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THE EFFECTS OF CHARACTERISTICS OF CORPORATE BLOG ON TOURISTS’ LODGING INTENTION: AN EXAMPLE OF BED AND BREAKFAST

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Abstract

Tourists may rely on external information to make various decisions. By understanding the relation between information source characteristics and decision making, tourist operators can improve their communication performance and marketing efforts. Some businesses use corporate blog as a communication platform to engage their customers with the companies. Researches about the causal relationship between corporate blog and business marketing performance, yet, are scant. A theoretical model was built based on a set of distinct characteristics of corporate blogs identified from existing literature. A questionnaire survey was conducted to test this model. Based on 143 samples collected, this study found that vividness, interactivity of the blogs impact B&Bs’ lodging intention via the mediation of the sense of intimacy; and that direction of product reviews posted in the blogs directly impacts the lodging intention. Finally, managerial and academic implications are offered.

Keywords—corporate blog; lodging intention; bed and breakfast
1 INTRODUCTION

The competition of tourism industry is intense. Service providers in this industry, hotel in particular (Pepur & Pivčević, 2009), are finding it difficult to acquire and keep customers. For example, the number of hotel in Taiwan is about 2700, and this number keeps increasing; and the number of Bed and Breakfast (B&B) grew from 65 in 2003 to 3537 in 2012. However, the market shares of hotel and B&B remain in 12-13% and 6% respectively for several years (Tourism Bureau, Taiwan, 2009, 2011, 2012). How to attract the tourists, hence, is receiving greater attention from researchers, policy makers, and marketers.

Tourists must make a variety of decisions before the trip, such as where to stay, where to eat, etc. People always search for information for trip planning to build an image regarding their future experiences (Fodness & Murray, 1997) and avoid potential risks, hoping to enhance the quality of the trip (Money & Crotts, 2003). Hence, by understanding the relationships between tourists’ decisions and the characteristics of various information sources, tourism managers could know how to improve their marketing efforts.

Recently, blog becomes new sources of information that provide abundant personal travel experiences and a platform for distribution of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) (Litvin et al., 2008). Many enterprises also build a corporate blog as a platform for communicating with their customers to engage them with the companies (Singh et al., 2008). However, though the effects of structural and informational characteristics of various information sources, including the websites of travel agents have been thoroughly investigated (Frias, et al., 2008), the causal relationship between corporate blog and marketing effects is still unclear. Therefore, exactly which and how the characteristics of corporate blogs affect tourists’ lodging intention become an interesting issue. Taking B&B as the research object, this study intends to fill the above void by conducting an exploratory research to identify some important characteristics of blog and figure out how these characteristics affect lodging decisions.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Information search and travelers’ decision making

Travelers need to consider various constraints such as cost, time, and schedule feasibility while planning their trips. Normally, tourists always consult information from various sources before making important on-site decisions (Moutinho, 1987), such as where to live, where to eat, and where to see, etc., to respond to internal and external situational factors (Fordness & Murray, 1997). For example, if hotels are fully booked, consumers may turn to looking for B&Bs for accommodation.

In addition, travelers may shape a destination image through information acquired (Beerli and Martin, 2004), which may influence the possibility of a destination being included, or even chosen in pre-trip planning (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Bigné et al., 2001). Um and Crompton (1990) claimed that travellers’ cognitive and affective perceptions of a destination are influenced by various external stimuli, including symbolic stimuli from commercial media, and social stimuli like WOM (Bigné et al., 2001; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Fodness & Murray, 1997).

Information search is also an activity to reduce the risk and avoid uncertainty, hoping to enhance trip quality and experience (Money & Crotts, 2003). Tourism is an experiential product characterized with intangibility, uncertainty and high risks before and during its consumption. Higher perceived risk may lead consumers to search for relevant information more in-depth (Dowling & Staelin, 1994) and be dependent more on non-commercial communications, such as personalized sources or WOM (Bansal & Voyer, 2000). It is also found that, in the case of highly involved products and services like travel, tourists are likely to spend significant time to search for information (Wang et al., 2007).
Therefore, tourism managers could improve their marketing efforts and performance by providing relevant product information to potential customers. In the past, businesses use various media to communicate with consumers. Due to the rapid expansion of the number of products and services, and, at the same time, the proliferation and diversification of marketing tactics and channels for customer communication and encounter (Singh et al., 2008), people may easily access to and be hard to process the abundant information (Chen et al., 2009). As a result, customers may become disfavor to business’ messages delivered by traditional media. Businesses were forced to seek different kind of media to engage customers with the company. It is also stressed that marketing messages should be built on the consumer's actual experiences (Singh et al., 2008).

Hence, personalized and socialized information sources become more important. The advancement of the Internet endows everyone a convenient way to share personal experiences (Singh et al., 2008). Consumers now increasingly utilize Internet to search for information. Such type of social media has gained its wide popularity among the tourists (Tourism Bureau, Taiwan, 2011; Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). Recently, blog became one of the emerging platforms for distributing subjective travel experiences (Litvin et al., 2008).

### 2.2 Personal and corporate blogs

Blog, also known as Weblog, is defined as a webpage that bloggers log the websites they find interesting. It is an often-updated site that point to articles elsewhere on the web, often with comments, and to on-site articles (Dave, 2003). Blog is one of the latest and most rapidly expanding platforms for personal publishing and communication (Scott, 2001). The format and content of the blog differ from other types of websites (Blood, 2004). Blog entries are listed in reverse chronological order (Nardi et al., 2004, Herring et al., 2004). Bloggers tend to store their experiences in story form, leading to blogs that normally consist of dated entries in a “story telling” format (Blood, 2004; Shang et al., 2009). People may also be allowed to post comments to individual entries in blog (Dave, 2003). Therefore, articles expressed by storytelling or diary format are usually results of inter-personal conversations, just like episodes in a serious of dialogues (Blood, 2004). Therefore, blogs can be viewed as a social media delivering user generated content by a web page or end user information system.

To some certain extent, businesses are unable to control the circulation and distribution of e-WOM messages or blog content among various consumers. Many enterprises, hence, also began to set up their own blogs as a platform for communication and assigned one or more executive level employees for its operation (Singh et al., 2008). By mimicking personal bloggers’ acts, businesses are hoping to gain marketing performance from the capability of blogs’ inter-personal influences; yet, corporate executive, rather than any individual, will play the role blog owner this time. Corporate blog is more informal, personal, and friendly than official website. Businesses are hoping to obtain recognition from readers and engage them with the company by mimicking personal bloggers’ acts to construct a non-conventional, high-speed communication medium for self-disclosure to their readers (Seoble & Israel, 2006).

Corporate blogs can also be used to promote brands and products, thereby being closer to and in contact with target customers to act quickly (e.g., sales promotion), get their feedbacks (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011) and create a high-quality customer experience (Wright, 2006). It can also be used as a customer relationship management interface, so that customers’ experiences can be collected, their requirements and complaints can be managed via this platform (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). Finally, businesses can integrate customers into their decision making process since customers are important sources of knowledge. What is relevant to customers’ needs could be identified easily and quickly (Chen et al., 2014; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011).

Though literature related with the blog is abundant, most of previous studies mainly focused on personal blogs. Recently, researchers began to have an interest in the phenomenon of corporate blogs (e.g., see Hsu & Tsou, 2011). However, related researches are still scant, and the causal relationship between corporate blog and marketing performance is still unclear (Singh et al., 2008); exactly which and how the characteristic of corporate blog influence marketing performance, in particular the
selection of B&B, is under-explored. The next section will explore and develop a preliminary theoretical explanation to answer this question.

3 MODEL DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Identifying Characteristics of Corporate Blog

Since corporate blog is a mimic of and mutation from personal blog, it is reasonably to assert that some of the personal blog characteristics may also be applicable in corporate blog to generate effective power of interpersonal influences. Drawing from theories deployed by previous personal blogs studies, including theories from web based information systems, advertisement, consumer decision-making, WOM, and social psychology, at least, but not limited to, four characteristics may be identified, including intimacy, interactivity, vividness, as well as the direction of WOMs inside the blogs.

Firstly, since blog by nature is a website, the Flow theory proposed by Steuer (1992), which argued that vividness and interactivity are two major antecedents affecting experiences of website navigation, was deployed. These two variables help bloggers generate a perception of tele-presence about the cyberspace, which may in turn produce flow experience. The flow experience during surfing a website may result in a pleasing state of mind; perceived enjoyment would positively influence the attitude and intention to use a website more extensively. Hence, the higher the flow state is, the more likely that the bloggers remember their perceptions.

Advancement of media technologies has allowed bloggers to use multimedia materials like photos, films and audio in their blogs (Dave, 2003; Herring et al., 2004) to vividly depicted their travel experiences (Lin & Huang, 2006). Vividness here means the representational richness of a medium environment in terms of sensory dimension (Steuer, 1992); this is the sensory characteristics derived from one’s inner experiences with the mediated environment to produce an intensified, clear, and comprehensive impression about the medium content. Accordingly, vividness refers to the degree of perceived richness of medium content presented by multi-materials.

Every tourist has his/her own exceptional fantasies, perspectives, and approaches regarding the trip and gain unique images from the trip. They can present their images in a very personal, ingenious, skillful, and innovative style, and provide others travel tips such as quality of accommodation, essential sight-seeing points etc., with rich media. Vivid and affective psychological states would then occur, and a sense of involvement and presence will be produced (Li et al., 2001). Finally, a vivid imagination, or virtual experiences of the trip would be built to influence tourists’ attitudes towards the trip (Chiu et al., 2008).

The format of blog lends itself smoothly for use in various tasks requiring interaction like information sharing; hence, producing inter-personal influences. Interactivity is defined as the degree to which users of a medium can influence the content and form of the medium (Steuer, 1992). In traditional communication theory, interactivity refers to a reciprocal and iterative process in which the message receiver deliver continually feedbacks regarding the message itself to message source to keep modifying the message, looking forward to achieve effective two-way communication (Steuer, 1992).

Secondly, since blog by nature is a platform for WOM distribution, WOM related articles were reviewed and direction of WOM was chosen to be studied here. Blog has now become a platform for personal publishing; more and more people share their ideas and experiences with others on personal blog (Nardi et al., 2004; Dave, 2003). Because of the medium’s lower cost, broader space, and anonymity, consumers are increasingly either seeking or simply exposed to the online advices (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). People can use blog as a medium to search for travel experiences, or respond to others. In this regard, blog can be seen as a platform for distribution of social stimuli, and entries posted in a blog may represent a type of written e-WOM (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004), which may influence others’ attitudes and purchase decisions (Richins & Root-shaffer, 1998). In short, blogs can be viewed as a many-to-many and asynchronous platform that provide personal interactive
process for communicating and exchanging e-WOM (Litvin et al., 2008) to produce interpersonal influences.

Readers, hence, are now apt to collect product consumption experiences via blog to make their decisions (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). However, most bloggers publish anonymously. People may doubt the credibility of blog content without identity recognition information (Chesney & Su, 2010). However, reverse perspective can also be argued. Due to anonymity, consumers may have less concerns and be more willing to provide first-hand, personal and real experiences and opinions (Nardi et al., 2004; Hollenbaugh, 2010), regardless comments are positive or negative (Gleb & Sundaram, 2002). In such a case, each WOM may possess either a positive or negative opinion (Park & Lee, 2009). The direction of e-WOM hence is defined as the overall direction of WOMs inside a corporate blog derived from comparing the numbers of positive and negative WOMs. Overall, WOMs inside a specific blog may be directed towards either positive or negative, and produce different impacts on readers’ attitude and behavior intention.

Finally, since blog by nature is a media for social interaction and communication, the effect of self-disclosure, a factor characterising blog content, will be explored. This variable is defined as the degree that an individual verbally expresses to others one’s thoughts, feelings, and experiences, including very personal and intimate information (Hollenbaugh, 2010), are worth noting. The feature of anonymity may encourage people to present themselves since people do not have to worry about the embarrassment from face-to-face communication like secret leakage (Min & Lee, 2011); hence, people may be apt to disclose themselves in cyberspace (Hollenbaugh, 2010). Blog content is therefore often characterized by high amount of self-disclosure information which shows a strong sense of the blogger’s personality and point of view (Dave, 2003; Hollenbaugh, 2010). Hence, from readers’ perspective, an active blog should be characterized by a strong sense of the blogger’s personality and point of view in the writing (Dave, 2003; Herring et al., 2004). The subject focused nature of blogs may be beneficial in attracting and grouping readers who have similar interests (Hsu & Tsou, 2011). After continuous and numerous interactions, readers may produce a sense of intimacy towards the blogger (Rau et al., 2008), which will be elaborated below.

3.2 Relationship between Self disclosure and intimate relationship

Tourism operators can achieve the effect of self-disclosure by expressing and communicating with the blog readers about their subjective thoughts and ideas. They can disclose and elaborate their business philosophies, experiences and emotions like sweetness and bitterness of running business, impressive guests or stories etc., by writing blog articles. Through reading the content, travelers can anticipate an encouraging pre-image, and may produce positive influence on post trip image (Chiou et al., 2008).

While presenting oneself in the blog, business owner is also shaping and conveying his/her desired self-images to public audiences to create his/her identity (Min & Lee, 2011); on the other hand, audiences are encouraged by the self-disclosure to observe, participate in and get into the owner’ inner world. Curiosity to the identity might induce a positive attitude towards and stimulate responses to the blog content (Lin & Huang, 2006); the depth and breadth of the interaction may be increased gradually to begin reciprocal disclosure. Over time, they may increasingly familiarize with each other, and come to recognize each other's existence (Parks & Floyd, 1996) or even their privacy to develop intimate relationships, which contribute significantly to blogging (Rau et al., 2008), thus creating an iterative process. Intimacy refers to the quality of social interaction and interpersonal relationships, or the desire to experience the relationship of closeness, warmth and communication with others (Rau et al., 2008).

Reader may eventually regard service providers as friends and their contact such as lived in B&B as friends’ reunion (Goodwin & Gremler, 1996). Commercial transaction with intimate relationship induces not only a process of rational calculation, in many cases, but also social interactions to a point that both parties may even become good friends (Goodwin & Gremler, 1996; Price & Arnould, 1999). In such context, both parties would be willing to make decision not only rationally, but also emotionally; their interactions may be accompanied with features of mutual and social support, and cooperation (Rawlins, 1992). The relations of social interaction may be a factor influencing
commercial decisions (Coote, 1994); sometimes its effect may be more significant than rational calculation (Humphreys & Williams, 1996). When selecting travel products, tourists usually hope to satisfy their cognitive and affective needs from future consumption experiences (Schmitt, 1999). With a sense of familiarization and intimacy, tourists may regard service providers as friends and their contact such as lived in B & B as friends’ union (Goodwin & Gremler, 1996). This perception of intimacy is likely to stimulate travelers’ lodging intention. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

**H1: Perception of intimacy would positively stimulate travelers’ lodging intention.**

### 3.3 Hypotheses of interactivity, vividness and WOM direction

Interactivity can be interpreted as an ability of dialogue, or a mode of communication that the actors talk to or give feedbacks to each other. Corporate blog provides a platform for social interaction and ongoing dialogue (Kavanaugh et al., 2006). Through the ability of interaction, B&B owners and tourists may mutually understand each other’s needs and preferences and obtain feedbacks (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011); eventually, these actors’ values and beliefs may be mutually recognised and adapted. Hence, using blog to interact with each other may contribute to reciprocal disclosure, producing a sense of intimacy. Therefore, the higher the degree of interactivity, the more frequently the owner and readers interact with and disclose to each other, leading to a sense of intimacy. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed.

**H2: The higher the degree of interactivity, the higher the sense of intimacy.**

From readers’ perspective, an active blog should be characterized by vividly expressing frequently updated and comprehensive content with multimedia technology (Nardi et al., 2004). Blog content could be disseminated among and comprehended by the readers more effectively if media technologies were being used to enhance its richness and vividness (Wang et al., 2007). Surfing blogs with vivid and rich content may make individuals experiencing immediate enjoyment, or feeling that any activity involving blogs is inherently enjoyable (Chung & Tan, 2004; Gretzel & Yoo, 2008); hence, individuals may be more likely to surf these blogs more extensively (Igbaria et al., 1996; Davis, 1992), and interact with the bloggers or readers more frequently (Rau et al., 2010). Eventually, process of mutual disclosure would be activated to generate a sense of intimacy. Vivid content, therefore, should be able to promote mutual self-disclosure, so that a feeling of intimacy can be created. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed.

**H3: The higher the degree of vividness, the higher the sense of intimacy.**

A large number of WOMs may indicate that the brand or product has attracted many attentions from consumers, but may not be definitively a good thing, since there may also be negative WOM. Negative WOM expresses someone’s emotions and feelings of disagree, depreciation and dislike from experiences of product consumption. It is showed that positive WOM will enhance purchase intention, hence, the higher the number of positive WOM, the better it is for business (Park & lee, 2008). Nevertheless, people normally place more weights on and trust more in negative information (Lee et al., 2008), and their attitudes were influence more by negative, rather positive WOM (Park & lee, 2008). This is particular true in the consumption of experience products. Consumers may easily anticipate a worse consumption experience if the product reviews posted in a corporate blog is interpreted to be negatively directed. As a result, we may infer that the more the corporate blog directed toward negative, the lower the intention of lodging. Hence, this study infers that:

**H4: The more the corporate blog directed toward negative, the lower the intention of lodging.**

### 3.4 Moderator: Subjective Product Knowledge

While making decision, consumers usually need to search for and process product related information. During this stage, individuals’ subjective product knowledge influences which piece of information be perceived and retained, and the decision strategies deployed (Bruck, 1985; Chen et al., 2009).
Subjective knowledge is defined as an individual’s perception of how much he/she knows about a product. It is a subjective measure of the degree of familiarity or understanding about a product, including previous purchasing or usage experience with the product (Brucks, 1985; Beatty & Smith, 1987).

Past knowledge may affect one’s selective exposure to and selective perception of the relevant information. Hence, it is constantly proposed by previous literature as an important factor affecting the effects of external information on decision outcomes (Brucks, 1985; Chen et al., 2009). The effectiveness and efficiency of this task is superior for experts than for novice consumers (Chen et al., 2009; Brucks, 1985). Individuals with comprehensive subjective knowledge may feel more confident about their knowledge and information processing strategies (Park & Lessing, 1992), and their ability in judging the quality of the B&Bs (Rao & Monroe, 1988). Experts may filter out irrelevant alternatives and information, and make appropriate evaluation on product quality more effectively (Rao & Monroe, 1988; Park & Lessing, 1992). More importantly, they may evaluate more product attributes than novice consumers (Brucks, 1985), hence, may be more confident and certain about, have less negative feelings to, and perceive less risks about their decisions (Chen et al., 2009).

Since there are so many alternatives for selection, different levels of perceived intimacy regarding these B&Bs may exist and become external information for decision making. Yet, B&B is a high-risk experience product; anecdotes of inferior post image and superior pre image of B&Bs are reported very often. To evaluate B&B quality appropriately and correctly before and during making lodging decision is not an easy task. Therefore, for individuals with the same degree of intimacy, the lodging intention of expert tourists should be higher, since they may have less concern with their decisions, and believe that have made right decisions; conversely, even after comprehensive information was processed, novice tourists may still have no confidence with their decisions. Hence, they should have lodging intention lower than experts. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

\[ H5: \text{With the same degree of intimacy, the lodging intention of expert tourists should be higher than novice tourists.} \]

4 RESEARCH METHOD

4.1 Questionnaire Development

Based on the literature reviewed, a theoretical model (figure 1), and a set of hypotheses were derived to explain how managers use corporate blogs to influence tourists’ lodging intention. To test these hypotheses, this study conducted a questionnaire survey to collect data. All questionnaire items were adapted from existing questionnaire. B & B lodging intention is modified from the scale designed by Hsu & Tsou (2011). Based on the definition of vividness, the representational richness of a medium environment was used as a surrogate which is composed of breadth and depth dimensions (Steuer, 1992). A five items scale adapted from Schiffman & Kanuk (2004) was used to measure the depth dimension. This study designed another 2 items to ask the number of entries and multimedia usage on the blog to measure the breadth dimension.

The concept of Interactivity is composed of direction, user control and time dimensions (MacMillan & Hwang, 2002); based on McMillan & Hwang (2002), we designed a scale of 11 items to measure this variable. Lee et al. (2008) measured the direction of WOM by the proportion of negative WOM to total number of WOM. A higher proportion indicates that most WOM possess negative opinions; and vice versa. Based on their idea, this study designed three items to measure the direction of e-WOM. One more item was added to ask about the total number of WOM to measure the degree of concern from blog readers about the B&Bs. In addition, intimacy was split into verbal and affective dimensions (Rau et al., 2008). Based on Rau et al. (2008), a scale of 21 items was designed to measure this variable. Finally, product knowledge questionnaire item is taking from the scale which is design by Brucks (1985).
Some graduate students from our university’s Business School participated in the pretest of the questionnaire. Some of the phrases and the order of appearance of these items were adapted according to their opinions. Then, 54 representative samples were invited to a pilot test. The result of data analysis indicated that Cronbach’s α of each variable is greater than 0.7, and the KMO value is 0.742, and the Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant. Hence, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted. A principal components analysis with orthogonal rotation by varimax method was deployed. Results showed that the first item of product knowledge (know1) was loaded into intimacy. Hence, it was deleted. Furthermore, items with factor loading less than 0.5, and/ or which did not load to their expected factor, including one item in the blog richness (Vivid-D5), two items in blog interactivity (IntAty-D1, IntAty-D2), and three items of blog intimacy were all dropped (ImVer-D1, ImVer-D2, ImAff-I2). Next, a second exploratory factor analyses was conducted to examine the convergent and discriminant validity. Factors with eigenvalues larger than one were extracted, resulting in nine factors. Interactivity, vividness and intimacy were all split into two factors; the rest of the items were all loaded into expected factors, and there was only one item- the third item of verbal intimacy, had a factor loading less than 0.5. Items of intimacy were all grouped into one factor. Since the sample size of pilot test is small, a chance of un-necessary deletion of items may exist, hence, this study still retained the remaining items.

4.2 Data Collection

This study intends to explore the effects of B&B owners’ blogs on tourists’ lodging intentions. Therefore, the one who had been browsed B&B blogs is the main target of investigation whether they finally chose to stay in the B&Bs or not. Unfortunately, the population frame is unclear. Considering the limitations of time and budget, both paper and online questionnaires were used concurrently for data collection and purposive sampling was used. Paper questionnaires were delivered to business employees and university students with related experiences. An e-mail invitation was sent to members of “FUN TAIWAN” and “Yilan Country Lodging Association” to fill the online questionnaire. The period of data collection lasted for two weeks. After exclusion of invalid samples, this study collected a total of 143 valid questionnaires with 68 from online survey and 75 from paper questionnaire. The rate of valid response is 78%.

1 https://www.facebook.com/funtw
2 http://www.ilanbnb.org.tw/
5 DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

5.1 Sample demographics

Most of the samples are young people under 25-years-old (50.35%); and the proportion of sample under 39 years old to total sample is 88.8%. More than 83 percent of the samples own a college degree. The annual income of the informants is mostly under US $ 13,333 (58.74%), and over 80 percent of the samples (82.5%) have an annual income below US $ 26,666. Almost all of the samples lived in the three cities located in Northern Taiwan (93.01%). To summarize, our samples are mostly highly educated and low income youth lived in northern Taiwan. This is in accordance with the general impression in Taiwan that people who choose to stay in B&B are primary relatively poor youth hoping to save trip costs. Among the 143 samples, 14 informants have never stayed in a B&B. The informants were asked to remind a most impressive B&B blog as the basis to answer the questionnaire. In the whole samples, 9.8% of them have surfed some B&B blogs but never stayed in B&B; 51.05% of them chose to stay in the B&B after surfing this most impressive B&B blog, and 39.16% of them chose not to stay in this B&B after surfing its blog.

5.2 Measurement Model

Exploratory factor analysis and Cronbach’s α were used to evaluate and improve the reliability and validity of our measurement model. The Cronbach's α value of the variables are all greater than 0.7, with a minimum value of 0.811 (interactivity) and a highest value of 0.96 (Intimacy). A principal components analysis with orthogonal rotation by varimax method was conducted. Eight factors with eigenvalues value larger than one were extracted. The values of factor loading of 2 items of interactivity (IntAty-C1 and IntAty-T2), one from time dimension, the other from control dimension were less than 0.5, hence, they were deleted. Two more items of interactivity, the sixth item of control dimension (IntAty-C6), and the first item of time dimensions (IntAty-T1), were also deleted because they were load into incorrect factors. After deleted those 4 items, interactivity is split into only two dimensions, and time dimension has been entirely deleted. Item 4 of direction (Dir4) was loaded into incorrect factor, hence was deleted. Item 3 of verbal intimacy (ImVer-W3) was loaded into two factors, and the difference of largest and second largest values of factor loading was less than 0.1, hence, was also deleted.

The items of intimacy were loaded into one factor only. However, conceptually, verbal, and emotional intimacy are not the same constructs. Hence, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) by Lisrel 8.8 was further conducted to test the discriminant validity. The results of CFA are summarized in Table 1.

The items of Intimacy were forced to split into verbal and emotional factors. The fit indices of the overall model of goodness-of-fit index are within the acceptable range (Chi-square/df=2.11; NFI=0.9; NNFI=0.94; CFI=0.94; IFI=0.94; RMR=0.11; SRMR=0.078; GFI=0.68; AGFI=0.62; RMESA=0.085) (Hair et al., 1995). The average variance extracted (AVE) of most constructs were larger than 0.5, except for direction, which was 0.498 (10). Since the t-statistics of the items of direction are all significant (Espinoza, 1999), and its AVE value is quite close to 0.5, this variable was still kept for further analysis. In addition, the square root of the AVEs are all greater than the correlation coefficient between any pair of variables, except for that of verbal and emotional intimacy (10), providing evidence of discriminate validity for most of the measures (Table 2). Yet, we still failed to effectively distinguish different dimensions of intimacy.

5.3 Hypothesis Testing

This study deployed multiple regression analysis to test the hypotheses since the sample size of this study is small relative to the large number of variables and parameters observed (Hair et al., 1995; Garson, 2005). As illustrated in Table 3, model 1 expressed the main effects of vividness and interactivity on intimacy, respectively (H2, H3). According to model 1, one dimension of richness
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<th>t-value</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>AVE</th>
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<td>12.44*</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Interactivity-direction</td>
<td>IntAty-D1</td>
<td>9.81*</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IntAty-D2</td>
<td>7.82*</td>
<td>0.61</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IntAty-D3</td>
<td>10.32*</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactivity-control</td>
<td>IntAty-C2</td>
<td>3.77*</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.823</td>
<td>0.842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IntAty-C4</td>
<td>4.09*</td>
<td>1.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intimacy-verbal</td>
<td>ImVer-D1</td>
<td>9.11*</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.538</td>
<td>0.819</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ImVer-D2</td>
<td>10.93*</td>
<td>0.79</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ImVer-W3</td>
<td>9.33*</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ImVer-W4</td>
<td>9.96*</td>
<td>0.74</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intimacy-affective</td>
<td>ImAff-I1</td>
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<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.636</td>
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<td>ImAff-I3</td>
<td>9.92*</td>
<td>0.72</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ImAff-P1</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ImAff-P2</td>
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<td>0.77</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ImAff-P3</td>
<td>10.68*</td>
<td>0.76</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ImAff-C1</td>
<td>10.71*</td>
<td>0.76</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ImAff-C2</td>
<td>11.77*</td>
<td>0.82</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ImAff-C3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ImAff-F1</td>
<td>12.00*</td>
<td>0.83</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ImAff-F2</td>
<td>13.09*</td>
<td>0.87</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ImAff-F3</td>
<td>13.30*</td>
<td>0.88</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ImAff-F4</td>
<td>12.78*</td>
<td>0.86</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ImAff-F5</td>
<td>11.95*</td>
<td>0.82</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Know2</td>
<td>22.63*</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Know3</td>
<td>26.26*</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Know4</td>
<td>25.99*</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Know5</td>
<td>26.00*</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lodging intention</td>
<td>Int1</td>
<td>13.07*</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.694</td>
<td>0.865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Int2</td>
<td>12.48*</td>
<td>0.87</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Int3</td>
<td>9.76*</td>
<td>0.73</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Results of confirmatory factor analysis

abbreviation: ImAff: affective Intimacy; F- frequency; C- commitment; P- predictable; I- Interdependency. ImVer: Verbal Intimacy; W-width, D-depth.
IntAty: Interactivity; C-control; D-direction of communication; T-time of interaction. Vivid: vividness; W-width, D-depth. Dir: Direction of information. Know: product knowledge.

β = .216, p < .05), and one dimension of interactivity (Int-D, β = .313, p < .05) significantly impact the intimacy. Hence, H2 and H3 are all partially supported. Model 2 expressed the direct effect of intimacy on lodging intention (H1), and this direct effect was positively significant (β = .465, p < .05). Therefore, the result supports H1. The direct effect of WOM direction on lodging intention is also significant (β=0.454, t=6.609, p=0.000) which supports H5 (model 3).
Table 2. Discriminant validity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>average</th>
<th>s.d.</th>
<th>Int</th>
<th>Dir</th>
<th>Vivid-D</th>
<th>Vivid-W</th>
<th>IntAty-D</th>
<th>IntAty-C</th>
<th>ImVer</th>
<th>ImAff</th>
<th>Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Int</td>
<td>4.7855</td>
<td>1.021219</td>
<td>0.833</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dir</td>
<td>4.8135</td>
<td>0.897416</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.706</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vivid-D</td>
<td>4.6293</td>
<td>0.846935</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.775</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vivid-W</td>
<td>5.2797</td>
<td>1.002852</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.880</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>IntAty-D</td>
<td>4.5967</td>
<td>0.984109</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.735</td>
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<tr>
<td>ntAty-C</td>
<td>3.9510</td>
<td>1.134160</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.907</td>
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<tr>
<td>ImVer</td>
<td>4.1748</td>
<td>1.414214</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.733</td>
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<tr>
<td>ImAff</td>
<td>4.2060</td>
<td>0.707107</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.797</td>
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<tr>
<td>ImAff</td>
<td>4.6101</td>
<td>0.978475</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.768</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, a hierarchical regression was used to test the moderation effect of knowledge (1) and the results are shown in Table 4. As illustrated in Table 4, model 6 expressed the main effects of intimacy on lodging intention. Product knowledge was added into model 7 as the basis for examining moderating effects. The interaction effects were added into model 8 to examine the moderating effects. To reduce the effects of multicollinearity, all variables were mean-centered.

According to model 6, the direct effect of intimacy is significant (β=0.465, t=6.264, p=0.000). In model 7, both intimacy and knowledge positively impact lodging intention (β=0.261, t=3.629, p=0.000 and β=0.479, t=6.653, p=0.000). Note that the variance explained increased from 0.217 to 0.405; the difference of 0.188 also reached significant level (F=44.268, p=0.000). Though F statistics of model 8 is still significant (r²=0.412, F=15.437, p=0.000), the variance explained increased only 0.007 which is insignificant (F=1.712, p=0.193), indicating that knowledge does not as expected produce moderation effect. Therefore, we refused to accept the H5.

6 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Blogs have now become an influential medium to produce vast marketing power (19). An understanding about how corporate blog impacts tourists’ lodging intention, would help hotel or B&B’s operator design more effectively marketing campaign plans. This study found that lodging intention was directly influenced by the sense of intimacy (H4), WOM direction (H1) and product knowledge (H5), and that depth of vividness (H2a) and direction of interactivity (H3a) positively impact the sense of intimacy.

The above findings indicate that B&B owners should try their best to vividly present his/her self-concept or identity by using multi-media materials (Ming & Lee, 2011), to reach an effect of high interactivity, leading to mutual self-disclosure (Hollenbaugh, 2010) activities to enhance the sense of intimacy (Rau et al., 2008), eventually, marketing performance can and will be improved (38).

The above findings may improve our understanding about the antecedents of lodging decisions. First of all, intimacy was found having positive effect on lodging intention (H1). This indicates that multimedia materials can be used to present B&B owners’ self-identities (Ming & Lee, 2011) to generate the effects of self-disclosure (Hollenbaugh, 2010); which will embrace a sense of intimacy with their readers to produce effective marketing effort (Rau et al., 2008). Previous related studies frequently discovered that blog content significantly impact consumer intention (e.g., Huang et al., 2010; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009; Chen et al., 2014; Lin & Huang, 2006). However, most of these studies focus on consumer’s personal blog, and viewed e-WOM as a special form of advertising (Huang et al., 2010; Lin & Hunag, 2006), or information input during consumers making-decision (Chen et al., 2014; Vermuelen & Seegers, 2009). Relatively little research has been done to inquire how do readers’ psychological perceptions after reading corporate blog’s content affect their intention. Though some blog related studies did deploy similar view, yet, most of them did not focus on online shopping in general, lodging intention in particular (e.g., see Rau et al., 2008; Chesney & Su, 2010).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Intention</th>
<th>Intention</th>
<th>Intention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Im</td>
<td>0.465</td>
<td>6.264(0.000***)</td>
<td>0.454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dir</td>
<td>0.201</td>
<td>0.217</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>8.738(0.000***)</td>
<td>6.264(0.000***)</td>
<td>36.831(0.000***)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Results of hypotheses testing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Intention</th>
<th>Intention</th>
<th>Intention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Im</td>
<td>0.465</td>
<td>6.242(0.000***)</td>
<td>0.261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know</td>
<td>0.479</td>
<td>3.629(0.000***)</td>
<td>0.469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Im*Know</td>
<td>0.088</td>
<td>1.305(0.193)</td>
<td>0.088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td>0.217</td>
<td>0.405</td>
<td>0.412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔR2</td>
<td>38.967(0.000***)</td>
<td>47.596(0.000***)</td>
<td>15.437(0.000***)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>38.967(0.000***)</td>
<td>44.268(0.000***)</td>
<td>1.712(0.193)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Results of hierarchical regression
Secondly, consistent with previous studies, direction of WOM was found having a positive impact on lodging intention (H4). However, the effects of positive and negative WOMs are mostly being examined separately in previous studies (e.g., Lee et al., 2008; Park & Lee, 2009). Practically, while making decisions, consumers may rarely access just positive or negative WOMs along. Clemons et al. (2006) found that consumers’ decisions may not only affected by average of consumer ratings, but also by their variations. Their finding indicates that consumers still pay attention to blog content and care about the differences among postings within this blog. Our finding is consistent with and may support the above argument. Future studies may further try to inquire the effects of WOM direction.

The third finding is vividness and interactivity of corporate blog partly impact intimacy (H2a and H3a are supported). Intimacy can be seen as a product of immersed experience. This is because immersing in a blog with content of self-presence and disclosure may help familiarize with the owners, which may be beneficial to build a sense of mutual intimacy (Walther, 1996). This finding may contribute more or less to the effective design of corporate blog.

However, breadth dimension of vividness and control dimension of interactivity do not significantly affect intimacy (H2b and H3b are rejected), and unfortunately, the scale of time dimension of interactivity was completely deleted. Most of B&B blogs do provide function of interaction. But, most of B&Bs are small-scaled, hence, may not be able to provide specialties to respond to readers’ comments or messages immediately. Therefore, experienced consumers won’t expect an instant response from B&B owners. This could be the reason why time dimension was deleted. The measure of control dimension asked subjects whether the B&B blog content is clear, easy to understand, systematic, and easy to find. Still, a large portion of local B&B blogs were built by professional IS organizations. Hence, ways of presentation of blog content among different B&Bs may have only trivial differences. In addition, due to a lack of personnel, B&Bs are difficult to effectively and timely manage and update their blogs’ content. These factors may cause samples difficulties in evaluating control dimension.

The measure of breadth dimension of vividness asked informants if they perceived that comprehensive multimedia materials were being used in the B&B blog. Unfortunately, anecdotes regarding the deployment of multimedia materials fabricating artificial images of B&Bs to lure people to stay in a B&B are circulated widely in local area. Part of the informants may therefore don’t trust fully the rich and vivid content of the B&B blogs, which may lead to the rejection of H3B.

Finally, this study found that subjective product knowledge directly affects lodging intention (H5 is rejected); the expected moderating effect does not exist. It is argued that product knowledge affect the judgment of pre-risks. However, up to 90.2% of the samples possessed some certain B&B experiences and knowledge. Besides, after reading B&B blogs, up to 51.05% of the samples answered that they had chosen to stay in that B&B. Hence, the perception of pre-risk may be diminished to a certain degree while filling the questionnaire; and their answers to the measure of product knowledge may be influenced by their actual experiences.

As a final point, some limitations of this study should be mentioned. To begin with, purposive sampling was deployed to collect samples since the nature of the population (those who had seen B&B owners’ blog) is unknown, and sampling frame was not available. Hence, problem of self selection may more or less exist. Online survey invitations were distributed to people who are members of B & B related websites or associations, but some of these members’ e-mail addresses were not correct. Due to the tight schedule of this study, these associations and websites were unable to cooperate with this study, which caused a response rate less than expected. Finally, this study may suffer from an unsatisfactory validity problem due to the specific features of B & B context.
REFERENCES


