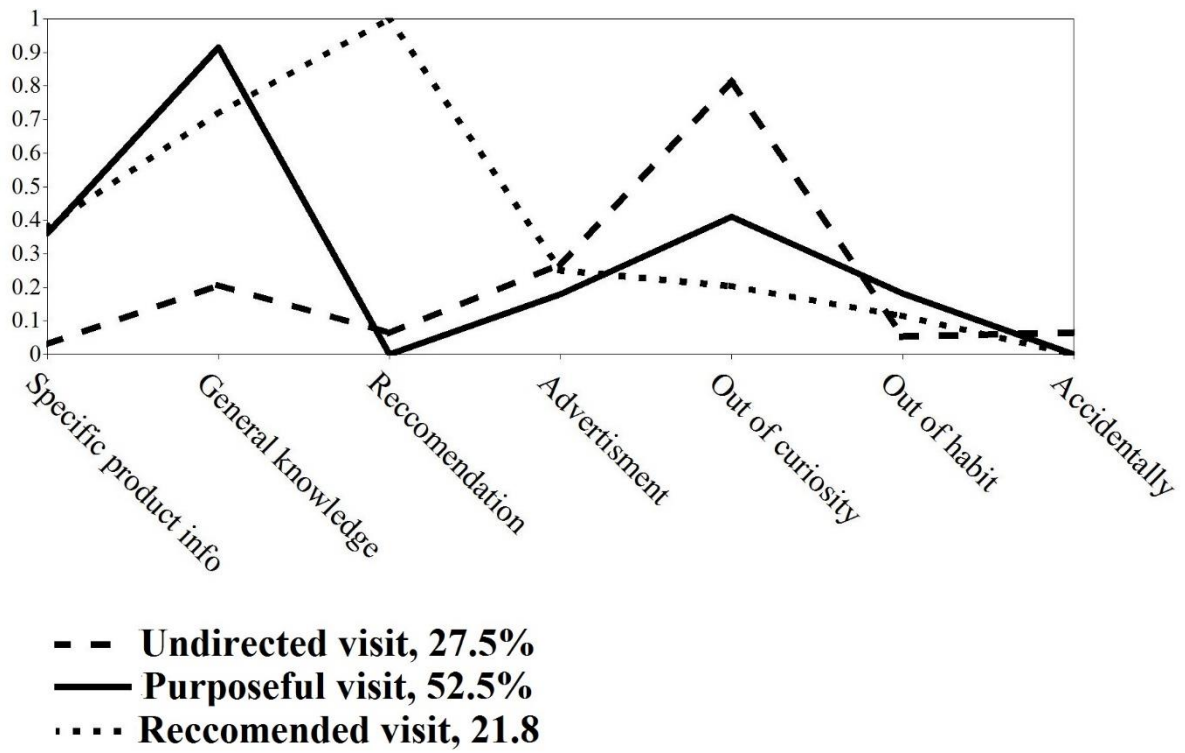
Appendix

Items and reliability statistics

Scale/items	Regression coefficients	AVE/Construct reliability
Authoritativeness		
-authoritative	0.514	
-consistent	0.724	
-instructional	0.660	
- has knowledge	0.765	
-has credentials	0.642	
- confidence	0.735	.460/.835
Approachability		
- approachable	0.745	
- agreeable	0.643	
-enthusiastic	0.665	
-helpful	0.829	.524/.814
Inspiration		
- inspirational	0.741	
- open to new experiences	0.641	.480/.647
Attractiveness		
-Unattractive: Attractive	0.978	
- Ugly :Beautiful	0.755	.763/.864
Trustworthiness		
-Undependable: Dependable	0.691	
-Unreliable: Reliable	0.933	
-Untrustworthy: Trustworthy	0.911	.726/.887
Expertise		
-Unknowledgeable: Knowledgeable	0.921	
- Unskilled: Skilled	0.924	.851/.920
Homophily		
Blogger is from a social class similar to mine	0.741	
Blogger's background is similar to mine	0.838	
Blogger's status is like mine	0.841	
Blogger has a lot of common with me	0.835	.664/.887
Involvement		

Using beauty products seems to "recharge" me in body, mind and spirit	0.782	
Using beauty products is one way I often use to relieve daily pressure	0.869	
Using beauty products is one of the most satisfying and enjoyable things I do	0.875	.711/.880
Susceptibility to information influence		
- I often consult other people to help choose the best alternative available from a product class	0.874	
- If I have little experience with a product, I often ask my friends about the product	0.669	.606/.751
Blogger's influence on beauty brand purchases		
-blogger's influence on buying brand X	0.6	
-blogger's influence on buying brand Y	0.799	
-blogger's influence on buying brand Z	0.706	.499/.747
Information quality		
-provides all the information needed	0.676	
-…complete information	0.718	
-…accurate information	0.601	
-…up-to-date information	0.687	
-information is presented clearly	0.744	.472/.816