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The Effects of Blogs on Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention

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Abstract

The popularity of blogs has become a common means of communication among Internet users and has caught the attention of marketers, particularly as a marketing tool [13]. Driven by the need to establish strong relationship with their customers, business have turned to the next generation of marketing approaches, including customer-centric, market orientation, integrated and relationship marketing ([3], [4], [6], [9], [10], [11], [12]). Key to this success, though, is the ability to interactively and effectively communicate with customers (Peppers and Rogers, 1993) to learn of and satisfy their needs [14]. Blogs, web sites that consists of discussion postings from people who are interested in sharing their person experiences or thoughts on site's topics, allow consumers to share ideas, build community and contact other consumers who are seen as more objective information sources. Blog marketing captures the essence of the blog and emphasizes its features in authentic voice, community power, bidirectional communication and knowledge sharing. This study examines the effects of blogs on brand attitude and purchase intention, and the influence of brand knowledge. It posits that blogs play importantly in building a consumer's intention to purchase a product or service.

Based on prior studies in blog marketing, this study identifies four salient blog elements: community identification (i.e., belongingness to a group which defines a person in terms of the group, and prescribes and instigates group-oriented behavior), interpersonal trust (i.e., confident belief in the truth of other members of the blog group), two-way communication (i.e., interactive communication before, during and after a transaction between group members and the business), and message exchange (i.e., sharing of information to encourage greater exchange of information).

In this study, brand attitude reflects the cognitive, affective and curative components that influence behavior, such as intent. It helps shape beliefs, judgments and thoughts of an object (cognitive), and conjures emotions, feelings and drives (affective).

Purchase intent gauges a consumer's plans to buy a brand or product within a time period. Based on the theory of reasoned action [5] and theory of planned behavior [1], it is frequently used as a surrogate measure of actual purchase.

Two components comprise brand knowledge: familiarity (i.e., number of prior experiences with the product) and expertise (i.e., ability to successfully perform product-related tasks) [2].

Figure 1 depicts the research model of this study. It suggests that the blog marketing elements will positively affect a consumer's attitude toward a brand (i.e., brand attitude) and subsequently brand attitude will positively influence his/her purchase intention. These relationships are further strengthened by his/her knowledge of the brand. The following hypotheses have been developed to test the relationships.

The collective information and knowledge that consumers gain through a blog site will affect the development of their attitude towards the brand. A blog can be used to openly discuss the brand and shape other's attitudes of it.

- H1: *Blog marketing elements have a positive effect on brand attitude*
- H1a: *Community identification has a positive impact on brand attitude*
- H1b: *Interpersonal trust has a positive impact on brand attitude*
- H1c: *Message exchange has a positive impact on brand attitude*
- H1d: *Two-way communication has a positive impact on brand attitude*

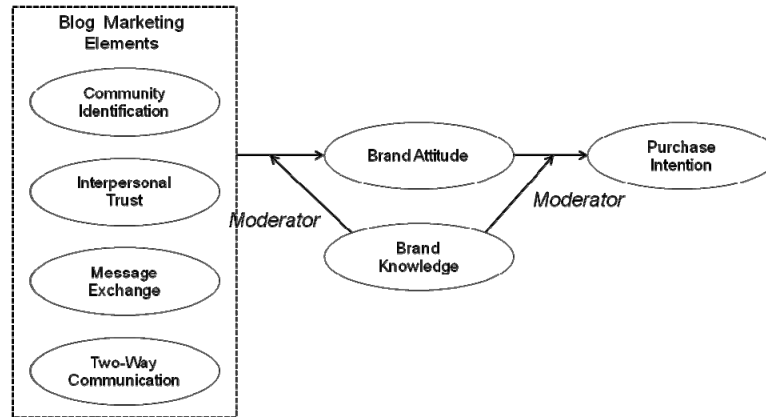


Figure 1. Research model

Based on the Fishbein and Ajzen's [5] theory of reasoned action, attitude toward an object has a significant impact on the intent on performing an act. Thus, the attitude that an individual has developed toward a brand will play upon his/her intention to purchase it.

H2: Brand attitude has a positive effect on purchase intention

Consumer knowledge of a brand will enhance (moderate) the effects of the blog's elements on his/her attitude towards it. Greater knowledge increases the development of a positive brand attitude.

H3: Brand knowledge moderates the relationship between the blog marketing elements and brand attitude

H3a: Brand knowledge moderates the relationship between community identification and brand attitude

H3b: Brand knowledge moderates the relationship between interpersonal trust and brand attitude

H3c: Brand knowledge moderates the relationship between message exchange and brand attitude

H3d: Brand knowledge moderates the relationship between two-way communication and brand attitude

Brand knowledge enhances (moderates) the relationship between brand attitude and purchase intention. Greater positive experience with a brand will increase brand attitude's influence on purchase intention.

H4: Brand knowledge has a moderating effect on the relationship between brand attitude and purchase intention

Data were collected through an online survey in Taiwan. Items on the survey instrument were adopted from prior studies and measured on 7-point Likert-type scales. Of the 1,033 questionnaires received, 727 were usable, for a return rate of 70.5 percent. A confirmatory factor analysis supports the validity (convergent and discriminant) and reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of the instrument. A structural equation model and series of regression models tested the direct and moderating effects, respectively.

The results partially support the positive effects of the blog marketing elements on brand attitude (H1). Of the four elements, only community identification is not supported (H1a). Brand attitude was found to have a positive effect on purchase intention (H2). Brand knowledge had a partial moderating effect on the relationship between the blog marketing elements and brand attitude (H3). All elements but two-way communication (H3d) were supported. Lastly, brand knowledge had no moderating effect on the relationship between brand attitude and purchase intention.

Blogs represent an important element that helps marketers build customer-focused relationships in the electronic marketplace. Increasing brand attitude and brand knowledge play importantly to ensure the purchase of a product or service. As demonstrated in this study, interpersonal trust (belief in the truth of other members of the blog group), message exchange (information sharing) and two-way communication (interactive communication) are elements that marketers should focus on to build brand attitude. Furthermore, having prior knowledge and experience with a brand (brand knowledge) enhances the effect of the blog elements on building brand attitude. Thus, investments in creating greater positive brand awareness and exposure will benefit the formation of brand attitude.

Creating a positive brand attitude leads to the greater likelihood of a purchase. In this model, a positive attitude toward a brand appears as a key determinant to a purchase. Hence, marketers should understand that to gain an advantage through blog marketing focus needs to be directed to activities and behaviors that lead to positive images of a brand.

Keywords: Blog, blog marketing, brand attitude, brand knowledge, purchase intention

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