

WHAT WORKS IN BLOG MARKETING? FIRM CREATED, OR USER GENERATED IN 2.0 WEB: EVIDENCE FROM A DEVELOPING COUNTRY

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ABSTRACT

This study provides insight on how the firm-created communication and consumer-generated communication messages through blog does, influence the perception of consumers and is a source of lifelong learning. This research also assesses the difference in perception of male and female based on their interaction with blogs. This research also investigates whether there is a notable impact of age factor on the consumer perception and how does information available through blog influences their perception formation. An online survey of one hundred eighty one respondents from Pakistan analyzed statistically. Results suggested that firm created communication material on the blog, user-generated blog communication material, blog credibility, and trending brands on blogs are some of the factors related to blog marketing that influences the consumer perception about the brands. No significant relationship found between blog rating and complete product information availability on consumer perception whereas Blog credibility and trending brands on blogs positively affects the consumer perception about brands.

Keywords: B2C Marketing, Blog Marketing, Consumer Perception, Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

Around 40% of the world population has an internet connection today. Rapid growth in online internet users has forced the attention of companies to look towards the booming area for reaching out consumers. In the last decade, we have seen tremendous growth in the usage of social media in the cyberspace (See-To & Ho, 2014). This phenomenal success, has urged and increase the research studies on the effect of social media on the lives and behavior of people with two perspectives; first with Information systems (Pai & Arnott, 2013; Ransbotham & Kane, 2011; Gnyawali, Fan, & Penner, 2010) and second with marketing (Naylor, Lamberton, & West, 2012).

Until date, no formal classification of internet-based application is available on social media or internet literature. Yet, Constantinides and Fountain (2008), have classified social media into five categories, i.e., (i)blogs, (ii) social network sites (such as, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Google+, (iii) content communities (such as, YouTube and Wikipedia), electronic or E-Forums, and (v) content aggregators. Social networking sites among the social media categories lead, followed by Blogs and content communities.

The Internet is considered as an important mediator for increasing consumer socialization. Therefore, it is necessary to assess the influence of brand communication messages given through blogs and similar websites on the consumers' mindset (Vinerean, Cetina, Dumitrescu, & Tichindelean, 2013). It is highly important to understand the implications of the increase in interacting activities of users on the internet for brand management in the contemporary age. With web 2.0, a user can share content regarding their experience of any product or service (Lu, Chang, & Chang, 2014). Lee and Koo (2012), found that information provided by consumers review is trusted more than information provided by corporations, and probably their peer consumer evaluations affect their purchase decision.

Blogs have shifted the control of brand communication away from marketers and consumers play an important role in generating and sharing the communication messages for other consumers (Berthon, Pitt, McCarthy, & Kates, 2007). Therefore, 'online consumer reviews' are a more influential medium for communicating product/service information rather than traditional mediums (Lu et al., 2014). This has shifted the focus to consumer-driven communication approach, under which consumers' information requirement and priorities define the brand communications messages (Arnhold, 2008). Therefore, it is important to understand the implication of information shared through blogs for the brands. In addition, it is essential to examine how do consumers created communication messages influences the perception about brands. In this regard, it is important to understand preference, learning and value of blog-oriented marketing for effective brand management. A great influx of brand promotion through websites, blogs and social websites has captivated the attention of emerging companies, which aim at increasing their brand presence in the market.

Consumers look for information pertaining to a product before making

an actual purchase. This involvement increases greatly when it comes to specialized products. In this context, it is essential to assess how the availability of complete product information, blog rating by users, blog credibility, trending brands on blogs influences the consumer perception about the brand, which in turn might convince them to make a purchase decision. In addition, it is important for firms to assess the viability of putting an effort in blog marketing for effective brand management and engage consumers in a competitive environment.

The term 'blogs' is derived from weblogs, which coined in the early 1990s. The concept of blogs refers to websites containing blog posts which are written by a blogger (Dearstyne, 2005; Kumar, Novak, Raghavan, & Tomkins, 2004). Blog posts are generally categorized in different sections based on the area of relevancy and are viewable in reverse chronological order (Wright, 2005). Mainly, blogs were utilized for critique, viewpoints, opinion, and rich information sharing related to any topic or idea. Bloggers reflect their interests, opinions, or discuss the subjective elements that can be any tangible or intangible item. Blog sites can be referred to as a platform for collaboration for new or returning users to the websites (Gillett, 2007). Blogs are categorized into multiple categories based on the nature of content and objective. The most common form of blogging is personal opinion and views sharing through blogs. Another common form of blogging related to news/journalism related content sharing, which actively followed by a large segment of people who want news updates. Many companies, for the promotion of their brands, are actively pursuing Blogging. They pursue blogging to create consumer interest and engage customers for their brands (Gillett, 2007). One of the important categories of blogging relates to business and professional discussion. Another category is related to knowledge management applications and sharing information related to various topics. It includes insights and discussion on topics which influence and benefit the decision of consumers (Dearstyne, 2005).

BACKGROUND, OBJECTIVE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

With the increase in internet usage and weblogs access, consumers are shifting their focus from conventional modes of obtaining information to newer modes. Blogs, being an open and wide source of information search presents a great set of information which helps them in getting feedback about product or brand and make a purchase based on the viewpoint of others (Lawson-Borders & Kirk, 2005). Mainly, blogger tends to be considered as a specialized person who has keen expertise in evaluating

and provide input or the ones who have used the products themselves and share their experiential thoughts.

Therefore, this study provides insight on how firm-created communication and consumer-generated communication through the blog, influences the perception of consumers. In addition, it would help in understanding the impact of complete product information availability, blog rating by users, blog credibility, trending brands on blogs on the consumer perception about the brand that in turn might convince them to make a purchase decision.

This research also assesses the difference in the learning of male and female based on their interaction with blogs. This research also investigates whether there is a notable impact of age factor on the consumer learning and how does information available through blog influences their perception formation. These results can help marketers in designing their brand communication plans based on gender and age factors.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

Blogs and Blog Marketing

Wright (2005, p. 7) Defined blogs as “A website comprising blog posts, or content written by a blogger, which are typically organized into categories and sorted in reverse chronological order”. Kirby and Marsden (2006, p. 148) Defined blog marketing as “the use of weblogs to promote a brand, company, product or service, event or some other initiative”.

Blogging has altered the communication pattern of marketers and consumers (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). Through blogging and social media sites (which are commonly used for micro-blogging), buyers’ decision can be influenced for the products or services. These sites are actively used for products and services review; information shared through blogs is used by the consumers as a reference for decision making, which could be related to purchasing or recommending it to others. In addition, they can influence other buyers through blog posts and micro-blogging tweets.

It is important here to understand that blog post reviews are not the only factor which influences the perception and decision of other buyers. There are many psychosocial characteristics such as motivation, income level, demographic factors, mode of purchase, company presentation, brand value, brand promotion and preference rating through social networks and blogs (Ioană & Stoica, 2014).

Virtual communities (referred to as online groups) presence on the internet have improved the consumers, buyers, decision makers, companies, and societies access to information and communication effectiveness. Increase in blogging trend and review sites has resulted in better communication and reach to consumers (Kucuk & Krishnamurthy, 2007). Marketers are actively using digital marketing as a mean to reach the consumers and establish un-aided recall for their products or services. Social networking has further enriched these concepts by connecting millions of users across the world. Therefore, global marketing campaign mechanism has taken keen importance where firms have a limited budget and want to establish a favorable attitude among consumers for their brands.

Various blogging sites offer users an opportunity to create their individual blogs to express their opinion and views. In addition, there are organized and professional blogging options for corporates to market their products. Users actively use blogs, social networks, product information sites (such as Yelp), bulletin boards, and corporate sites to search for information. Marketers promote their brands and services through these websites such as Facebook, Digg and Yelp, as they have credible rating and acceptability across the globe and wide segment of consumers actively pursue information from these websites for their decisions related to purchase and recommendation. (Sin, Nor, & Al-Agaga, 2012; Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011). Marketers, bloggers, and consumers share ideas, reviews, and assessments for a given service, brand, or product through these sites. Therefore, it is viewed as quick information sources by consumers when making a decision to purchase products for the first time or indulge in making a decision for the purchase of a new product or brand (Kozinets, 2002). The immense popularity of blogging sites has transfigured the marketing practices of brand promotion and advertising (Hanna et al., 2011). Blog advertising has gained popularity among consumers from the point of information search and marketers from the point of reaching consumers. These sites have actively played their role in influencing the consumer behavior; product search to post-purchase behavior have been the elements of discussion on blogs. Consumer share their experiences, causes of satisfaction or dissatisfaction about a brand, service or a product (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Weblogs, being the great influencers have been an interesting point for companies. It provides opportunities to businesses for engaging and interacting with the consumers, increase familiarity of their brands,

increase confidence and build favorable attitude for their brands (Davis Mersey, Malthouse, & Calder, 2010). However, mixed reactions have been observed for the preference of blogs as an effective tool in establishing the product appeal (Fitzgerald, 2007).

Major media companies sell the advertising content on blogs created by renowned personalities or entities. For example, 'DealBook' blog page of The New York Times has attracted a lot of advertising. Moreover, Intel Corp. and Paramount pictures have displayed their brands on David Carr's blog 'The Carpetbagger' (Fitzgerald, 2007). Many companies now display their brands through various media companies which provide advertising space on different websites, such as Samsung mobile are showcasing their smartphone brand on various technology blog sites through Google AdSense (Yang, 2011).

Companies are leveraging the traditional communication channel with an online environment to reach consumers and shape their behavior (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Companies are promoting their brands and creating awareness through blogs. They can provide plenty of information related to their brand offering which is used by consumers in attitude formation towards any brand (Williams & Williams, 2008). A survey conducted by Deloitte USA reported that 62% of consumers in the USA read online reviews before purchasing any new brand or trying a new product. 98% of respondents considered the reviews as reliable despite assessing their validity; and more than 80% consumers buying intention was influenced by the reviews given on blogs (Pookulangara & Koesler, 2011). Witnessing the potential in the blog advertising and role of social media blogs in influencing the consumers, nearly every big company has its presence on blog sites, either it is Facebook, Yelp, Twitter or any other blog sites (Smith, Fischer, & Yongjian, 2012).

Corporate presence on blogs to attract consumers and strengthening their brand recognition through blog communication has posted merits and demerits. Ioană and Stoica (2014), stated that many users post negative views about the brand of a company, which affect the brand image in the eyes of people who were not aware of the brand earlier. Brand communication messages by the company and users help in creating favorable as well as the unfavorable brand image for the users who read information on blogs before taking any decision related to purchase or recommendation (ibid). Previous research has indicated that even a small amount of negative information from a few postings can have substantial impacts on consumer attitudes (Schlosser, 2005).

Consumer Perception

Schiffman and Kanuk (2007, p. 172), define consumer perception as “The process by which an individual select, organizes, and interprets stimuli into a meaningful context based on his expectations, values, and needs”. Consumers use social networks in daily life for various reasons. Most of them want to maintain relationships with relatives or colleagues/friends. Maintaining interpersonal connectivity between online users of a social media channel has benefits derived from establishing and maintaining contact with other people in a manner of giving social support, friendship, and intimacy (Smudde, 2005). These allow users to connect with peers by adding them to networks of friends, which facilitates communication, particularly among peer groups (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003). Online groups exert a noticeable influence on the behavior and consumer buying intent and implicitly on the purchase decision. For example, social media websites provide a public forum that gives individual consumers their own voice; as well access to product information that facilitates their purchase decisions (Kozinets, De Valck, Wojnicki, & Wilner, 2010).

Shopping has always been a social experience and social networking allows consumers to interact with individuals—many of whom are likely strangers when we talk about online. Cultural aspects have an influence on consumers’ usage of social networks and a great impact on the online purchase intentions (Pookulangara & Koesler, 2011). Due to the advantages of social media in connecting businesses directly to end-consumers, in a timely manner and at a low cost (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), has been seen that a great influence on customer perceptions and behaviors (Williams & Cothrel, 2000), and has been brought in the center of attention in different industries in the last few years. Based on the above background, literature survey and objectives of research, the author formulated following hypotheses:

H₁: Firm-created blog communication material positively influences the consumer perception about brands.

H₂: User-generated blog communication material positively influences the consumer perception about brands.

H₃: Availability of complete product information on blogs influences consumer perception formation.

H₄: Higher blog rating by users helps in positive perception formation about brands.

H₅: Blog credibility positively influences the consumer perception about brands.

H₆: Trending brands on blogs positively affect the consumer perception about brands.

H₇: There is a significant difference between male and female in the learning perception about brands based on their interaction with blogs.

H₈: There is a significant difference between teenagers and adults in the learning perception about brands based on the information available through blogs.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Participants and Methods of Data Collection

An online questionnaire was developed to conduct a survey to assess the impact of blog marketing variables on consumer perception. Data was collected using the online approach as it was quick, easy to administer, and flexible based on the time requirement in gathering data and approach the relevant respondents. The questionnaire was developed using a free survey website by google survey and links shared through social media platforms like Facebook and Google+.

Data was collected using ‘convenience sampling’ method that is a non-probability based sampling technique. The scope of the data collection was limited to Pakistani nationals. The focus on the survey was to target respondents who have been using the internet and have access to blog sites for information gathering and sharing purpose. Convenience sampling approach was adopt considering the easiness to approach relevant population segment and the time factor. No incentives were offered to encourage participation in the survey. It solely based on the respondent’s interest to share their views.

More than 300 potential respondents were shared the online questionnaire link to participate in the survey. However, only 181 people filled the online questionnaire, so the response rate was 60.3 %. The sample selected for the survey include people who are using the internet and spend their time seeking information online related to different brands before either taking any decision, related to purchase, or recommending it to others.

Instrument of Data Collection

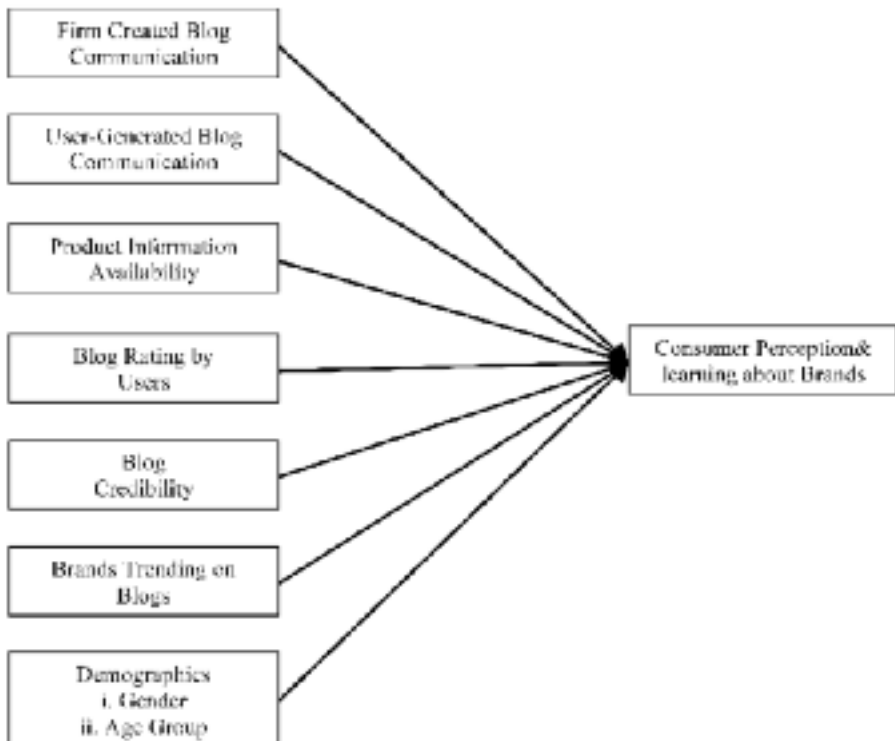
Data collected using a structured questionnaire. Likert scale items were developed to measure the consumer perception about brands, firm-created blog communication, user-generated blog communication, product information availability, blog rating by users, blog’s credibility, and brands

trending on blogs. Twenty-Seven (27) scale items are defining these seven (7) variables. All items measured on a five-point Likert scale. Respondents also answered demographic information, which includes gender, age, income level, and occupational status. Apart from the entire question, additional five (5) general questions were included related to whether respondents follow any blogs, the frequency of visiting the blogs, and the product categories for which they seek information through blogs.

RESEARCH MODEL

The diagram below displays the conceptual research model that is been tested in this research study. Firm-created blog communication, user-generated blog communication, product information availability, blog rating by users, blog's credibility, brands trending on blogs are independent variables of the research. Consumer perception about brands based on their online interaction with the blogs is the dependent variables. Demographics used as a moderator variable in the study; differential in consumer perception based on gender and age group factor has been assessed in the study.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework (Author Compilation)



RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

The total sample size for the survey was 181. Only duly filled questionnaires were included in the analysis. In terms of gender participation in the survey, males dominated the representation in the survey. Sample mix include 63% representation of males and 37% females. Respondents were categorized into two groups based on age factor; i.e. Youngsters (age less than 30 years) and Adults (age more than 30 years). 49.7% sample has the representation of youngsters and 51% sample have the representation of adults. The below mentioned table shows the segregation of the sample based on demographic characteristics.

Table 1. Demographic Profile

Items	Frequency	%		Frequency	%
Gender			Income Level		
Male	114	63%	Less than 25,000	34	19%
Female	67	37%	25,001-50,000	70	39%
			50,001-75,000	51	29%
			75,001-100,000	19	9%
			More than 100,000	7	4%
Age			Occupational Status		
Less than 20 Years	27	11%	Employed	115	64%
20-30 Years	63	40%	Self-Employed	29	16%
31-40 Years	49	30%	Housewife	16	9%
41-50 Years	28	14%	Student	19	10%
More than 50 Years	14	5%	Unemployed	2	1%
Total	181	100%		181	100%

Reliability Analysis

The questionnaire included 27 Likert scale statements to capture users' responses for the 6 independent variables and 1 dependent variable. In order to assess the internal consistency between the data variables items and the reliability scores for the variables, Cronbach's alpha was determined. 'Firm created communication material' and 'Consumer perception' variable items have the highest internal consistency with scores of 0.86 and 0.84 respectively. All variables have internal consistency score, which is higher than the satisfactory level.

Table 2. Reliability Analysis & Collinearity Statistics

Variable	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Tolerance	VIF
Firm-created blog communication	4	0.860	0.868	1.153
User-generated blog communication material	4	0.756	0.711	1.406
Blog credibility	4	0.796	0.532	1.878
Trending brands on blogs	3	0.761	0.585	1.710
Consumer Perception	6	0.844		

Above table shows the multi-collinearity test score for the independent variables having a notable impact on the variable ‘consumer perception’. None of the variables shows inter-correlation as they have tolerance score of more than 0.2 and Variance Inflation Factor score of less than 05. Therefore, none of these variables had inter-correlation.

Correlation Test

In order to determine the relationship between independent variables (firm-created blog communication, user-generated blog communication, product information availability, blog rating by users, blog credibility, and brands trending on blogs) and the dependent variable (i.e. consumer’s perception about brands), Spearman’s Rho correlation test has been used. All variables were measured on a scale of 1 to 5; therefore, Spearman’s Rho correlation test was applicable. Results showed that firm-created blog communication, user-generated blog communication, blog credibility, and brands trending on blogs significantly correlated with consumer perception about brands. These variables have a varied but moderate relationship with the dependent variable as shown in the table below. However, no significant relationship found between product information availability, blog rating by users and consumers’ perception.

Table 3. Correlation Test

Variable	Spearman’s Rho	Sig.	N
Firm-created blog communication	.367**	.000	181
User-generated blog communication	.335**	.000	181
Product information availability	.129	.141	181
Blog rating by users	-.083	.345	181
Blog’s credibility	.391**	.000	181
Brands trending on blogs	.490**	.000	181

Notes: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

Testing Hypotheses 1-6. Multiple Linear Regression

In order to test hypothesis 1-7, multiple linear regression technique has been applied to determine the impact of independent variables (firm-created blog

communication, user-generated blog communication, product information availability, blog rating by users, blog’s credibility, brands trending on blogs) on the dependent variable (consumer perception about blogs). MLR (multiple linear regression) test model has appeared significant with scores of (F=34.489, p=0.000) which shows that model is useful. R-square (coefficient of determination) has a score of 0.523, which suggests that all significant independent variables explain 52.3% variation on the dependent variable, i.e. Consumer perception about brands.

Table 4. Multiple Linear Regression Test – Consumer Perception about Brands

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
.723 ^a	0.523	0.507	0.5146	34.489	.000 ^a

Stepwise MLR test technique was applied using the SPSS 19 software. It automatically ignores the insignificant variables to improve the effectiveness of the model in sequence. Test result shows that 4 independent variables i.e. firm-created blog communication (t=2.593, sig =0.011), user-generated blog communication (t=2.814, sig =0.006), blog’s credibility (t=2.997, sig.=0.003), and brands trending on blogs (t=4.032, sig.=0.000) have significant impact on the consumer perception about the brands (as shown in Table 5). However, product information availability (t=-0.090, sig =0.928) and blog rating by users (t=-1.779, sig =0.078) did not produce any significant results for the consumer perception (as shown in Table 5). Therefore, hypotheses 1, 2, 5, and 6 are accepted and supported. Whereas, hypotheses 3 and 4 are rejected. Unstandardized coefficient (B) results show that trending brands on blogs (b=0.332) contribute more to the dependent variable followed by the blog credibility factor (b=0.309).

Table 5. Multiple Linear Regression Test – Included Variables

Independent Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	95.0% Confidence Interval for B			
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	-.260	.385		-.675	.501	-1.021	.502
Firm Created MCommunication Material	.155	.060	.171	2.593	.011	.037	.274
User Generated Communication Material	.270	.096	.205	2.814	.006	.080	.460
Trending Brands on Blogs	.332	.082	.325	4.032	.000	.169	.495
Blog Credibility	.309	.103	.253	2.997	.003	.105	.512

Table 6. Multiple Linear Regression Test – Excluded Variables

Independent Variables	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig.
Product Info Availability	-0.006	-0.090	.928
Higher Blog Rating	-0.111	-1.779	.078

Based on the results, the conclusion was that firm-created blog communication material, user-generated blog communication material, blog credibility, and trending brands on blogs positively affects the consumer perception about brands. Whereas, no notable relationship identified for the complete product information availability, and higher blog rating with respect to influencing the consumer perception formation about brands based on their interaction with blogs.

Testing Hypotheses 7-8. Independent Sample t-test

Hypotheses 7 and 8 aims at determining the differences between the male and female, and youngsters and adults’ learning about brands based on their interaction with blogs to gather information about various brands. Therefore, independent sample t-test was used for both hypotheses as it helps in determining the significance of the difference between two independent groups. In the case of hypothesis 7, male and female; and in the case of hypothesis 8, youngsters and adults. Below mentioned table presents the group statistics for the differences between these two independent groups.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Demographic Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Consumer Learning Perception About Brands	Male	4.0806	.70196	0.077
	Female	3.9921	.78896	0.011
	Youngsters	4.0851	0.72645	0.084
	Adults	4.0002	0.74573	0.098

In order to test the variance equality, Levene’s test for equality of variance was used for both hypotheses testing. Results showed that data variance for male and female is insignificant ($F=0.564$, $sig =0.454$) with respect to perception level. Similarly, data variance for youngsters and adults is also insignificant ($F=0.177$, $sig =0.675$) with respect to perception level. This signifies that variance is equal for data set of both groups.

The t-test for equality of means (equal variance) shows insignificant results for the perception level difference between male and female ($t=0.664$, $df=179$, $sig =0.508$). This suggests that there is no notable difference in the perception

level of male and female and representation from both groups is likely to exhibit similar perception based on their interaction with blogs. Also, no significant difference has been proved between youngsters and adults with respect to their perception level about brands based on the interaction with blogs. Results appeared insignificant ($t=0.656$, $df=179$, $sig =0.513$) suggesting no valuable difference. Therefore, hypotheses 7 and 8 both not supported.

Table 8. Independent Sample Test

Variables	Levene's Test		t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
<i>Consumer Learning Perception about Brands – Gender</i>	.564	.454	.664	179	.508	.08852	.13325
<i>Consumer learning Perception about Brands – Age Group</i>	.177	.675	.656	179	.513	.08496	.12951

Hypotheses Assessment Summary

Table 9. Hypotheses Assessment Status

Hypotheses	Testing Specifications		Empirical Conclusion
	<i>t-statistics</i>	<i>Prob.</i>	
<i>H1: Firm-created blog communication material positively influences the consumer perception about brands.</i>	2.593	0.011	Supported
<i>H2: User-generated blog communication material positively influences the consumer perception about brands.</i>	2.814	0.006	Supported
<i>H3: Availability of complete product information on blogs influences consumer perception formation.</i>	-0.090	0.928	Not Supported
<i>H4: Higher blog rating by users helps in positive perception formation about brands.</i>	-1.779	0.078	Not Supported
<i>H5: Blog credibility positively influences the consumer perception about brands.</i>	2.997	0.003	Supported
<i>H6: Trending brands on blogs positively affects the consumer perception about brands.</i>	4.032	0.000	Supported
<i>H7: There is a significant difference between male and female in the learning perception about brands based on their interaction with blogs.</i>	.664	.508	Not Supported
<i>H8: There is a significant difference between teenagers and adults in the learning perception about brands based on the information available through blogs.</i>	.656	.513	Not Supported

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This research provides ample insight into the impact of blog communication material in influencing the consumer perception about the brands. Firms which are aiming at forming a positive perception about their must target the potential consumers through blogs. In contemporary marketing environment, digital media role is very important as a large number of people are now using electronic media to gather information about products (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). People aim at gaining sufficient information before actually buying a product. Blogs and social websites play an important role as consumers can reach actual users of the brand who share information about their experience and help shape consumer perception.

This study suggests that the information provided by the firms on blogs about their brands play an important role in shaping the consumer perception. In addition, consumer-generated material such as product reviews and recommendation articles play an important role in forming the consumer perception (Smith, Fischer, & Yongjian, 2012). Firms should target those blogs and social websites that have higher credibility among consumers as it sends a positive message about their brand image. In addition, those brands that are greatly discussed on blogs or which a group of people is favoring tends to create a positive impact on the consumer perception level about the brands.

This research also suggests that male and female, youngsters and adults are equally likely to be influenced by the blog communication messages and are likely to perceive information in a similar manner. Therefore, marketers are not required to categorize their communication messages separately for gender and age differences. Based on gender and age, men and women are likely to form a perception about brands in a similar manner based on their interaction with blogs to gather information about brands.

Research results suggest that material provided by the firms about their brands, information shared by consumers about the brands, blogs' credibility, and the brands, which are trending on blogs, tend to have a notable impact on the consumer perception about the brands. This shows that firms should focus on sharing information about their brands using blogs, which tend to have higher credibility and better acceptance among consumers. Consumers actively search for information about the brands using blogs and look for information that was shared by other consumers to assess the brand quality and image based on their experience.

The research did not provide concrete evidence with respect to differences in the perception of male and female, who access blogs for information about brands. In addition, no such difference reported for youngsters and adults. Therefore, it was assumed that all people falling under these categories are likely to exhibit similar traits with respect to accessing and evaluating the information. Firms may target both groups with similar marketing communication messages using blogs to influence the perception of consumers about their brands.

Blog marketing should be the key marketing aspect of brand communication strategy as it helps in shaping consumer perception about brands. It is important to provide ample information to potential consumers through blogs as it accompanies by users' experience information. In particular, consumers tend to focus on firm provided information, information and review information shared by consumers, evaluate the blogs credibility and trending brands. Therefore, firms need to focus on marketing brands through blogs that have higher credibility among consumers as it would help in forming a better perception about the brands. Marketing messages accompanied by consumer-shared information enhance the effectiveness of blog marketing campaign.

This research did not assess the impact for a specific kind of product or from a particular category. Therefore, in future, researchers can focus on assessing the impact of blog marketing for different product categories. Also, it is important to assess the impact of blog marketing on consumers' intention to indulge in the purchase and recommend it to others. In addition, consumers' education level, income level and other demographic characteristics impact on consumer perception level would be of significant importance to assess.

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