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# Effectiveness of Blog Advertising: Impact of Communicator Expertise, Advertising Intent, and Product Involvement

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# EFFECTIVENESS OF BLOG ADVERTISING: IMPACT OF COMMUNICATOR EXPERTISE, ADVERTISING INTENT, AND PRODUCT INVOLVEMENT

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## Abstract

*Blog advertising, which refers to the paid sponsorship of bloggers to review, promote, or sell products in their blog writing, is becoming prevalent. This paper investigates the impact of three critical factors on blog advertising effectiveness: communicator expertise, advertising intent, and product involvement. An experiment with a 2×2×2 factorial design was used to test their interaction effects on advertising effectiveness. The results indicate that, for low-involvement products, there is better advertising effectiveness when low-expertise communicators are explicit about the advertising intent or when high-expertise communicators are implicit about the advertising intent. But for high-involvement products, the results show that when low-expertise communicators are explicit about the advertising intent, the outcome is lesser advertising effectiveness. For such products, advertising effectiveness does not differ when high-expertise communicators are implicit or explicit about the advertising intent. Based on these results, some implications for further research and practice are given.*

**Keywords:** Blog advertising, communicator expertise, product involvement, advertising intent, advertising effectiveness

## Introduction

A blog, which is short for 'Web Log', is known as a website in which dated journal entries are posted on a regular basis and displayed in reverse chronological order (Wright 2006; Herring, Scheidt, Bonus and Wright 2004). Blogging has rapidly become a cyberspace phenomenon since 2000. Currently, there are 71.7 million blogs tracked by *Technorati* (http://technorati.com/about), one of the largest blog authorities in the virtual world, with the number of blogs doubling approximately every 6 months ever since 2003. Reading blogs has also become one of the top activities for Internet users. The rise of this new medium has induced the growing trend of blog advertising, which refers to the paid sponsorship of bloggers to mention, review, promote and/or sell products in their blog entries. More and more businesses are embracing this new form of advertising because it is believed that the opinions posted in blogs can be very influential in terms of reader coverage and the persuasive impacts at a fairly low cost as compared to traditional advertising. There has even spurred the emergence of some official blog advertising agents such as *Blogsvertise* (www.blogsvertise.com), which invite and pay bloggers to write about products in their blogs. However, while there is a growing interest in blog advertising, its effectiveness as well as the extent to which findings from prior research on web advertising effectiveness can apply in the blog context, has never been systematically studied before. Therefore, this study aims to examine the effectiveness of blog advertising, which will be more specifically construed in this paper as the masked text-based advertisement that simulates a journal format in the web media.

Blog advertising has some key characteristics. First, unlike official websites, a blog is typically personal in nature, serving as a channel for the blog authors (also called 'bloggers') to express their own opinions and experiences. The blog is a form of self-representation of its author, providing considerable information about the authors' real life identities (Gilly and Schau 2003). The credibility and reputation of the blog are tightly linked with the credentials of the blogger since the blogger not only contributes the advertisement content, but also endorses the products that he/she writes about as well. When readers process the information presented in the blog, their perception of the blogger thus becomes a most significant factor that will impact on their responses.

Second, the advertising messages are embedded into the content of the entries, which disguises its appearance as a typical advertisement. Instead, the advertisement message may be read as some recommendations provided by the blogger or as a personal experience that the blogger would like to share. The readers receive the text-based advertisement in an intimate, friendly, engaging, and relatively informal way, probably without realizing that it is an advertisement or a marketing message. Because blog advertising looks very much like personal journal material, the messages may attract individuals to be more involved in processing the message than other typical advertising formats. This gives blog advertising advantages in persuading readers. However, such advertising tactics have also received considerable criticism because it has blurred the line between advertising and journal content. It can be considered as a masked editorial because it looks like editorial content and not like a standard advertisement (Stein 1990). Since honesty, authenticity and openness are crucial for blogs (Wright 2006), it is thus possible that there will be a backlash from the audience when they sense that the contents in the blog cross the line into traditional advertising; The audience may feel that they being 'fooled,' and no longer trust the blog as it contains ulterior commercial motives and serves as a marketing tool instead of a personal online diary. Concern with the issue of possible confusion among readers has led some to suggest labeling such blog contents as advertising. In fact, transparency of actions and motives is considered as one of the blogging ethics by many. Rebecca Blood, author of *The Weblog Handbook*, identified blog ethics (www.rebeccablood.net/handbook/excerpts/weblog_ethics.html) and Jonathan of *CyberJournalist.net* issued a Bloggers Code of Ethics (www.cyberjournalist.net/news/000215.php). However, such explicitness in advertising intent may turn away the readers. Should the bloggers be honest about the advertising intent when they are paid to review and promote the products? How will it affect the advertising outcomes? This is a key and unique aspect of blog advertising that would be investigated in this study.

From the preceding discussions of blog advertising's unique features, blog author's expertise and the explicitness of advertising intent presented in the blog were identified as meaningful and important factors affecting advertising effectiveness. Furthermore, the effects are likely to be influenced by the audience involvement with the advertised products, as an individual's involvement determines his/her information processes. Therefore, this research aims to explore the interaction effects of the communicator expertise, the advertising intent, and the product involvement simultaneously. More specifically, the paper investigates how the explicitness of advertising intent will affect advertising effectiveness under different situations, which give practical insights to advertisers on how to execute the advertising message effectively in the blog context.

## Literature Review

Past research of persuasion communications, specifically advertising, mainly studied four important factors evolving around the question "Who says what to whom with what effect": the source (who said it), the message (what was said), the audience (to whom it was said) and the context (medium of the communication) (Hovland, Janis and Kelley 1953; Petty and Cacioppo 1981). Likewise, this paper, combining the general communication framework and key characteristics of blog advertising, proposes to investigate the effects of three key aspects of blog advertising on blog advertising effectiveness: the *expertise of the blog communicator* (corresponding to the *source*), how the advertising message is executed pertaining to its *advertising intent* (corresponding to the *message*), and the *level of personal involvement with the advertised object* (corresponding to the *audience*). By addressing these three major issues, this study also offers some practical suggestions on how marketers can make use of blogs as an effective advertising medium.

From the advertisers' perspective, the ultimate goal of an advertisement or any persuasive message is to produce behavior change. Ajzen and Fishbein (1970) have proposed that behavioral intention is a closer indicator of the actual behavior. This study thus seeks to examine respondents' behavioral intent as the indicator of the effectiveness of blog advertising. Three desired outcomes – intent to learn more about the product, to give positive recommendation, and to make a purchase – are used to measure the behavioral intent.

The communicator expertise refers to the blogger's level of capability of making correct assertions about the product by possessing relevant skills, competency, and knowledge (Homer and Kahle 1990). The blogger is not only the content contributor of the blog, but also the endorser of the product he/she writes about. This study takes into account how the level of a communicator's product-relevant expertise impacts on endorsement effects. An endorsement by a high-expertise blogger can be considered as an expert endorsement, while low-expertise blogger endorsement can be seen as a novice endorsement. The effects of the two types of endorsement on advertising response have been studied and their effectiveness occurred through different dimensions (Wang 2005).

Advertising is intended as a persuasive appeal. In a typical advertisement, the sponsor can be easily identified and the advertising intent is explicitly demonstrated. Blog advertising messages, however, are embedded within individual blog posts, which make it difficult for audiences to distinguish the editorial contents from the advertorial contents. As such, audiences are likely to be unaware of the advertising intent. There is a general belief that when the advertising intent of an advertising message is hidden, the message can become more persuasive (Cameron 1994). According to attribution theory, individuals try to determine whether the message is an accurate representation of an object or is attributable to irrelevant causes, such as an ulterior motive (Kelley 1967). As consumers are likely to infer that advertisers want to sell a product, the advertisement would be discounted because of the ulterior motive. This suggests that when the advertising intent is expressed explicitly in the blog posts (e.g., the existence of blog sponsorship is stated clearly; a label of advertisement is placed in the message), the readers are less likely to exhibit desired behavioral intents toward the advertised product. On the other hand, without stating the existence of blog sponsorship or placing advertisement labels, the advertising intent appears implicit.

The product involvement is defined as a person's perceived relevance of the objects based on the inherent needs, values, and interests (Zaichkowsky 1985). Involvement is a motivational construct (Celsi and Olson 1988). There are many types of involvement, based on how it is classified. According to the framework for the conceptualization of the involvement construct established by Andrews et al. (2001), there are plenty of antecedents to drive one's involvement toward an advertised product or issue. Involvement can be enduring or situational (Brennan and Mavondo 2000). Typically, product involvement has been typically regarded as enduring involvement, that is, individuals have relatively stable and sustainable involvement levels with a particular stimulus (e.g. a product class) (Andrews et al. 2001; Havitz and Howard 1995). The definition by Zaichkowsky (1985) is consistent with this view.

Information processing, and persuasion are two of the major consequences of involvement levels (Andrews et al. 2001). Based on Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty et al. 1983; Petty and Cacioppo 1986), when product involvement is low, peripheral route is used and an individual is not motivated to process product-relevant information but would rather take positive or negative cues surrounding the communication to make decisions. On the other hand, the central route is used when the involvement is high and individuals are more motivated to exert cognitive efforts in processing product-relevant information and the peripheral cues are likely to be ignored. Subsequently, the mode of information processing may affect how an audience is persuaded. In many past studies,

the level of product involvement has been widely considered as a key variable affecting one's response to advertising messages (Petty et al. 1983; Buchholz and Smith 1991; Danaher and Mullarkey 2003).

### *Communicator Expertise and Product Involvement*

Even though high-expertise endorsement is perceived as more credible than low-expertise endorsement, this does not mean that audiences will rely more on high-expertise sources to make decisions (Dean and Abhijit Biswas 2001). In other words, consumers may be influenced by third-party endorsements differently based on the types of products (Wang 2005). For low-involvement products, consumers tend to use heuristic methods to evaluate the products. Audiences are found to be attracted more naturally to and be persuaded more easily by the recommendations and product testimonials of regular consumers because they are perceived to be similar and closer to the audiences' background and status (Chaiken and Eagly 1975). Similarity-to-audience, usually found to be associated with liking, serves as a peripheral cue here. On the other hand, consumers are more motivated to evaluate the information of a high-involvement product through cognitive efforts before they make a purchase decision. Seeking experts' opinions is common for high-involvement products as high-expertise endorsement is perceived to have credible information and/or objective argument that may help them evaluate the product.

The 'match-up hypothesis' suggests that an endorsement is more effective when there is a "fit" between the endorser and the endorsed product (Kamins 1990). Studies show that increased congruence between the endorser and the product results in higher perceived believability, a more favorable product attitude and a greater purchase intent (Kamins and Gupta 1994). Physical attractiveness has been traditionally treated as an appropriate match-up factor for celebrity endorsement (Homer and Kahle 1990; Kamins 1990). Recently, expertise has been considered more potent than physical attractiveness in matching products with endorsers (Busler and Till 2000). The study implies that consumers may more readily see the combination between "high-expertise endorser" and "product that motivates consumers to elaborate message" in an advertisement. Similarly, "low-expertise endorser" or novice endorsement works well with products that match their expertise level. Thus, it is important to consider the spokesperson-product match-up in an advertisement. The mismatch between the endorser's expertise and the product type may lower advertising persuasion (Kamins and Gupta 1994).

### *Advertising Intent and Product Involvement*

The perceived intention of the communicators plays a crucial role in determining whether we trust them. Based on attribution theory, the trust that we attribute to the source is likely to be greatest when we perceive them as arguing against their own self-interest and with nothing personal to gain, and possibly even losing out through persuading us (Erwin 2001, Kelley 1967). This may explain the power of advertisements that approach ordinary consumers, instead of paying professional actors, to give their views on a product. We do not see these ordinary shoppers as having any ulterior motive or vested interest in persuading us, and hence they are inherently more trustworthy.

One type of responses that a recipient may exercise when he/she perceives an ulterior motive in a persuasive message is resistance. Resistance to persuasion is a negative response in which the person chooses not to agree or comply with the advocated message. It can be instilled through forewarning mechanism. Stating the existence of paid sponsorship or placing advertisement labels in a blog post would serve as a forewarning of the persuasive intent of the advertising message. A warning of persuasive intent may induce resistance in one of three ways (Petty and Casioppo 1979). First, known as 'cue effect', the warning may serve as a simple negative cue leading the person to discount the message without seriously processing it. Second, known as 'objective processing', the warning may cause the person to scrutinize the message arguments more carefully, which in turn results in resistance when the arguments are weak but not when they are strong. Third, known as 'biased processing', the warning may motivate the recipient to actively counter argue the message. The results of several studies suggest that the biased processing was responsible for the resistance conveyed by a warning of persuasive intent and the resistance was more potent under high than low relevance conditions (Petty and Casioppo 1979).

According to Petty and Cacioppo (1986), when personal relevance to an object or to think about an issue is low, forewarnings should enhance the salience of various cues (e.g., source credibility) that could influence audiences' judgment without affecting their argument scrutiny. When motivation is high, however, forewarnings would alter one's response by biasing his/her issue-relevant thinking. Consistent with this reasoning, resistance or susceptibility can be predicted on the basis of how personally relevant the topic of the communication is to the person, or rather the level of involvement a person has. When a person is warned of an upcoming persuasive communication on a topic that is important or involving, resistance is typically found. But when the topic is of low importance or personal relevance, susceptibility is more likely to result. Consistent with the "reactance theory" (Brehm 1966), the

inhibiting effect of the forewarning (i.e., reduced persuasion, increased counter argumentation, and declined favorable thoughts) was greater under high than low involvement conditions.

## Hypotheses

Previous studies basically focused on the main effects of the three independent variables or the two-way interactions. It is important to note that the source, the message, and the audience factors are not independent. It is likely that they are interrelated and affecting the perception of each other (Erwin 2001). This indicates that there would be an interaction among communicator expertise, advertising intent, and product involvement. Based on the match-up hypothesis, generally speaking, 'match' is better than 'mismatch' in terms of perceived source credibility. Besides, stating the advertising intent explicitly in a blog context is a two-edged sword. On one hand, being open and honest is a good practice and is valued by blog readers. On the other hand, based on attribution theory and forewarning mechanism, explicit advertising intent could induce skepticism and resistance to persuasion because readers are aware of your ulterior motive. The interaction between the match-up effect and the resistance to persuasion effect is likely to be moderated by the ELM, which may result in the complex three-way interactions of the three independent variables. Focusing on this, the study developed four hypotheses as summarized in Figure 1.

When the product involvement is low, individuals are more inclined to rely on peripheral cues in judging. Explicit advertising intent serves as a forewarning, which is likely to enhance the salience of various cues that could affect audiences' judgment. Firstly, low-expertise bloggers are perceived as regular consumers and have higher similarity to the audience. In addition, the expertise level is matched with the low-involvement product they endorse. In other words, the message communicated to the audience is congruent with the communicator's characteristics. The 'match', boosting the perceived believability of the message, serves as another positive peripheral cue. Besides, the 'match' is consistent with the explicitly stated intent. Hence, the ulterior motive of the blogger will not lower audiences' evaluation (Forehand and Grier 2003). Being frank about the advertising intent and existence of blog sponsorship can even boost the credibility of the blogger as honesty and openness are valued in blog communication. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H1(a): For **low** product involvement with **low** communicator expertise, blog advertising effectiveness will be **greater** when the advertising intent is explicit than when the advertising intent is implicit.*

When a high-expertise blogger is explicit about his/her advertising intent with a low-involvement product, the audience response is likely to be negative. Firstly, a low-involvement product is not congruent with an expert's high expertise. Although the expert is perceived to have more credible and professional information about a product, the 'mismatch', lowering the perceived believability of the message, serve as a negative peripheral cue. Secondly, the 'mismatch' appears inconsistent with the explicit intent, which will raise audiences' skepticism towards the ulterior motive behind the recommendation (Forehand and Grier 2003). The explicitness of the advertising intent may thus channel the audience to focus on communicator's vested interests, lowering the audience's evaluation even further. Additionally, the elaboration of a low-involvement product is likely to cause the audience to feel the communicators are 'hard-selling' the product and the similarity-to-audience is compromised as the expert is perceived as having different background from ordinary audiences. As a result, the audiences are likely to take the negative cues and resistance to the persuasive message will be the response of the audience. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H1(b): For **low** product involvement with **high** communicator expertise, blog advertising effectiveness will be **lesser** when the advertising intent is explicit than when the advertising intent is implicit.*

When the product involvement is high, individuals are more motivated to make cognitive efforts in processing information. The strength of the arguments is one important factor that can lead the audience to have favorable or unfavorable thoughts about the product. In other words, for high-involvement products, consumers are more likely to be persuaded through strong arguments instead of the peripheral cues such as similarity-to-audience (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). Therefore, although low-expertise communicators have higher similarity to the audience, a communicator with low expertise significantly deteriorates the strength of the product-related arguments which are important for consumers when evaluating the information about a high-involvement product. Additionally, when a person is warned of an upcoming persuasive intent on a product that is important or involving, counterargument is typically found (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). Furthermore, novice consumers' low expertise does not fit with high-involvement products. Thus, the 'mismatch' is inconsistent with the clearly stated advertising intent. In consequence, the inconsistency could provoke readers' skepticism towards the communicator's ulterior motives, and in turn, diminished persuasion (Forehand and Grier 2003). Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H2(a): For **high** product involvement with **low** communicator expertise, blog advertising effectiveness will be **lesser** when the advertising intent is explicit than when the advertising intent is implicit.*

When a blog communicator with high-expertise recommends a high-involvement product with explicit advertising intent, there is no mismatch between the endorser's expertise and the endorsed product. The 'match' is consistent with the explicitly stated intent. Hence, the ulterior motive of the blogger will not lower the audience's valuation (Forehand and Grier 2003). However, the negative effect of the warning of persuasive intent was more potent under high involvement conditions. Many studies have shown that increased processing attention sometimes results in increased counterarguing (Petty and Cacioppo 1979; Wright 1974), irritation (Aaker and Bruzzone 1985), and diminished persuasion (Greenwald and Leavitt 1984; Petty and Cacioppo 1986; Petty et al. 1983; Hovland and Sherif 1961). Thus, while being honest about the existence of blog sponsorship could add merit to low-expertise bloggers who endorsed low-involvement products, subjects were likely to ignore this cue under high-involvement condition because the central route was being used to process product-relevant information. Therefore, resistance to persuasion is likely to be the response from the audience. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H2(b): For **high** product involvement with **high** communicator expertise, blog advertising effectiveness will be **lesser** when the advertising intent is explicit than when the advertising intent is implicit.*

| | | Product Involvement | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | **Low** | **High** |
| **Communicator Expertise** | **Low** | Low-Low Match <br><br> H1(a): Explicit AI > Implicit AI | High-Low Mismatch <br><br> H2(a): Explicit AI < Implicit AI |
| | **High** | Low-High Mismatch <br><br> H1(b): Explicit AI < Implicit AI | High-High Match <br><br> H2(b): Explicit AI < Implicit AI |

**Figure 1. Summary of Hypotheses**

Attitude is described as an overall positive or negative evaluation that expresses how much we like or dislike an object, issue, person, or action (Krech et al. 1962). Past studies have shown that attitudes influence actions (Petty and Cacioppo 1981). A person who has a favorable attitude toward the product is likely to learn more about the product, recommend the product to others, and/or purchase the product. As such, an individual's attitude-toward-the-product (i.e. Product Attitude) can impact on his/her intentions to do something with regards to the product. Furthermore, the attitude-toward-the-website has been widely used to assess the effectiveness of a website as an advertising tool (Chen and Wells 1999). An individual who has a favorable attitude towards the website is likely to react positively to the advertising message it contains. A blog is essentially a special type of website. Hence, the attitude-toward-the-blog (i.e. Blog Attitude) is another factor that can potentially influence audience's behavioral intent. To account for the effects of these uncontrolled factors, both 'Product Attitude' and 'Blog Attitude' were measured during the experiment. In summary, Figure 2 shows the overall research model developed for blog advertising effectiveness in this study.
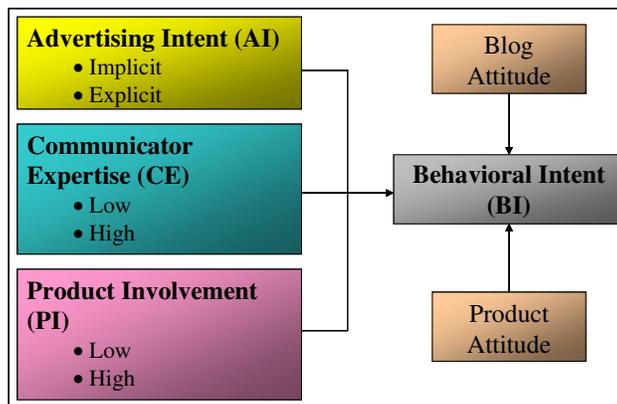


**Figure 2.  Conceptual Research Model**

| Construct | Scale | Measures |
|---|---|---|
| Product Involvement (Zaichkowsky 1985) | 7-point Semantic Differential Scale | 1. unimportant (1) / important (7)<br>2. irrelevant (1) / relevant (7)<br>3. undesirable (1) / desirable (7)<br>4. uninterested (1) / interested (7)<br>5. useless (1) / useful (7)<br>6. does not matter to me (1) / matters to me (7)<br>7. insignificant (1) / significant (7)<br>8. unappealing (1)/ appealing (7) |
| Communicator Expertise (Ohanian 1990) (Homer and Kahle 1990) | 7-point Semantic Differential Scale | 1. not an expert (1) / an expert (7)<br>2. not knowledgeable (1) / knowledgeable (7)<br>3. inexperienced (1) / experienced (7)<br>4. incompetent (1) / competent (7)<br>5. unqualified (1) / qualified (7) |
| Advertising Intent (Kim et al. 2001) (Ellerbach 2004) (Fogg et al. 2001) | 7-point Likert Scale Strongly Disagree (1) Strongly Agree (7) | 1. The blog has a commercial purpose.<br>2. The blog contains marketing elements.<br>3. The blog tries to persuade me to try or buy the product.<br>4. The blog author has been paid to review the product.<br>5. Advertising/Promotional messages are clear in the blog.<br>6. The post about the product sounds like an advertisement. |
| Behavioral Intent (Homer and Kahle 1990) (Busler and Till 2000) (Balasubramanian et al. 2006) | 7-point Likert Scale Strongly Disagree (1) Strongly Agree (7) | 1. I would like to learn more about [the advertised product].<br>2. Learning more about [the advertised product] is useless (reverse score).<br>3. I would like to recommend [the advertised product] to others.<br>4. Recommending [the advertised product] to others is meaningless (reverse score).<br>5. I will buy [the advertised product] one day. |
| Product Attitude (Wang 2005) (Mitchell 1986) | 7-point Semantic Differential Scale | 1. bad (1) / good (7)<br>2. undesirable (1) / desirable (7)<br>3. dislike (1) / like (7)<br>4. unfavorable (1) / favorable (7)<br>5. negative (1) / positive (7)<br>6. unpleasant (1) / pleasant (7) |
| Blog Attitude (Chen and Wells 1999) | 7-point Likert Scale Strongly Disagree (1) Strongly Agree (7) | 1. The blog makes it easy for me to build a relationship with the blog author.<br>2. I would like to visit this blog again in the future.<br>3. I am satisfied with the contents provided by this blog.<br>4. I feel comfortable surfing this blog.<br>5. I feel that surfing this blog is a good way for me to spend my time.<br>6. Compared with other blogs, I would rate this one as one of the best |
| Product Familiarity (Johnson and Russo 1984) | 7-point Semantic Differential Scale | 1. not familiar at all (1) / very familiar (7)<br>2. not knowledgeable at all (1) / very knowledgeable (7) |
| Brand Familiarity (Allen and Kent 1994) | 7-point Semantic Differential Scale | 1. not familiar at all (1) / very familiar (7)<br>2. not knowledgeable at all (1) / very knowledgeable (7) |
| Blog Familiarity | 7-point Semantic Differential Scale | 1. not familiar at all (1) / very familiar (7) |

**Table 1.  Measures for Constructs**

# Research Methodology

## Research Design

As there is lack of theoretical foundation in the research area of blog advertising, it is best to adopt an experimental research methodology. Experiments are good for theory development because it gives researchers more control of the situation and its high internal validity can provide precision of measurement and convincing support for causal claims. A 2 (low vs. high product-involvement) × 2 (low vs. high communicator expertise) × 2 (implicit vs. explicit advertising intent) factorial between-subjects experimental design was used to test the hypotheses. Subjects were randomly assigned to the eight treatments in the experiment.

## Experimental Blogs Development

Currently, blogs on the Internet vary greatly in styles, designs, contents, formats, and popularity, which makes it extremely difficult to isolate the independent variables and rule out alternative explanations by using real existing blogs. Therefore, it was decided that fictitious blogs would be created in the experiment so that subjects would have no prior knowledge of the blogs, and to allow for other uninterested factors to be controlled as well. They were designed and set up based on the generic template provided in *Blogger.com* ([www.blogger.com/start](www.blogger.com/start)), which is owned by *Google* and has become one of the most popular blog portals among blog users today. Thus, each blog has the same design, layout, format, and background complexity. Only three blog entries are posted in each blog, displayed in a reverse chronological order with similar length of displayed text. The first entry and the third entry are filler entries that are identical for every blog, while the advertising message is presented in the second entry. The entries were arranged in such a way so as to reduce primacy and recency learning effects (Alwin and Krosnick 1987). Furthermore, in order to exclude the interactive effects that may influence advertising outcomes, the comment function is disabled and no hyperlinks to other websites are provided in the posts. Since blog is a relatively new online advertising medium that possesses distinctive features, subjects who are familiar with the format of blogs may respond to the advertising differently from those who are not. Hence, the familiarity of blogs in general (i.e. Blog Familiarity) would be also measured in the actual experiment (see Table 1). The three independent variables – product involvement, communicator expertise, and advertising intent – were operationalized as follows in the advertising blog entry.

### Product Involvement

A pretest was conducted to select appropriate product categories with varied product involvement. Fifteen undergraduates (8 females, 7 males) from a large university rated six product categories on an 8-item, 7-point semantic differential scale based on the Personal Involvement Inventory (PII) developed by Zaichkowsky (1985). In addition, the undergraduates were also asked to rate their degree of familiarity with the product categories. This rating was used to reduce confounding effects caused by prior knowledge (Johnson and Russo 1984; Monroe and Rao 1988), as the EML indicates that the ability to process information determined by one's knowledge can moderate the persuasion effects (Petty and Wegener 1999). As suggested by past studies (Chintagunta 1999; Villas-Boas and Winer 1999), using more than one product categories instead of only one will reduce situational (i.e. product-specific) confounding factors. Hence, to make results more stable and generalizable, two product categories instead of only one product category were used at each product involvement level. Thus, mineral water and tissue paper representing low product involvement, and mobile phone and laptop computer representing high product involvement were selected. The same scale used in the pretest was employed to validate the manipulation in the actual experiment (see Table 1).

After selecting the product categories, another pretest was carried out to find an unfamiliar brand for each product category so that the prior knowledge of the brand would not create a bias in the results (Campbell and Keller 2003). Two brands that are not widely available in local market in each product category were tested on a 2-item, 7-point semantic differential scale. Through this process, *Belu* mineral water, *Puffs* tissue paper, *Pantech* mobile phone, and *Averatec* laptop computer were selected as the advertised objects in the experimental blogs. Both 'Brand Familiarity' and 'Product Familiarity' were also measured in the actual experiment (see Table 1).

### Communicator Expertise

The level of product-relevant expertise of the blogger was operationalized by manipulating the blogger profile and the writing in the blog entry. For high product expertise manipulation, it was stated in the blogger profile that the blogger has a profession that is related to the product, as suggested by Homer and Kehle (1990). In addition, more professional opinions, technical terms, and formal language were demonstrated in the high-expertise blogger's

writing. In contrast, for blogs with low product expertise, no information was provided in the blogger profile. Novice opinions, casual descriptions, and informal language were presented in the writing. A panel of two judges (two university professors from the English Language Department) examined the level of communicator expertise in each blog and made necessary modifications based on their expert judgment. Both high- and low-expertise communicators have the same level of expertise in English writing. In other words, they write equally well in terms of grammars, sentence structures, vocabularies, and expressions. What differentiate communicators' 'product-relevant' expertise in their written contents lies in the presence or absence of professional opinions, technical terms, and formality. Furthermore, for the same product, both high-expertise and low-expertise blogs described the same set of product attributes. In addition, as many studies in the past have shown that one-sided and two-sided messages have different effects on the audience (Crowley and Hoyer 1994), all the advertising entries only presented one-sided messages instead of two-sided, that is, only describing the positive features of the product. In the actual experiment, the manipulation of communicator expertise was checked. Based on the work by Ohanian (1990) and Homer and Kehle (1990), a 5-item, 7 point semantic differential scale was adopted to assess the level of communicator expertise (see Table 1).

**Advertising Intent**

The advertising intent was operationalized with two levels: explicit versus implicit. A label in an advertisement could be critical to signal advertising content for readers (Kim et al. 2001). Thus, in the explicit advertising intent case, the label "Advertorial" was conspicuously placed at the beginning of the advertising post. Furthermore, the blog sponsorship by the advertiser was also clearly stated in the first paragraph. In the implicit advertising intent case where the commercial intent is hidden, "Advertorial" was not labeled and blog sponsorship was not mentioned in the post. The advertising intent was measured in the actual experiment to ensure that the manipulation was successful. Subjects were asked to indicate their agreements with a list of 6 statements on a 7-piont Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree). See Table 1 for full details of the measure items.

Finally, the design resulted in 8 treatments and a total of 16 experimental blogs. Table 2 shows the summary of the experimental designs.

| Product | Product Involvement | Communicator Expertise | Advertising Intent | Blog URL | Number of Subjects | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mobile Phone | High | Low | Explicit | http://treatment1a.blogspot.com | 11 | 23 |
| Laptop | High | Low | Explicit | http://treatment3a.blogspot.com | 12 | |
| Mobile Phone | High | Low | Implicit | http://treatment2a.blogspot.com | 12 | 23 |
| Laptop | High | Low | Implicit | http://treatment4a.blogspot.com | 11 | |
| Mineral Water | Low | Low | Explicit | http://treatment5a.blogspot.com | 11 | 22 |
| Tissue Paper | Low | Low | Explicit | http://treatment7a.blogspot.com | 11 | |
| Mineral Water | Low | Low | Implicit | http://treatment6a.blogspot.com | 10 | 22 |
| Tissue Paper | Low | Low | Implicit | http://treatment8a.blogspot.com | 12 | |
| Mobile Phone | High | High | Explicit | http://treatment1b.blogspot.com | 12 | 24 |
| Laptop | High | High | Explicit | http://treatment3b.blogspot.com | 12 | |
| Mobile Phone | High | High | Implicit | http://treatment2b.blogspot.com | 12 | 24 |
| Laptop | High | High | Implicit | http://treatment4b.blogspot.com | 12 | |
| Mineral Water | Low | High | Explicit | http://treatment5b.blogspot.com | 10 | 23 |
| Tissue Paper | Low | High | Explicit | http://treatment7b.blogspot.com | 13 | |
| Mineral Water | Low | High | Implicit | http://treatment6b.blogspot.com | 12 | 24 |
| Tissue Paper | Low | High | Implicit | http://treatment8b.blogspot.com | 12 | |

**Table 2. Experimental Designs**

### Pilot Test

A pilot test was conducted on 12 undergraduates in order to check for manipulation and other problems that could appear in the real experiments. Each respondent browsed the randomly assigned experimental blog and then completed the questionnaire. Feedback and suggestions were obtained afterwards. Generally all the participants thought the treatments had been successfully operationalized. Other major suggestions and adjustments include the phrasing of questions, the order of questions, and the design of the experimental blogs.

### Samples

Since blogs are a relatively new online phenomenon and bloggers consist primarily of young people below 30 (Viegas 2005), the use of a student sample who are typically young and experienced with Internet in this study is appropriate. Although the use of student samples has been criticized for its limited representation of the entire population (Soley and Reid 1983), the appropriateness and usefulness of using student subjects were demonstrated in many advertising literature (Homer and Kehle 1990; Russell 2002; Danaher and Mullarkey 2003; Yoo and MacInnis 2005). Hence, a total of 185 undergraduates were recruited from various faculties of a university through an online registration website. The average age of the participants was 21.07 (aged between 18 and 26). Gender was equally balanced with 92 males and 93 females. About 97 percent of the sample indicated that they had more than 4 years of Internet experience, indicating that the subjects were very experienced web users.

### Procedures

Referring to Table 2, the number of subjects for each treatment was between 22 and 24. Participants were randomly assigned to the treatment blogs. Instructions were communicated to the participants before they viewed the blogs. Subjects were not allowed to browse other websites so that they could pay full attention to the experimental blogs. No specific instructions were given regarding the sequence of browsing the contents of the blogs, so that blog reading behaviors in reality were partly preserved. After viewing the blogs, subjects would precede to answer the questions in the self-administered questionnaire which measured their behavioral intents toward the product, captured demographic information and checked for manipulation and covariate control. Each experimental session lasted about 30 minutes. To motivate the subjects to participate the experiment seriously, a token payment was given on completion of the questionnaire.

## Results

### Validity and Reliability Tests

The principal-component factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted, yielding 9 factors (see Appendix) for the complete factor analysis results. All items loaded on the intended factors respectively, indicating satisfactory convergent and discriminant validity. The constructs have a Cronbach's Alpha greater than 0.7, indicating adequate reliability (see Table 3).

| Construct | Number of Items | Cronbach's Alpha |
|---|---|---|
| Product Involvement | 8 | 0.96 |
| Communicator Expertise | 5 | 0.94 |
| Advertising Intent | 6 | 0.88 |
| Behavioral Intent | 5 | 0.76 |
| Product Attitude | 6 | 0.93 |
| Blog Attitude | 6 | 0.83 |
| Product Familiarity | 2 | 0.87 |
| Brand Familiarity | 2 | 0.95 |
| Blog Familiarity | 1 | N.A. |

**Table 3. Reliability Test Results**

## Control Checks

The ANOVA was used to check whether the effects of the identified covariates had been neutralized through randomization process. The independent variables 'Advertising Intent' (AI), 'Communicator Expertise' (CE), and 'Product Involvement' (PI) have no main effects or interaction effects on 'Internet Experience', 'Brand Familiarity', 'Blog Familiarity', and 'Product Familiarity', indicating that the effects of these factors were controlled in the experiment environment. On the other hand, AI and PI had significant main effects on 'Product Attitude' (both $p<0.01$), while CE and AI-by-PI had significant effects on 'Blog Attitude' ($p<0.03$ and $p<0.04$ respectively). That means these two factors varied in different treatments dependent on the setting of the independent variables. As such, these two factors were included into the statistical analysis later as the covariates in order to account for the uncontrolled effects on the dependent variable.

## Manipulation Checks

The manipulation of the independent variables was verified using manipulation checks (see Table 1 for the measures). For each independent variable, the results show a significant difference between the means for different levels of treatment (see Table 4). Therefore, the manipulation of communicator expertise, advertising intent, and product involvement appears to be successful.

| Independent Variables | Treatments | N | Mean | Std Dev | t | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Product Involvement | High | 90 | 5.92 | 0.75 | 14.94 | 0.01** |
| | Low | 95 | 3.98 | 1.00 | | |
| Communicator Expertise | High | 91 | 4.69 | 0.96 | 10.79 | 0.01** |
| | Low | 94 | 3.18 | 0.94 | | |
| Advertising Intent | Explicit | 92 | 5.26 | 0.96 | 4.47 | 0.01** |
| | Implicit | 93 | 4.56 | 1.18 | | |

*p<0.05, **p<0.01

**Table 4. Manipulation Checks**

## Hypotheses Tests

All tests of hypotheses were conducted at a 5% level of significance. The ANOVA full factorial model tests the main effects of independent variables and covariates, as well as the interaction effects of the independent variables. The ANOVA results (see Table 5) show a significant three-way interaction among 'Product Involvement', 'Communicator Expertise', and 'Advertising Intent' ($F=14.479$, $p<0.01$). The descriptive statistics are shown in Table 6a and Table 6b. The observed power (see Table 5) is high enough, indicating that the sample is sufficient to induce significant results. Simple effects analysis was employed to examine the three-way interaction further. One tail tests were used for hypothesis tests because the direction of the differences has been predicted (Keppel and Wickens 2004).

| Treatment Variable | df | F | P | Power |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Blog Attitude | 1 | 6.94 | 0.01** | 0.75 |
| Product Attitude | 1 | 33.51 | 0.01** | 1.00 |
| Product Involvement | 1 | 0.14 | 0.71 | 0.07 |
| Communicator Expertise | 1 | 0.46 | 0.50 | 0.10 |
| Advertising Intent | 1 | 0.63 | 0.43 | 0.12 |
| Product Involvement * Communicator Expertise | 1 | 0.15 | 0.70 | 0.07 |
| Product Involvement * Advertising Intent | 1 | 0.01 | 0.94 | 0.05 |
| Communicator Expertise * Advertising Intent | 1 | 0.83 | 0.36 | 0.15 |
| Product Involvement * Communicator Expertise * Advertising Intent | 1 | 17.48 | 0.01** | 0.99 |

*p<0.05, **p<0.01

**Table 5. ANOVA Results**

When product involvement holds low, there was a significant interaction effect of Communicator Expertise and Advertising Intent (F=12.65, p<0.01). For H1(a), as predicted, blog advertising was significantly more effective when advertising intent was explicit than when advertising intent was implicit (t=1.88, p<0.03). Thus, H1(a) was supported. For H1(b), also as expected, the advertising effectiveness was significantly lesser when advertising was explicit than when advertising intent was implicit (t=2.86, t<0.01). Hence, H1(b) was also supported.

| Mean (Std Dev) | | Advertising Intent | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | **Implicit** | **Explicit** |
| **Communicator Expertise** | **Low** | 4.25 (0.86)<br>N=24 | 4.68 (0.88)<br>N=24 |
| | **High** | 4.70 (0.86)<br>N=24 | 3.97 (0.76)<br>N=23 |

**Table 6a. Descriptive Statistics for Low Product-Involvement**

| Mean (Std Dev) | | Advertising Intent | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | **Implicit** | **Explicit** |
| **Communicator Expertise** | **Low** | 4.52 (0.74)<br>N=23 | 3.97 (0.93)<br>N=23 |
| | **High** | 4.31 (0.65)<br>N=22 | 4.20 (0.66)<br>N=22 |

**Table 6b. Descriptive Statistics for High Product-Involvement**

When product involvement is high, the interaction of Communicator Expertise and Advertising Intent was significant (F=4.95, p<0.03). For H2(a), consistent with the prediction, the advertising effectiveness was significantly lesser at the condition of explicit advertising intent than at the condition of implicit advertising intent (t=1.81, p<0.04). Thus, H2(a) was supported. For H2(b), contrary to the expectation, the advertising effectiveness was not significantly lesser when advertising intent was explicit than when the advertising intent was implicit (t=0.22, p>n.s.). Therefore, H2(b) was not supported.

## Discussions and Implications

### Discussion

The results of the study are summarized in Figure 3a and Figure 3b. The findings showed that when the product involvement was high and the blogger had high-expertise, there was no significant difference detected between implicit and explicit advertising intent, which did not support the proposed hypothesis. This shows that the inhibiting effect of explicit advertising intent did not occur significantly in the case a high-involvement product was endorsed by an expert. The result was inconsistent with past study on warning of persuasive intent which suggested that resistance to persuasion was typically found under high involvement condition (Petty and Cacioppo 1979, 1986). A possible explanation for this lies in readers' prior-expectation from an expert. Experts who possess higher expertise are expected to analyze and review products as part of their ongoing business and publish their views in media (Wang 2005). Perhaps based on past experience on advertisements, consumers may more readily accept the fact that an expert is paid to endorse a product on which consumers need expert advice. In addition, it takes more efforts and greater skills to review high-involvement products that typically contain more information and complex attributes to elaborate on. Thus, experts are thought to deserve the 'rewards' which can be manifested as blog sponsorship. The congruence between communicator's high-expertise and high-involvement products will make communicator's vested interest less accessible. As a result, in this case, being explicit about the advertising intent may not provoke consumers to resist the advertising message.

On the other hand, when the product involvement was high and the blogger had low-expertise, it was found that explicit advertising intent led to less favorable behavioral intent. As predicted, for high-involvement products, forewarning of advertising intent induces readers to elaborate more on product-relevant information and generate counterarguments. The mismatch between the endorser's low expertise and the endorsed product's high involvement caused the respondents to resist persuasion even further.

When the advertised products are low in involvement, it was found that the awareness of advertising intent had a significant impact on respondents' behavioral intent. Low-expertise bloggers' endorsement elicited greater

advertising effectiveness by being explicit with the persuasive intent. As what was hypothesized, when personal involvement with the product was low, warning of intent enhanced the salience of various peripheral cues such as source similarity-to-audience and honesty reinforcement in the blog. More favorable behavioral intent was observed with explicit advertising because non-expert endorsers had greater similarity to the audience and being honest with the existence of blog sponsorship enhanced the blogger's credibility and sincerity as well, provided that bloggers' low expertise matched with low-involvement products.
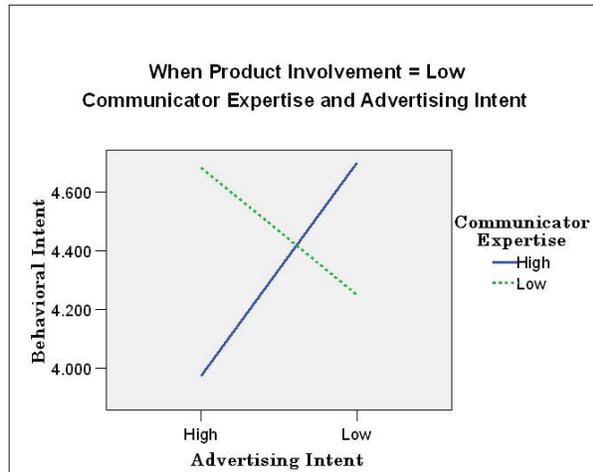


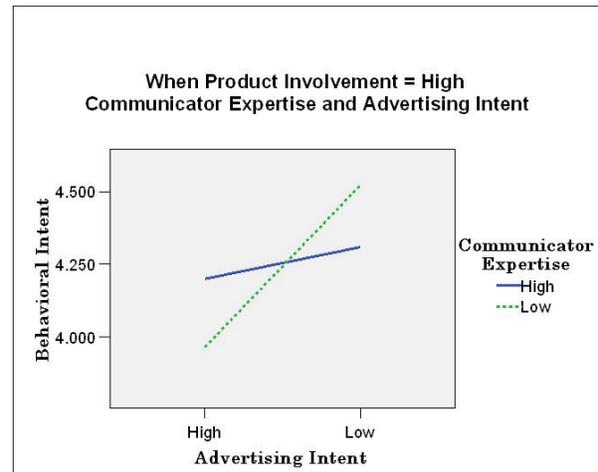Figure 3a. Graphical Presentation of Results for Low Product-Involvement

Figure 3b. Graphical Presentation of Results for High Product-Involvement

Also as expected, it was found that high-expertise bloggers' endorsement of low-involvement products resulted in a lower level of behavioral intentions by being explicit with the advertising intent. The mismatch between endorsers' high expertise and low-involvement product caused the negative impacts of explicit advertising intent (e.g., skepticism towards ulterior motives, increased defense against persuasion, etc.) to manifest. After all, when the product is low in involvement to an individual, he/she is not motivated to process product-relevant information and experts' opinions seem unnecessary and somewhat overselling if they are paid to do so.

## *Implications for Theory*

Built on past theories and models in the field of persuasion communication, including ELM, match-up hypothesis, and forewarning mechanism, this paper has developed a conceptual theory in the research area of blog advertising effectiveness. In advertising research, most of the findings were based on the assumption that the audiences were aware that the message was an advertisement. As more and more 'stealth marketing' tactics, such as product placement in movies and video games, advertorial advertising in magazines, and online buzz marketing etc. gained more popularity, research on advertising effectiveness should no longer limit itself to traditional advertising forms. It is believed that when the intent of a persuasive message is hidden, the advertising message becomes more persuasive. Some call it 'publicity's credibility advantage' (Kim et al. 2001). Thus in the context of blog advertising, of which the advertising intent can be easily disguised, the awareness of the advertising intent by message recipients becomes one important variable that has far been neglected as a conventional variable to study in past research. In addition, the study of the variable 'advertising intent' also deals with the ethical issue of advertising.

In persuasion research, although the effect of warning persuasive intent has been studied (Petty and Cacioppo 1979, 1986), the resistance to persuasion was shown to be evident only under high-involvement conditions without the incorporation of other variables in the study. This paper demonstrates that being explicit about the persuasive intent is not always bad, and hiding persuasive intent is not always good either in the context of blog advertising. The impact of awareness of persuasive intent was found to be affected by audiences' personal motivation and relevance together with the communicator's expertise.

This is an initial study that examined the interaction of source expertise, advertising intent, and product involvement simultaneously. As evidenced by the three-way interaction among the manipulated factors in this study, the level of explicitness of advertising intent has different impacts on blog readers' behavioral intent, depending on the association between the level of perceived expertise and the level of personal involvement. The interactive

phenomenon may help explore other new advertising formats of which the advertising intent is also camouflaged or concealed.

From the preceding discussion, it seems that whether being explicit or being implicit with the advertising intent is more effective depends on the match between the communicator and the product, the consistency between the match-up and stated intent, as well as the mode of information process. The mismatch between high-expertise communicator and low-involvement product, or between low-expertise communicator and high-involvement product, seemed to manifest the inhibiting effects of explicit advertising intent. In the case of low-involvement products, the mismatch tended to increase the salience of the high-expertise communicator's vested interest; In the case of high-involvement products, the mismatch tended to amplify the incompetence of the low-expertise communicator in providing credible information or strong message argument.

What is most interesting is that the 'fit' between low-expertise communicator and low-involvement product was found to offset the potential negative impact of explicit advertising intent because of the consistency. Furthermore, stating the advertising intent explicitly not only had no inhibiting effect on audiences' response, but also enhanced the advertising effectiveness. The use of peripheral route and affective processing of information could be the reasons for this outcome. In addition, it reinforces the idea that honesty and openness are appreciated and respected in blog communication environment. However, the 'match-up' between high-expertise communicator and high-involvement product seemed to only defuse the negative effect of explicit persuasive intent to a certain extent. The cognitive dominated processing route (i.e., the central route used under high-involvement condition) may help explain the phenomenon.

## Implications for Practice

The findings of the three-way interaction indicate that when advertisers launch a blog advertisement, they need to consider the three factors together, instead of looking at them separately: 1) Who communicates the advertising message, low or high-expertise bloggers? 2) What are the advertised objects, low or high-involvement products? 3) How should the endorser deal with the blog sponsorship, implicitly or explicitly?

For high-involvement products, if advertisers adopt common man strategy, more specifically, pay low-expertise bloggers to advertise the product, it is not suitable to let the bloggers indicate the advertising intent explicitly because the distinguishing cues of advertisement will amplify the incompetence of the communicator, reduce perceived credibility of the communicator, provoke readers' resistance to persuasion and trigger readers to counter argue the message through cognitive thinking. On the other hand, it doesn't matter whether a high-expertise blogger states the advertising intent conspicuously or not. The effects do not differ significantly, though it will be an ethical practice to help audiences distinguish the advertising from the editorial contents.

For low-involvement products, it is not a good idea to ask high-expertise bloggers to promote the products with explicit advertising intent, because readers will be likely to attribute the salient advertising intent to oversell and doubt the vested interest of the bloggers. But for non-expert bloggers, they can produce better advertising effects if they are honest about the existence of blog sponsorship. That means, advertisers should encourage ordinary bloggers to advertise products in an open and honest way.

When the advertisers are concerned over the advertising ethical issue or when labeling blog advertising advertisement becomes a common practice, advertisers should approach non-expert bloggers to write about low-involvement products, and expert bloggers to promote high-involvement products. Due to the match-up between the endorser expertise and product involvement level, the revealed advertising intent will not result in negative response from the audience.

## Limitations and Future Research

### Product versus Service

This study only focused on investigating tangible products as the advertised objects, which emulates past academic research on advertising. However, products and services are very different in terms of their tangibility, perishability, homogeneity, demand fluctuations, and customer interaction (Zinkhan et al. 1992). That is why marketing strategies developed for products are usually found to be considerably different from those for services (Anderson et al. 1997). Services like restaurants, hotels, health care, entertainment (e.g., movies, music, sports etc.), travel and tourism, education, and hairdressing have strong pleasure-seeking, hedonic, and experiential characteristics. Intuitively, consumers are more likely to need opinions and experiences from others when they search for information on

services, and blogs are excellent platforms in offering personal opinions and sensory experiences, which in turn breeds stronger attitudes and behaviors. This thus begs the question as to whether blog advertising will be as effective for services as it is for tangible goods. Blogs like *TravelBlog* ([www.travelblog.org](www.travelblog.org)), *RestaurantReviews* ([http://restoronto-reviews.blogspot.com](http://restoronto-reviews.blogspot.com)), and *That's Fit* ([www.thatsfit.com](www.thatsfit.com)), which are popular blogs on traveling, restaurant reviews, and health care respectively, have exhibited great potentials in advertising services effectively. Furthermore, third-party endorsements (or source effects) and decision making processes might perform very differently for services as compared to tangible goods. As consumers often look for hedonic values from services, communicator's attractiveness or popularity may play a more important role than communicator's expertise in affecting advertisements on services. In addition, real personal experiences and true opinions are more desired for service products, as compared to physical goods. Hence, having explicit advertising intent in the blog advertisement may lead to stronger impact, whether it is positive or negative. All in all, it will certainly be interesting and meaningful to broaden the blog advertising research to services and provide marketing implications for marketers in service industries.

### Interactive Advertising

Traditional advertising efforts have always been one-way communications from companies to the audience. With the interactivity provided by blogs, however, the audiences are no longer passive information receivers. They can respond to the advertising messages and exchange opinions with each other by posting comments in the blog. This kind of dialogue-based advertisement is powerful not only in getting the message out, but also allows the simultaneous retrieval of reader feedback, and is one unique characteristic that other forms of online advertising do not have (Scoble and Israel 2006). The commenting and auto-linkage functions in blogs are powerful in encouraging communicator-recipient interactions, information spread, and community building, which can potentially boost advertising effectiveness. Due to the lack of prior academic research on blog advertising, this study was only aimed at finding out the effectiveness of blog advertising at the initial stage. The comment functions were disabled and no hyperlinks were provided in the blog posts to exclude the interactive effects. A better understanding of the dynamic and interactive processes, which will be related to other research areas such as information propagation, word-of-mouth communications, and social networking, would have substantial implications for advertisers and is worth studying in future research. The process of interactive advertising is certainly more complex. For instance, when the comment function is enabled and blog readers participate by posting opinions on the advertised product, their views will become an extension of the original post on the product and influence other readers' response. As the time goes by and the conversation increases, the impact of blogger's expertise may become diluted. Blog readers are more likely to integrate information from different people and make a decision. Furthermore, the level of involvement with the product will largely determine the possibility that an individual will give comments. In the other way around, the number of comments indicates the popularity of the blog post and in turn may get blog readers more involved in reading the post and giving their own opinions. As preceding elaborations suggest, a lot of additional efforts are needed to investigate the effectiveness of interactive advertising in blogs.

## Conclusion

Both the number of blogs and the number of blog readers have been expanding rapidly ever since the year 2000. Blogging is now so popular that services enabling people to post journal entries anywhere and anytime from their mobile handsets have also been made available (known as mobile blogging). The steady growth trend also implies that the blog space may one day become part of the mainstream media. As a relatively new advertising form, blog advertising is already showing its huge potential, and certainly going to become more prevalent in the years ahead. This research has uncovered some interesting and meaningful findings that are valuable to the study of blog advertising effectiveness. The 3-way interaction of communicator expertise, advertising intent, and product involvement corresponding to the three major aspects in communication research (i.e., the source, the message, and the audience) was examined. Specifically, this study identifies the conditions under which the explicitness of advertising intent will either enhance or inhibit the behavioral intents of audiences. This study also offers some practical suggestions as to how marketers can make use of blogs as an effective advertising medium. Blog advertising is a hybrid of traditional text-based advertorials, word-of-mouth communication, and interactive web advertising. Thus, the potential effectiveness of using blogs to influence viewers should not be underestimated. We hope that this study will lead to more comprehensive research efforts in this new advertising medium so as to better the understanding of how target audiences will react to this new advertising tactic.

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## Appendix: Complete Factor Analysis Results

| | Component | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| ProductInvolvement_item1 | **.854** | .003 | .060 | -.026 | .019 | -.009 | -.047 | .120 | -.007 |
| ProductInvolvement_item2 | **.915** | -.005 | .055 | -.023 | -.001 | -.039 | .023 | .065 | .055 |
| ProductInvolvement_item3 | **.888** | .098 | .070 | -.047 | .113 | .053 | .026 | .018 | -.032 |
| ProductInvolvement_item4 | **.882** | .014 | -.025 | -.036 | .117 | .112 | .043 | -.028 | -.073 |
| ProductInvolvement_item5 | **.840** | .004 | .119 | .012 | -.033 | -.024 | .024 | .153 | .165 |
| ProductInvolvement_item6 | **.863** | -.015 | -.003 | -.020 | .123 | .053 | .035 | .089 | -.080 |
| ProductInvolvement_item7 | **.862** | -.017 | .011 | -.021 | .100 | .121 | .039 | .125 | .051 |
| ProductInvolvement_item8 | **.858** | .009 | -.071 | -.050 | .022 | .087 | .072 | .017 | .095 |
| CommunicatorExpertise_item1 | .028 | .051 | **.888** | -.065 | .049 | -.038 | -.045 | -.116 | -.133 |
| CommunicatorExpertise_item2 | .024 | .030 | **.918** | -.006 | -.037 | .047 | -.021 | .003 | -.095 |
| CommunicatorExpertise_item3 | .034 | .048 | **.914** | .041 | -.007 | -.034 | -.020 | .002 | .082 |
| CommunicatorExpertise_item4 | .060 | .023 | **.880** | -.021 | .098 | .059 | .012 | -.087 | -.026 |
| CommunicatorExpertise_item5 | .021 | -.039 | **.875** | -.039 | .096 | .109 | -.095 | -.034 | .153 |
| AdvertisingIntent_item1 | .041 | -.097 | .123 | **.792** | -.005 | -.006 | .067 | .017 | -.206 |
| AdvertisingIntent_item2 | .013 | .018 | .026 | **.728** | .081 | -.027 | -.042 | .023 | .022 |
| AdvertisingIntent_item3 | -.093 | -.168 | -.115 | **.758** | .027 | -.012 | .001 | -.119 | -.081 |
| AdvertisingIntent_item4 | -.020 | -.073 | -.084 | **.879** | -.036 | -.011 | .009 | .031 | -.012 |
| AdvertisingIntent_item5 | -.073 | -.077 | -.098 | **.834** | -.040 | -.025 | .065 | -.003 | .066 |
| AdvertisingIntent_item6 | -.050 | -.057 | .066 | **.747** | -.077 | -.109 | .037 | .011 | .232 |
| ProductAttitude_item1 | .035 | **.811** | .015 | -.086 | .007 | .144 | .034 | -.006 | .075 |
| ProductAttitude_item2 | -.027 | **.855** | .040 | -.104 | .063 | .134 | .010 | .028 | .069 |
| ProductAttitude_item3 | .063 | **.841** | .008 | -.002 | .249 | -.014 | -.024 | -.023 | .042 |
| ProductAttitude_item4 | .012 | **.867** | .044 | -.112 | .096 | .116 | .002 | .002 | .012 |
| ProductAttitude_item5 | -.013 | **.839** | -.044 | -.044 | .057 | .110 | .019 | .103 | .012 |
| ProductAttitude_item6 | .106 | **.797** | .022 | -.050 | .124 | -.083 | -.116 | .026 | -.133 |
| BrandAttitude_item1 | .097 | .222 | .069 | .059 | **.514** | -.073 | .053 | .023 | .393 |
| BrandAttitude_item2 | .090 | .127 | .012 | -.029 | **.846** | .146 | .012 | -.005 | .048 |
| BrandAttitude_item3 | .021 | .123 | -.052 | -.004 | **.837** | .107 | .020 | -.052 | -.072 |
| BrandAttitude_item4 | .101 | .112 | .168 | .000 | **.677** | .163 | -.014 | .036 | .170 |
| BrandAttitude_item5 | .078 | .031 | -.033 | -.003 | **.743** | -.057 | .010 | .103 | .177 |
| BrandAttitude_item6 | .050 | .176 | .135 | -.034 | **.713** | -.034 | -.084 | .071 | -.387 |
| ProductFamiliarity_item1 | .190 | .043 | -.126 | -.019 | .099 | .104 | .004 | **.911** | .019 |
| ProductFamiliarity_item2 | .345 | .131 | -.117 | -.002 | .036 | .089 | -.001 | **.831** | .070 |
| BrandFamiliarity_item1 | .116 | -.027 | -.077 | .068 | .002 | .012 | **.953** | .059 | -.046 |
| BrandFamiliarity_item2 | .065 | .034 | -.072 | .048 | -.001 | .047 | **.965** | -.056 | -.033 |
| BlogFamiliarity_item1 | .110 | .094 | -.029 | .006 | .172 | -.023 | -.100 | .069 | **.795** |
| BehavioralIntent_item1 | .179 | .292 | .126 | -.012 | .195 | **.703** | .001 | .037 | -.092 |
| BehavioralIntent_item2 | .279 | -.032 | .032 | -.006 | .049 | **.808** | .006 | .026 | -.141 |
| BehavioralIntent_item3 | -.134 | .205 | .061 | -.103 | .143 | **.553** | .190 | .114 | .196 |
| BehavioralIntent_item4 | .007 | .243 | -.021 | -.129 | -.005 | **.663** | .080 | .141 | .164 |
| BehavioralIntent_item5 | -.286 | .243 | .044 | -.072 | .134 | **.498** | -.050 | -.007 | .021 |
| Eigenvalue | 7.617 | 5.736 | 4.240 | 3.674 | 2.607 | 1.966 | 1.678 | 1.457 | 1.147 |
| Variance Explained (%) | 18.579 | 13.989 | 10.341 | 8.960 | 6.359 | 4.796 | 4.094 | 3.555 | 2.798 |
| Cumulative Variance Explained (%) | 18.579 | 32.568 | 42.909 | 51.869 | 58.228 | 63.024 | 67.118 | 70.673 | 73.471 |