Target and position article

A comparative study of corporate user-generated media behavior: Cross-cultural B2B context☆

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ABSTRACT

Because blogging is become more prevalent in both personal and professional contexts, many companies obtain useful information from user-generated media (e.g., blogs). Due to the significant growth of this phenomenon, businesses in developed (e.g., United States) and developing countries (e.g., Kuwait) have become more engaged in the blogging behavior of their employees.

The main objectives of this study are: (1) to lay the groundwork for understanding the critical factors that lead to corporate bloggers' stickiness to corporate user-generated media sites (e.g., corporate blogs or corporate social media accounts) and (2) to understand organizations' awareness of the potential liabilities resulting from the actions of managers or employees in violation of different laws when blogging for the company. The study uses survey data collected from managers in the United States (U.S.) and Kuwait to meet these objectives.

Five hypotheses are tested in this study. The results of the structural model indicate that corporate bloggers' attitude, corporate bloggers' subjective norm, and corporate bloggers' perceived behavioral control are positively related to corporate bloggers' stickiness to blog. The results also suggest that corporate bloggers' perceived behavioral control leads to corporate bloggers' commitment to blog. Finally, the results indicate that corporate bloggers' stickiness to blog is a positive predictor of corporate bloggers' commitment to blog.

The results further suggest that corporate bloggers' stickiness to blog partially mediates the relationship between corporate bloggers' perceived behavioral control and their commitment to blog. Overall, the results of the structural model for the U.S. and Kuwait samples generate similar findings. The implications of this research offer potential theoretical and managerial contributions for both the U.S. and Kuwait.

1. Introduction

A recent phenomenon - the weblog - has emerged as one of the greatest tools of the Internet age. This phenomenon is more commonly known as a blog (Lovink, 2013). It is a regularly updated website-based journal consisting of entries that contain commentary, event descriptions, links to other websites, and other information pertaining to a particular interest or set of interests (Li & Du, 2011; Stephen & Galak, 2012). The current study uses the term "blog" to refer to different user-generated media tools such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram because each website utilizes a form of blogging activity.

User-generated media (e.g., blogs) is becoming one of the most effective methods for Internet users to communicate and share information with others (Singh, Veron-Jackson, & Cullinane, 2008; Whitting & Williams, 2013; Zhao & Rosson, 2009). For organizations, user-generated media sites present a safe way of communicating thoughts and ideas with organization consumers, business partners, marketing intermediaries, etc. In this study, we use the term "corporate user-generated media sites" to refer to a company's official blog, Twitter, Instagram or Facebook account. These websites serve as a novel way of publishing information by or with the support of an organization. In addition, a typical corporate user-generated media site combines text, images, links to other blogs, and other media related to its topic to share content with its users.

Corporate user-generated media sites have changed the face of communication, bringing new opportunities and earning potential to many organizations and people as they occupy a new area in the Internet genre (Dawson, 2007; Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2004). With millions of established corporate blogs on the Internet and thousands of new blogs created daily, this information medium has the potential to become the largest marketing tool for organizations to connect with their customers and business partners.

A recent eMarketers (an online research company) study indicated that from 2008 to 2014 the number of blog readers in the United States (U.S.) grew from 91.4 million to 150.4 million, whereas the number of U.S. companies using blogs for marketing purposes grew from 25% (in 2008) to 43% (in 2014). Even though the number of companies using blogs to communicate within and outside an organization has increased in the U.S., businesses in general lack the awareness of the factors that drive employees to use a company's user-generated media site, the company's official blog or Twitter, Instagram or Facebook account, and the potential liabilities created by these user-generated media sites. Moreover, questions remain as to what extent these conclusions can be applied to other countries, particularly less developed or developing nations such as Kuwait.

Even though user-generated media is continuously growing in popularity and has become an increasingly important method for companies to connect with organizational customers and business partners, only a handful of scholarly research has been conducted on corporate blogging activity (Ahuja & Medury, 2010; Huang, Yung, & Yang, 2011; Thakur, Summey, & John, 2013; Weil, 2010). Furthermore, this research has focused on weblog content (Kaye, 2005) and the technological aspects of blogging (e.g., Gordon, 2006; Scoble & Israel, 2006; Thakur et al., 2013). However, presumably none of the previous research has discussed the critical factors (e.g., corporate bloggers' attitude, corporate bloggers' subjective norm, and corporate bloggers' perceived behavioral control) that enhance the stickiness and commitment to blog for the firm/corporation. By applying two important theories from social psychology, Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the present study examines how these critical factors shape corporate bloggers' stickiness and their commitment to a company's user-generated media sites from a cross-cultural business perspective, such as a developed economy like the U.S. versus a developing economy like Kuwait (Tables 2 and 4).

In this study, a developed economy (U.S.) and a developing economy (Kuwait) are examined because of the following reasons: (1) these countries differ culturally and in overall business systems. For example, the U.S. is an individualistic society/culture whereas Kuwait is a collectivistic society/culture; (2) in the last five years, the number of U.S. companies adopting user-generated media for marketing purposes has grown significantly because it helps generate more leads for both business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) companies. For example, B2B marketers that use blogs generate 67% more leads, and B2C companies that blog generate 88% more leads per month than those that do not (Edgecomb, 2016). However, firms in Kuwait are still in the early stages of effectively using these user-generated media sites for marketing purposes. For example, only 55% of businesses in Kuwait have a corporate blog. Out of the businesses that have blogs, < 20% use it for marketing purposes (Kuwait Times, 2017a,b); (3) Kuwait is more similar to the U.S. in terms of having a high literacy rate (96.2% vs. 99%) and GDP per capita; and (4) a review of the literature reveals that the majority of research on corporate blogs has been conducted in the U.S. and other developed Western countries (please refer to Table 1). A comparative study to understand managerial perceptions about the critical factors that lead to corporate bloggers' stickiness and their commitment to blog between a developed (e.g., U.S.) and a developing (e.g., Kuwait) economy will enhance the generalizability of the findings of this research on a larger population.

The reason why Kuwait is used in this study is because of three reasons: (1) it is an emerging economy (second most free economy) in the middle east by pursuing the policies of economic liberalization and is well positioned to become a regional leader (Bandow, 2017). It is the fourth richest country in the world per capita, the 5th largest sovereign wealth fund in the world, emerging as a country of immense industrial power and it is becoming an attractive alternative for foreign investors. This showcases that Kuwait has a leading position in the financial industry in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), yet very little is known about the Kuwaiti managerial perception about corporate blogs; (2) the

Table 1
Sampling of previous corporate blog studies.

Authors(s)	Journal	Examined	Industry examined	Country analysis	Method
Iglesias-Pradas et al. (2017)	Information Systems Management	Employees' acceptance of corporate Web 2.0 applications for collaboration and knowledge sharing.	IT industry	Madrid	Survey
Hernández-García et al. (2016)	Journal of Business Research	Factors that lead to acceptance or refusal to use corporate blogs in companies.	IT industry	Madrid	Survey
Thakur et al. (2013)	Journal of Consumer Marketing	Factors that affect bloggers attitude	IT industry	U.S.A.	Survey
Chua et al. (2012)	Journal of Applied Business Research	Impact of trust on corporate blogs	Service industry	New Zealand	Quantitative (personal interviews)
Sepp et al. (2011)	Journal of Marketing Management	Perceived gratification of private bloggers	IT industry	Estonia	Quantitative (personal interviews)
Hsu and Tsou (2011)	International Journal of Information Management	Understand customer experience in online blog environment.	Service industry	Taiwan	Survey
Huang et al. (2011)	Journal of Vacation Marketing	It explores travel blog marketing channel strategies.	Tourism	Taiwan	Quantitative (personal interviews)
Kozinets et al. (2010)	Journal of Marketing	Understand WOM marketing in online communities	IT industry	U.S.A.	Quantitative (personal interviews)
Vandana Ahuja and Yajulu Medury (2010)	Database Marketing & Customer Strategy Management	Understand the ability of an organization to use its corporate blog as an e-CRM tool to induce customer engagement.	IT industry	U.S.A.	Survey
Mack et al. (2008)	Journal of Vacation Marketing	To test whether consumer perceive corporate blogs to be credible sources of information	Tourism	U.S.A.	Survey
Lee et al. (2006)	Management Decision	How fortune 500 firms attempt to maintain control, while supporting employee autonomy in corporate blogging.	IT industry	U.S.A.	Content analysis of corporate blogs.