



A STUDY OF BLOGGERS' EMOTIONAL CONTAGION AND TRAVEL INTENTION

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ABSTRACT

Theme parks have become a mainstream of development in the leisure industry in Taiwan. This study chose bloggers as research subjects in order to study the correlation between bloggers' emotional influences and the allure of their blogs, and to further examine whether these blogs stimulate tourists' behavioral intention to visit theme parks. The results revealed that bloggers' perception while they are reading blog information is susceptible to the influence of emotional contagion. In addition, blog usefulness, blog appeal, and brand appeal of theme parks all cast an influence on the public's behavioral intention to visit theme parks.

Keywords: *Emotional Contagion, The Attractiveness Of Blogs, Blog Usefulness, The Attractiveness Of Brands, Behavioral Intention*

1 INTRODUCTION

As people in modern society encounter increased levels of stress due to a heavy workload, venting their emotions through leisure activities has become an important part of people's lives. Bammel and Burrus-Bammel (1992) suggested that participating in leisure activities brings forth benefits in physical, psychological, social, recreational, educational, and aesthetical dimensions, whereas travel assists in alleviating stress by letting people get closer to nature [1].

Theme parks have become a mainstream of development in the leisure industry in Taiwan. Scholars have pointed out the concept of theme parks refers to holistic planning and

representations by focusing on extensions of various themes and embodying these themes' unique features in every detail of the park (such as recreational facilities, workers, food and beverage, performances, environmental landscapes, and commodities). Such details must be planned in accordance with the preset theme of the theme park [2]. Since customers are regarded as mainstays of theme parks, how to attract large numbers of consumers is worthy of theme park operators' elaborate planning.

As the Internet has become an integral part of people's daily lives, consumers can now share leisure and recreation information online. Online media have become important intermediaries for



information exchange. Blogs serve as a convenient platform for the public to give voice to their opinions, express their emotions, and exchange professional knowledge. In cyberspace, blog hosts frequently use visual pictures and textual descriptions to recommend theme parks' various facilities or novel events. Theme park operators also constantly launch promotional package tours that incorporate seasonal festivals and themes to bring excitement and novelty to the public. In this way, theme parks can constantly offer consumers different experiences, attract consumers' patronage, and succeed in perpetual business operation.

In addition to the commitment to perfecting services and physical facilities in the parks, theme park operators must have a profound understanding of blog marketing, which has become popular in recent years, as well as the influence of blog articles on tourists' willingness to visit theme parks. Therefore, this study chose bloggers as research subjects in order to study the correlation between bloggers' emotional influences and the allure of their blogs, and to further examine whether these blogs stimulate tourists' behavioral intention to visit theme parks. In addition, this study examined the influence of blog usefulness and the brand appeal of theme parks on the public's intention to visit theme parks, as a reference for reinforcing customer relationship, boosting customer satisfaction, and establishing customer loyalty.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Usefulness of Blogs

Blogs exist in cyberspace and are loaded with a multitude of textual descriptions, images,

and arrangements in a chronological order. As a blog is not subject to time and spatial restraints, blog hosts can freely update the content anytime and attract Internet users without borders to read the content or participate in discussions. In recent years, blogs have become a convenient platform for blog hosts to express their emotions, record their travel details, and give food reviews, among a variety of other activities. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) suggests that consumers' acceptance of a system is influenced by the five main elements of perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, attitude toward use, intention to use, and actual system use [3]. Newby (2010) pointed out that the usefulness of a website refers to the practicality, relevance, reliability, and accuracy of the information offered by the website[4]. Therefore, this study defined the usefulness of a blog as the pertinence, usefulness, and trustworthiness of the theme park information found on a blog, and proposed the following hypothesis:

H1: The usefulness of a blog is positively correlated to bloggers' behavioral intention.

2.2 Emotional Contagion

Emotional contagion refers to transforming an individual's perceived emotional content to the individual's own emotional sentiment through the process of imitation or assimilation [5]. Scholars have pointed out that emotional contagion and emotional susceptibility are two inherent characteristics of an individual, and that different variables may result in different influences [6]. Contagion refers to an individual's capacity to influence others, while susceptibility refers to an



individual's tendency to be influenced by others. As emotions may interfere with each other, an individual's emotions not only affect the individual's daily life but also affect the emotions of other people, and other people's emotions may influence the individual's daily life [7]. Therefore, according to the theory of emotional contagion, bloggers' susceptibility to influence and blog hosts emotional contagion may result in varied influences when bloggers and blog hosts use blogs as interfaces to interact with each other. Based on the above, this study put forth the following hypothesis:

H2: Bloggers with a higher susceptibility to emotional contagion are more attracted by the appeal of blogs.

2.3 Appeal of Blogs

Jeng(1992) has pointed out that an individual who is attracted to other individuals or objects may fall into a state of intense focus, become oblivious to oneself, and engage in indulgence[8]. Of these, intense focus is the most commonly seen effect. Therefore, a blog is deemed as engaging if the blog successfully draws readers' attention to its content. Further, obliviousness of self, which refers to bloggers' behaviors as a result of being drawn to the content of a blog, is enthusiasm in the most appropriate degree. Indulgence, on the other hand, is revealed in bloggers' engagement in issues addressed on a blog. Therefore, an interesting depiction of a theme park on a blog will attract consumers to read the entire blog article, search for more articles in relation to the intended travel destination, encourage family members, relatives,

or friends to physically experience the tourist attraction recommended on blogs, enthusiastically plan relevant travel itineraries, and demonstrate blogs' important values of sharing travel information. Based on the above, this study put forth the following hypothesis:

H3: The appeal of a blog is positively related to bloggers' behavioral intention.

2.4 Brand Appeal

A brand is a symbol with a tangible name and visual image that can be used to distinguish products of the brand from competitors. As it is associated with consumers' intangible emotions, a brand represents a collection of consumers' experiences, such as feelings, memories, and belief in branded products or services; therefore, it is also a representation of brand users' social status. In addition, a brand represents a contractual relationship between customers and brand manufacturers[9-11]. Appeal refers to a force that drives an individual's voluntary intention to get closer to a subject, which conveys signals in a certain form [12]. Boyd and Mason (1999) defined brand appeal as a brand's success in producing an armada of favorable messages to convince consumers that the brand can satisfy consumers' genuine needs and bring forth true value for consumers[13]. Brand appeal in this study referred to the name recognition of a theme park, consumers' positive brand experiences with the theme park, and the theme park's ability to attract consumers to revisit it. The following hypothesis was proposed:

H4: Brand appeal is positively associated with

bloggers' behavioral intention.

2.5 Behavioural Intention

Behaviors are derivatives of an individual's knowledge and attitudes, meaning that an individual's behaviors result from his/her attitudes. Ajzen (1991) put forward that behavioral intention may be subject to the influence of any or all the following three factors: attitudes toward behaviors, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control[14]. Baker and Crompton (2000) suggested that the behavioral intention of intending visitors refers to the intending visitors' willingness to revisit the same destination, i.e., their tourism destination loyalty[15]. Scholars have pointed out that tourism spots which produce a more memorable impression on tourists are usually associated with publicity gained through media, which enhances tourists' likelihood of visiting or revisiting a destination and creates enhanced effect of word of mouth. After their trips, tourists may even be willing to recommend the same destinations to their families or friends and cause their families or friends have a stronger intention to travel [16]. Based on the foregoing inference, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

H5: The appeal of blogs has a mediation effect on the extent of bloggers' emotional contagion and behavioral intention.

3 RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Participants

This study used interviews to collect data in private universities in Taiwan. The samples were people who had visited online theme parks' blogs. There were 312 valid questionnaire samples in this

study.

3.2 Measures

In this study, the construct of brand appeal was modified from the scale developed by Power et al. (2008)[17]. Measurements were based on a Likert 7-point scale, with scores ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). In the variable of emotion contagion, this study modified the scale developed by Doherty(1997), which has thirteen items[18]. The measurement was based on a 7-point Likert scale. This study defined the variable of usefulness of blogs as the useful and reliable blogs. The scale was adapted from Newby and Groom (2010) and contained a total of six items[4]. This study sought to measure the construct of appeal of blogs by referring to Ehrhart et al. (2012) for six items which were also measured using a 7-point scale[19]. Finally, the usage intention construct referred to whether people would visit theme parks which were introduced on the blogs. Measurements were based on the scale of Zeithaml et al. (1996), which features a total of five items[20].

This study used the partial least square method (PLS) to conduct reliability and validity tests as well as overall model analysis and used SmartPLS software for analysis. The reliability and validity of the overall dimensions are shown in Table 1. The measurement model's dimensions indicated good reliability, with a composite reliability of over 0.7, and the average variance extracted was also above the standard of 0.5, thereby reaching the standard for convergent validity.

Table 1 Fit Indicators Of The Measurement Model

Construct	CR	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	Fit indicators
Impression Management	0.9182	0.6549	0.932	$\chi^2/df=2.0$; GFI=0.90 ; AGFI=0.84 ; RMSEA=0.07
Health Trust	0.9291	0.7663	0.942	$\chi^2/df=3.1$; GFI=0.84 ; AGFI=0.81 ; RMSEA=0.08
Health Communication	0.8759	0.5408	0.875	$\chi^2/df=4.1$; GFI=0.91 ; AGFI=0.89 ; RMSEA=0.08
Online Social Support	0.9607	0.8034	0.879	$\chi^2/df=4.1$; GFI=0.87 ; AGFI=0.81 ; RMSEA=0.08
Blog Usage Intention	0.8762	0.6407	0.875	$\chi^2/df=5.2$; GFI=0.99 ; AGFI=0.94 ; RMSEA=0.06

4 RESULTS

This study established four hypotheses, which were confirmed using PLS in structural equation modeling analysis. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Correlation Coefficient Matrices Of The

Constructs

	Impression Management	Health Trust	Health Communication	Online Social Support	Blog Usage Intention
Impression Management	1.00				
Health Trust	.344**	1.00			
Health Communication	.299**	.322**	1.00		
Online Social Support	.416**	.457**	.350**	1.00	
Blog Usage Intention	.246**	.558**	.202**	.42	1.00

**significance

Standardization coefficients and significance test values showed that when people more believe blogs' travel information, they would have better behavioral intentions (estimate value=0.121, p<0.001), thus supporting H1. The results also

indicated that when people had higher emotion contagion, they would be easy attracted by blogs (estimate value=0.533, p<0.001); thus, H2 was supported. Furthermore, when the blog is more

attractive, then people would have better intentions (estimate value=0.234, p=0.000). Finally, it was observed that when the

attractiveness of the brand of the theme park is higher, people would also have better behavioral intentions (estimate value=0.524, p=0.006);

therefore, H4 was supported. The model of this study has the average R²=0.4124, which was greater than 0.35 and the GOF=0.5189; thus, the model had a good fit.

To further examine the mediation hypotheses, this study used the Sobel test to confirm the mediating effects [21]. Preacher and Hayes (2004)

suggested that for computations based on the path coefficient and standard error, a Z value greater than 1.96 indicates a significant mediating effect, which shows that the blogs' attractiveness plays a mediating effect between emotion contagion and behavioral intentions(estimate value= 5.461, p<0.001)[22]. Thus, H5 was supported by the results. The framework of this study is illustrated

in Figure 1. Research framework

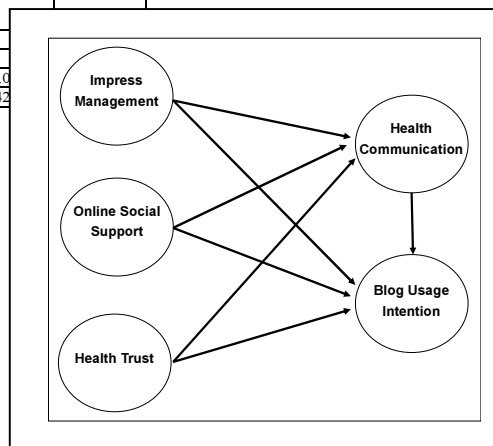


Figure1 Research Framework

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In addition to examining the influences of blog appeal, blog usefulness, and brand appeal of theme parks on the public's behavioral intention to visit theme parks, this study also analyzed whether the perception of bloggers is influenced by factors of emotional contagion during the course of viewing graphical and textual descriptions on blogs. The results revealed that bloggers' perception while they are reading blog information is susceptible to the influence of emotional contagion. In addition, blog usefulness, blog appeal, and brand appeal of theme parks all cast an influence on the public's behavioral intention to visit theme parks.

With respect to the correlation between blog usefulness and the public's behavioral intention to visit, the results of the structural equation revealed an upsurge in the public's intention to visit a theme park when consumers considered information on travelling to the theme park to be trustworthy. Propelled by the popularity of blog marketing, theme park operators often instruct the hosts of frequently-visited blogs to incorporate advertising information into their blog articles, which has caused consumers to develop a reserved attitude toward travel commentaries on blogs. On the contrary, impartial blog commentaries win consumers' trust and are praised as practical information, and the usefulness of these blogs enhances the public's motivation to visit a theme park.

With regard to the correlation between brand

appeal and consumers' behavioral intention, this study verified that consumers' behavioral intention is subject to the influences of a theme park's name recognition, i.e., a theme park with better name recognition and a more extensive range of recreational activities causes consumers to assume that the theme park can offer more fun and sensory stimuli, thus resulting in consumers' heightened willingness to visit the theme park. In a word, brand appeal enhances the public's intention to schedule a trip, which shared an identical viewpoint with that of Lin et al. (2011)[12].

Bloggers whose feelings and emotions are susceptible to contagion are predisposed to be influenced by compelling graphic and textual descriptions of blog articles and sprout the intention to visit a theme park. The results of this study verified the hypothesis that when consumers' emotions are vulnerable to influences, their intention to visit a theme park will be heightened, provided the information and recommendations about the theme park on a blog are positive and cheerful. Therefore, other than creating a positive overall experience for visitors and valuing the quality of customer services, theme parks are recommended to never underestimate bloggers' post-travel comments and to take immediate remedial measures whenever a negative review is perceived.

The results of this study indicated that blog commentaries have become an important source of information that is searched for prior to people's engagement in an activity. The ease of access to blogs has allowed cyberspace users all around the globe to have frequent interaction and rapid



dissemination of assorted types of information. The breadth of blog layouts also allows for more complete graphical and verbal content, which gives blogs the advantage of providing better comfort for readers' eyes when compared with other media. When blogs gain consumers' trust, bring convenience to consumers, and have appealing representations, they are favorable for creating a positive image for theme parks and further intensifying the public's intention to visit these theme parks. Undoubtedly, a theme park's good brand image and success in creating a positive atmosphere are also important factors that attract consumers' visits and patronage.

While many factors may influence consumers' behavioral intention, this study exclusively centered on blog research rather than encompassing diverse media such as Facebook. In light of this, researchers in the future are recommended to compare the influences of different online media on consumers' intention to visit a tourism site.

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