

Understanding the Role of Blogger Recommendations on Consumer Purchasing Behavior

By DHOHA ALSALEH*

This study examines the influence of the perceived usefulness of blogger recommendations, the blog reader's confidence in them, and the reputation of bloggers on consumers' purchasing attitudes and intentions. A model is proposed, based on the theory of reasoned action (TRA) and the technology acceptance model (TAM) empirically examined with a primary dataset of 439 blog readers in Kuwait. Perceived usefulness of blogger recommendations, confidence, and reputation had influential effects on blog users' purchasing attitudes and intentions. Confidence in bloggers significantly influences perceived usefulness of blogger recommendations. The reputation of bloggers had a significant positive direct effect on confidence in bloggers.

Keywords: Blog, Attitude, Consumer Behavior, Perceived Usefulness, Recommendations

JEL Classification: D00, D01, D02, D03, D04

I. Introduction

Blogging is considered a leading online medium that influences the purchasing decisions of people globally (Schroeder, 2014). Consumers are technologically enabled and informed on the practicality in their purchasing decisions (Cina, 1989). The consumer and seller association is constantly changing with greater technological empowerment on both sides. These factors have fundamentally changed consumer expectations, motivated demand for improvements, developed more personalized and innovative products, and resulted in better experiences and services. Consumers seek experiences that are personalized to their individual needs while shopping. In today's retailing era, creating and maintaining a superior consumer experience are identified as the main objectives of many firms (Hong, 2015).

Information delivery sources have significantly changed along with the technological empowerment by the internet. It has been demonstrated that consumers usually trust bloggers and reviewers more than salespeople and corporations. Bloggers have become reliable online presenters due to their sustained efforts in several fields (Hsu *et al.*, 2010). Bloggers are likely to use information suggested by the associated consumers to evaluate the services or products before they make a purchasing decision (Al-Haidari, 2016). Web 2.0 tools can be used by consumers to share their experience and information, and to purchase across several platforms, including online

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communities, websites, personal blogs, and independent websites. Whenever online consumers share experience-based information on a specific product, other consumers can review their input to assess the attributes of a product before purchasing it (Elmorshidy *et al.*, 2015).

In recent years, blogging has been considered to be the most common and prominent platform for recording and presenting ideas and reactions related to any specific life event (Hsu *et al.*, 2013). It has been observed by Singer (2009) that an average of 900,000 news articles are being posted daily on blogs. In particular, people blog their comments frequently after using any product or service to share their views with others. Wegert (2010) indicated that 81 percent of consumers seek recommendations from bloggers before purchasing any product through an online website. 74 percent of the people who had taken the recommendations and advice found them influential in purchasing any product or service. Consequently, blogging has evidently become an important factor for consumers before they purchase products or services and make purchasing decisions.

In recent years, blogging has been developed as a popular media source for sharing thoughts, feelings, and ideas linked to particular events. People share their personal experiences such as traveling or hobbies on a personal website, and also share their reviews after using products. While the literature related to the impact of blogging is growing at this time, an understanding of the impact of blogging is still under-documented in Arab countries (Rouibah, 2014). The main objective of this study is to understand whether trust in the blogger, reputation of the blogger, and belief in blog usefulness influence Arab consumers' purchasing attitudes and intentions.

This study has combined the theory of reasoned action (TRA) (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) with the technology acceptance model (TAM) (Davis, 1989) to understand factors that influence consumer attitudes toward blogger recommendations. While TRA has been highly influential in explaining attitude-intention-behavior relations, TAM was specifically designed to predict and explain a user's acceptance of an innovative information system. TAM theorizes that an individual's behavioral intention to adopt a particular piece of technology (blogs) is determined by the person's attitude toward the use of the technology. Attitude, in turn, is determined by two beliefs: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. On the other hand, TRA is an intention model from social psychology that is concerned with the primary determinants of behavior (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). According to TRA, attitude toward the behavior is determined by the person's salient beliefs about the consequences of performing the behavior multiplied by the evaluation of those consequences. Subjective norms have to do with one's perceptions that referent groups and individuals believe certain behaviors should or should not be performed (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975).

The current study has used elements from both TRA and TAM because TAM alone fails to take into account other important characteristics of bloggers. For example, TAM assumes that information systems are used in organizational settings to improve the efficiency of workers. It excludes the fact that information systems could be used outside organizational settings by individual users, and such usage can also be influenced by other users. TAM does not address the roles of other users in influencing an individual's attitude toward bloggers, and consequently the usage intention. This is problematic, since numerous psychological studies prove that individuals' behavior is influenced by the behavior of other people surrounding them. Therefore, current research builds upon previous studies of TAM and TRA to explain consumer attitudes toward blogger recommendations to purchase products and services.

Many studies have comparatively demonstrated that blogger recommendations would have a strong and influential effect on marketing to consumers (Pavlou, 2003; Chau *et al.*, 2007). Consumers have been observed to believe that blogs are more trustworthy as compared to

traditional media (Johnson and Kaye, 2009). The findings are expected to facilitate and clarify the most effective marketing strategies for targeting Arab customers and promoting products and services in Arab regions. It is expected that blogger recommendations are likely to assist Arab consumers in their purchasing decisions, and the result may also contribute to providing assistance to marketing managers. This study is organized as follows: Section II provides the theoretical framework of the research and develops the research hypotheses; Section III describes the research methodology; Section IV provides the results of the study; Section V provides discussion and conclusion of the study and Section VI discusses limitations and future research.

III. Theoretical Framework and Research Hypotheses

Blogging consists of the writer's comments, brief texts, images, and links structured in sequential order. As mentioned by Zhao and Kumar (2013), over 1.2 million users post blogs every day through the communication procedures that interchange comments between several different blogs. In comparison to the activities related to blogging, micro-blogging can be considered as a quick and easier way to communicate short messages from a mobile device or computer. The use of micro-blogging has been found increasing to 62 percent between the years 2009-2011. Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook can be considered as examples of micro-blogging tools.

Mikalef *et al.* (2013) have discussed consumers' perceptions of social media. A theoretical framework has also been suggested by Hsu and Tsou (2011) that outlined the association among consumer experience, purchasing intention, and information credibility in the blogging environment. The study indicated that customer experiences have a significant influence on purchasing intentions due to information accountability. Hence, information accountability may be crucial for enhancing consumer experiences, which is essential to strengthening purchasing intentions.

Hsu *et al.* (2013) have examined the effects of blogger recommendations on the purchasing attitudes of customers and analyzed the level of trust that consumers have in blogger suggestions for specific products and services. The results indicate that there is a significant persuasive effect on the purchasing behavior of online consumers based on the perceived usefulness of a blogger's suggestions and trustworthiness.

A significant literature has examined the impact of blogger recommendations on consumer purchasing attitudes and intentions in Western countries (Goldsmith and Horowitz, 2006; Riegner, 2007); however, limited research has been conducted to examine the influence of blogger recommendations in Arab countries (e.g., Kuwait) (Al-Roomi, 2007; Riquelme and Saeid, 2014). It can be argued that what is effective in non-Arab countries may or may not be effective in Arab countries due to the cultural and social environment. Factors such as language, religion, education, social norms, tradition, morale, social class structure, social diversity, pattern of living (e.g., Bedouin, rural, and urban), expressiveness and social interaction, family, and group relations are a few examples of how/why peoples' behavior may vary from culture to culture (Ein-Dor *et al.*, 1993; Barakat, 1993; Hofstede, 1984). Moreover, Barakat (1993) identified a number of value orientations that indicate the complexity and contradictory nature of comparing developed countries with less developed countries such as Arab countries (e.g., past oriented/future oriented, conformity/creativity, collectivity/individuality, open/closed mindedness, and culture of the mind/culture of the heart).

Arabs use different social media sites to generate information and share ideas (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). For example, across the Arab world, there are over 1.3 million active Twitter

users; Kuwait reached 8 percent among Arab nations, ahead of Bahrain at 4 percent, Qatar at 2 percent, the UAE at 2 percent and Saudi Arabia at 1 percent. Also, data show that Arab nations mostly use Facebook and Instagram in social media channels (87 percent and 84 percent, respectively) (*Arab Social Media Report*, 2015). Other reports indicate that 70 percent of Kuwait youth have been found to actively participate in social network sites (*Arab Youth Survey*, 2010), and that the youth of Kuwait have been described as Internet active (Wheeler, 2001 and 2003). Moreover, Kuwait has the highest percentage of social media users in the Middle East (*Kuwait News*, 2013).

In the current research, the role of blogger recommendations on consumer purchasing behavior has been investigated in a smaller platform in Kuwait. It is expected that blogger recommendations would be useful for analyzing consumers' buying behavior in Kuwait. However, no research has yet been conducted to investigate the factors influencing consumer purchasing reactions to blogger recommendations. Therefore, this study aims to explore the factors that can affect consumer purchasing attitudes and intentions, taking into consideration the influence of blogger recommendations.

A. Research Hypotheses

The study examines the role of the following key constructs to evaluate the impact of blogger recommendations (see Figure 1).

A.1 Perceived Usefulness of Blogger Recommendations

Perceived usefulness is defined as the extent to which a person believes that using a technological innovation will enhance his/her job performance (Davis *et al.*, 1989). In the blogging context, this study redefined perceived usefulness as the degree to which a blog reader believes that blogger recommendations and reviews would enhance his/her buying decision, particularly when purchasing expensive, new, or complex products. A common explanation states that buying expensive, new, or complex products would create uncertainty; individuals are generally uncomfortable with uncertainty and will tend to refer to blogger recommendations for support in reducing the risks of their buying decisions (Burkhardt and Brass, 1990; Brown and Reingen, 1987; Kotler and Makens, 2010). It goes back to the theory of reasoned action (TRA), in which an individual may develop beliefs by referring to information from or normative practices of a group and peers. Consequently, these beliefs will influence individual behavioral intention.

Examining the literature on consumer behavior shows that reference groups influence consumer purchasing behavior (Bearden and Etzel, 1982; Childers and Rao, 1992; Engel *et al.*, 1995). Many other previous studies have empirically confirmed that perceived usefulness has significant effects on attitude and intention (Hsu and Lu, 2004; Lin and Lu, 2000; Yu *et al.*, 2005). Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H₁: *Perceived usefulness of blogger recommendations will positively affect blog readers' attitudes toward purchasing products/services.*

H₂: *Perceived usefulness of blogger recommendations will positively affect blog readers' intentions to purchase products/services.*

A.2 Trust

Trust (T) can be defined, in general terms, as being a firm reliance on the integrity, ability, or character of a person or thing (Gefen, 2002; McKnight *et al.*, 2002a). In the blog context, trust is defined by Doney and Cannon (1997) as “perceived credibility and benevolence of a target of trust (i.e., the other party: in this study, the target of trust is the blogger)”. This definition of trust is relevant to an online (blogging) context. Trust issues have emerged as major consumer concerns. Blogs are considered by online users as a highly credible source amongst all sources in different media (Johnson and Kaye, 2009). In addition, previous studies indicate that trust is an important factor for successful online transactions (Salo and Karjaluoto, 2007), and is also a key for attracting and retaining customers and obtaining competitive advantage on the internet (McKnight *et al.*, 2002b).

A careful review of the literature reveals several influences of trust on consumers. For example, previous studies have confirmed that trust is strongly associated with attitude and purchasing behavior in online transactions (Kuan and Bock, 2007; Pavlou, 2003). Similarly, past studies have empirically verified that trust significantly affects attitudes of consumers (Suh and Han, 2002; Wu and Chen, 2005). Moreover, studies such as Lim *et al.* (2006) and Hsiao *et al.* (2010) also noted that trust positively influences consumers’ attitudes and shopping intentions. Therefore, bloggers are needed to provide trust-related mechanisms to encourage blog readers to adopt blogger recommendations.

A stable and consistent review along with recommendations, continuous interaction between the blogger and blog readers, unambiguous and clear reviews, and knowledgeable blogs are some of the practices required to build the blog reader-blogger trust relationship. Moreover, trust typically grows with shared experience, shared friends, and interactions among others over a period of time (Swamynathan *et al.*, 2008). The literature reveals that the relationship between trust and perceived usefulness is also positive, and that trust increases certain features of perceived usefulness (Gefen *et al.*, 2003). The indirect effect stems from the fact that trust could influence attitudes towards social media usage via perceived usefulness, thus reducing risks and increasing trust and, consequently, users’ attitudes and intentions (Han and Windsor, 2011). Consequently:

H₃: Trust will positively affect blog readers’ perception of usefulness.

H₄: Trust will positively affect blog readers’ attitudes toward purchasing products/services.

H₅: Trust will positively affect blog readers’ intentions to purchase products/services.

A.3 Reputation

In the blog context, reputation is related to the extent to which a blogger is credible (Burgess *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, this study suggests that bloggers with different levels of reputation will influence blog readers’ attitudes and behavioral intentions differently. For example, a highly reputable blogger may become an opinion leader influencing others to purchase products/services through a persuasive message that will influence the reader’s confidence in a specific product/service (Shamdasani *et al.*, 2001).

An examination of the literature reveals that many studies have investigated the importance of reputation as an antecedent of trust or behavioral intention. For example, some studies empirically verified that reputation significantly affects trust or behavioral intention (Casalo *et al.*, 2008; Keh and Xie, 2009; Koufaris and Hampton-Sosa, 2004). Moreover, prior studies have shown that consumers are dependent on information provided by reputable sources in the process of

decision making (MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989). Reputable recommendations by bloggers depend on the social capital perspective in which a blogger with good online social relations can establish a positive reputation. The positive reputation of a blogger may positively influence blog readers' attitudes and purchasing behavior (Hung and Li, 2007). This is due to the fact that the blogger's reputation, as a basis of credibility, is considered as a persuasive factor in convincing a consumer to purchase a certain product/service. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H₆: Reputation of a blogger will positively affect blog readers' trust in the blogger.

H₇: Reputation of a blogger will positively affect blog readers' attitudes toward purchasing products/services.

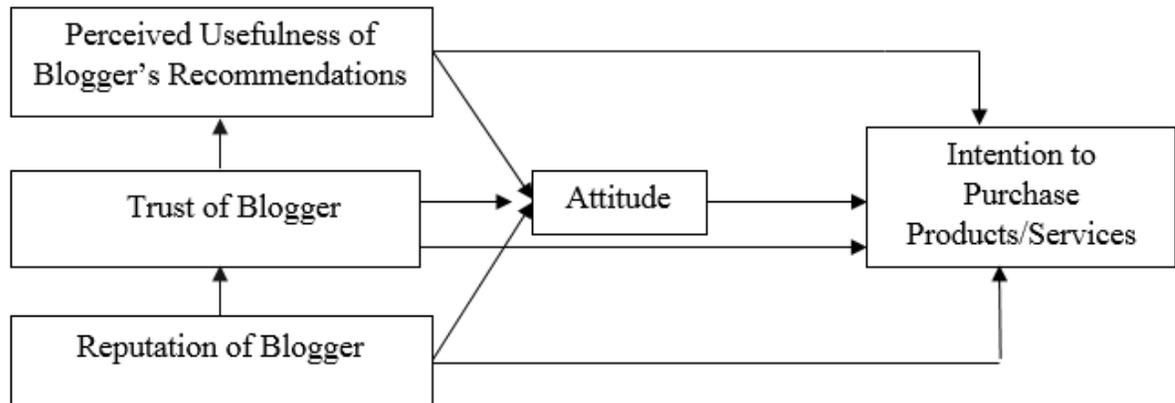
H₈: Reputation of a blogger will positively affect blog readers' intentions to purchase products/services.

A.4 Attitudes

Attitude is central to behavioral theory and decision-making research. It is considered as one of the most significant predictors of behavior (Bagozzi, 1992). For this study, attitude is defined as the degree of a blog reader's positive feelings about purchasing products/services. The effect of attitudes on behavior intention goes back to well-known theories such as TRA, TAM, and the theory of planned behavior (TPB), which indicate that an individual's behavioral intention is influenced by his/her attitude towards the concerned behavior. Many empirical studies based on these theories have found that attitude positively affects an individual's behavioral intention (Hsu and Lu, 2007). For example, the positive effect of attitude on intention was found in the context of consumer adoption of new technology and a wide variety of innovations. It includes self-service technology (Dabholkar and Bagozzi, 2002), handheld technology (Bruner and Kumar, 2005), and smart phones (Chang *et al.*, 2009). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₉: Blog readers' attitudes toward products/services will positively affect their intentions to purchase products/services.

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed and tested research model of the study. The research model hypothesized that a blog reader's intention to buy products and services is determined by attitudes about the perceived usefulness of a blogger's recommendation and the trustworthiness and reputation of the blogger. Attitude is influenced by the impact of beliefs about usefulness, trust, and reputation regarding the intention to buy products and services. In turn, the usefulness of a blogger's recommendation is influenced by trust. Additionally, trust is influenced by the blogger's reputation.

Figure 1: The Research Model

III. Methodology

A. Sample

An online questionnaire was designed on the basis of the literature and blogging practices. Data were collected from a convenience sample of undergraduate and postgraduate students from Kuwait. Students were told that their participation was voluntary, but extra credit points were offered as an inducement. A total of 521 completed questionnaires were received, but 82 respondents, who were not blog readers, were excluded from the analysis. Therefore, the study sample comprised 439 respondents. The demographic profile is presented in the following Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Profile

Measure	Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	228	51.9
	Female	211	48.1
Age	Under 20 years	204	46.5
	20 to 25 years	214	48.7
	26 to 30 years	10	2.3
	Above 30 years	11	2.5
Amount of Reviewing Blogs for Purchasing Products/Services	1 to 3 times	48	10.9
	3 to 6 times	57	13.0
	6 to 9 times	93	21.2
	More than 10 times	241	54.9

Table 1: Demographic Profile: Continues

Experience of Reading Blogger Recommendations for Purchasing Decisions	Less than a year	124	28.2
	1 to 2 years	163	37.1
	2 to 3 years	87	19.8
	More than 3 years	65	14.8
Experience in Following Blogger Recommendations	Never	79	18.0
	Less than 3 months	127	28.9
	3 to 6 months	134	30.5
	6 to 12 months	42	9.6
	1 to 2 years	18	4.1
	More than 2 years	39	8.9
Degree of Following Blogger Recommendations	Never	93	21.2
	1 to 2 times	162	36.9
	3 to 4 times	146	33.3
	5 to 6 times	26	5.9
	More than 6 times	12	2.7

B. Scales

The online questionnaire consisted of two parts: demographic profile based on behavior towards blogging practices and constructs based on the literature. To develop scales for measuring constructs for perceived usefulness of recommendations, trust, attitude, intention and bloggers' reputations, measurement items have been utilized. These were adapted from existing validated scales from past research (Davis, 1989; Doney and Cannon, 1997; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Lim *et al.*, 2006), with modifications to fit with Kuwaiti culture. Each item was measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). Furthermore, all survey questions, instructions, and items were translated from English to Arabic using Brislin's (1986) backward translation method.

A pre-test was performed before conducting the main survey. The pre-test included three marketing professors along with 10 undergraduate and graduate students. The purpose of the pre-test was to check the wording of the scales, the length of the instrument, and the format of the questionnaires to obtain the final version of the survey.

IV. Results

A. Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 lists the means and standard deviations of the constructs. It can be observed that, on average, the participants responded positively to the research constructs (the averages all being >3). Moreover, the coefficient α values for all constructs (except intention and blogger reputation) are above the conventional level of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1967). The scales for these constructs exhibited an acceptable level of reliability.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Constructs	Means	SD	Cronbach's Alpha
Perceived Usefulness of Recommendation	3.44	0.69	0.71
Trust	3.18	0.68	0.81
Attitude	3.66	0.98	0.88
Intention	3.59	0.66	0.69
Blogger's Reputation	3.41	0.70	0.67

B. Analytical Strategy for Assessment of Model

Structural equation modeling was conducted using AMOS 22 to test the fit between the research model (Figure 1) and the data set.

C. Measurement Model

The results of the measurement model are listed in Table 3. The data indicated that the reliability of the items ranged from 0.79-0.998, which exceeds the acceptable value of 0.50 (Hair *et al.*, 2006). The internal consistency of the measurement model was assessed by computing the composite reliability. Consistent with the recommendations of Fornell (1982), the composite reliability of all the items exceeded the benchmark of 0.60. The average variance extracted for all constructs exceeded the threshold value of 0.5 recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981). Since the values of reliability were above the recommended thresholds, the scales for evaluating these constructs were deemed to exhibit adequate convergence reliability. The data in Table 4 indicate that the variances extracted by construct were greater than any squared correlation among constructs, thereby implying that the constructs are empirically distinct (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). In summary, the test of the measurement model, including convergent and discriminant validity measures, is satisfactory.

Table 3: Item Reliability, Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Construct	Item	Skewness	Kurtosis	Item Reliability	Composite Reliability	AVE
Perceived Usefulness of Recommendations	PU1	-0.612	0.287	0.84	0.985	0.67
	PU2	-0.213	-0.248	0.95		
	PU3	-0.315 ^a	-0.356 ^a	0.79		
Trust	TR1	-0.547 ^a	0.210	0.849	0.904	0.754
	TR2	-0.712	0.784 ^a	0.814		
	TR3	-0.215	0.216	0.981		
Reputation	RP1	-0.332	0.277	0.845	0.85	0.755
	RP2	-0.315 ^a	0.242	0.799	0.72	0.731
	RP3	-0.321	0.224	0.819	0.76	0.743
Attitude	AT1	-0.557	-0.032	0.964	0.895	0.875
	AT2	-0.418 ^a	-0.051 ^a	0.998		
		-0.384	0.487	0.865		
Intention	IN1	0.553	0.488	0.811	0.871	0.854
	IN2	0.432 ^a	0.241	0.985		

^a Significant deviation from normality.

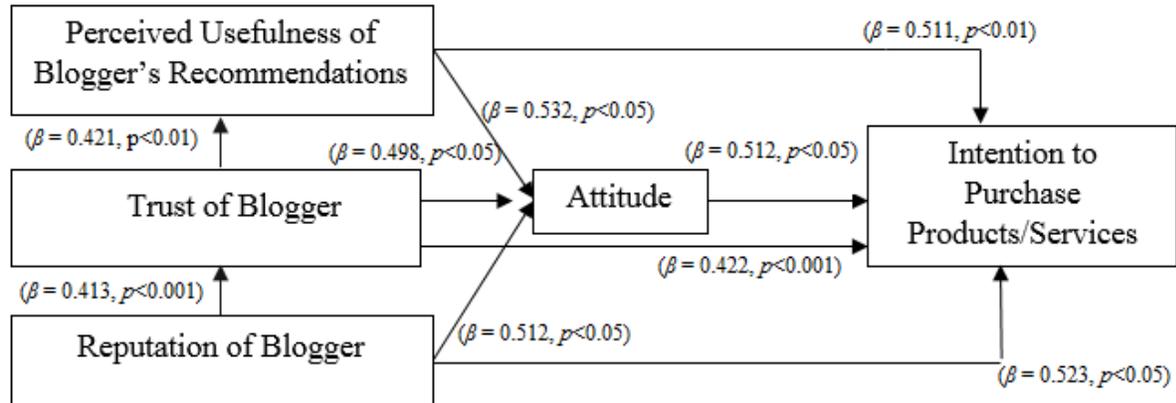
Table 4: Discriminant Validity

Items	PU	TR	RP	AT	IN
PU	1				
TR	0.215	1			
RP	0.321	0.021	1		
AT	0.023	0.755	0.033	1	
IN	0.031	0.023	0.378	0.845	1

Note: The diagonals represent the average variance extracted (AVE); the other matrix entries, the shared variance (the squared correlations).

D. Structural Model

The study has analyzed the structural model by testing the hypothesized relationships among various constructs, as illustrated in Figure 2. The results showed that all of the hypotheses were supported. As expected, perceived usefulness of recommendations significantly influences attitude ($\beta = 0.532, p < 0.05$), thus supporting H1. Perceived usefulness of recommendations significantly influences intention to purchase ($\beta = 0.511, p < 0.01$); therefore, H2 is also supported. Moreover, trust significantly affects perceived usefulness of recommendations ($\beta = 0.421, p < 0.01$), attitude ($\beta = 0.498, p < 0.05$) and intention ($\beta = 0.422, p < 0.001$); these findings thus support H3, H4, and H5 respectively. In addition, reputation significantly affected trust of blogger ($\beta = 0.413, p < 0.001$), attitude ($\beta = 0.512, p < 0.05$) and intention ($\beta = 0.523, p < 0.05$); hence, results support H6, H7, and H8. The effect of attitude on intention was significant, as shown by the path coefficient of 0.512 ($p < 0.05$), supporting H9. The significance of the variables can be observed in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Results of SEM*E. Recommended Products*

It is important for companies to know when it is best to use blog marketing strategy. Hence, to gain further insight into the effectiveness of blogger recommendations, the online questionnaire was also designed to ask several open-ended questions such as “What kind of recommendations for products/services do you usually read on blogs?” Table 5 lists the results of this query, showing that 43.2 percent of the respondents review recommendations for fashion, 35.0 percent for food, 11.1 percent for cosmetics, 4.10 percent for travel related services, 2.96 percent for accessories, and lowest for books and investments. The findings suggested that retail sellers of these products/services should heavily use blog marketing strategies to inform customers about their new products/services, attract more customers to increase sales, and remind customers to buy products/services from them and not their competitors.

Table 5: Product/Service Recommendations Read on Blogs

Items	No. of respondents	%
Food	154	35.0
Cosmetics	49	11.1
Accessories	13	2.96
Travel-Related Services	18	4.10
Fashion	190	43.2
Investments	9	2.05
Books	6	0.01

V. Discussion and Conclusion

A. Discussion

Understanding the effect of blogger recommendations on the purchase of products/services is important for researchers and practitioners. Based on the findings of this study, several implications are discussed. The findings confirmed those recommendations, which were observed in the existing literature and previous studies (Park and Farr, 2007). Indeed, having informative and recommending bloggers would positively impact a consumer's purchasing attitude and intention.

According to the report by my Yearbook report (Wegert, 2010), bloggers have significant influence, as 81 percent of people seek recommendations through a social site before shopping (Osman *et al.*, 2009). Consumers are not the only ones affected by appreciating the impressive shopping posts - bloggers have become persuasive individuals and opinion leaders for people around the world. People can acquire information and relevant knowledge about products/services as well as follow trends in shopping and places to visit. Bloggers are becoming a benchmark for the public in determining whether products/services are worthy to be adopted or not. Hence, this study verifies that consumers depend on blogger recommendations before making the final purchase decision (Corporate Eye, 2010).

Numerous studies have presented how consumers seek out reviews about the choices of products/services and believe that blogger recommendations may be significant at various stages of the consumer buying process (Jermyn, 2016; Scaraboto and Fischer, 2013; Hsu *et al.*, 2013). Conceptually, the consumer buying process includes five stages: 1- need recognition, 2- information search, 3- evaluation of alternatives, 4- purchase, and 5- post-purchase behavior. The recommendations of bloggers may influence several stages of the consumer buying process. For instance, in the stage of need recognition, the content of the blogger recommendations is considered an external stimulus that may attract blog readers. Moreover, in the stage of information search, blogger recommendations are considered as a valuable source of information by many people. Similarly, recommendations written by bloggers may have a significant influence on the consumer's evoked set (consideration list of choices), thus influencing final purchase decisions. Finally, in the stage of post-purchase behavior, consumers may express their feelings after purchasing and using the product/service through the blog page. Therefore, the influences of blogger recommendations are multifaceted.

In addition to showing how blogger recommendations influence consumer attitudes and intentions to purchase products/services, the study has also found that trust and reputation of bloggers significantly and directly influences attitudes and intentions to purchase. The result seems consistent with previous studies by Hsu *et al.* (2013), Chu and Kamal (2008), and Lee *et al.* (2011), who verified that trust and reputation had an influence on consumers' purchase intentions to shop online. Consequently, it implies that consumers tend to accept recommendations by bloggers with high trust and reputation, and thereby it develops positive attitudes and behavioral intentions for online shopping. The results highlight the importance of trust and reputation of bloggers. Moreover, the study confirms the direct influence of the perceived usefulness of blogger recommendation on purchaser attitudes and intentions. It means that blog readers would purchase products/services if they perceive the blogger recommendations to be useful (e.g., usefulness in terms of describing details of the product/service from blogger's self-usage experience, listing clear advantages and disadvantages of the product/service, discussing other alternatives similar to the product/service features, etc.).

B. Contribution of the Study

In terms of theoretical contributions, the study has contributed to the growing body of literature on consumer behavior and blogging. Particularly, it has shed much-needed light on the influence of blogger recommendations in consumer purchase decisions. This study replicates a previous study conducted on Taiwanese blog readers to understand the effects of blog recommendations on consumer purchase decisions. Moreover, this study extends the previous studies by adding a reputation factor to the model.

In terms of practical contributions, the results have valuable implications for retail sellers and business owners who wish to promote their products/services and increase sales. Based on the results of this study, perceived usefulness of blogger recommendations, trust, and reputation have been empirically confirmed as having significant influential effects on blog readers' attitudes and intentions to purchase products/services. Therefore, blogger recommendations seem to be a promising marketing strategy for increasing sales. Hence, marketers should utilize blogs, weblogs, and social media tools such as Instagram to help them positively influence consumer attitudes and intentions to purchase products/services. Experienced bloggers and opinion leaders are important because they help marketers to recommend and offer their products/services, stimulate customers to purchase, engage with customers, and build relationships with customers. Through blogger marketing activities, marketers can accelerate marketing efforts to influence consumers' purchasing attitudes and behavioral intentions. Moreover, marketers should expand their customer base by providing incentives and promotions for other customers through blogger posts. Lastly, the study found that positive attitudes and intentions to purchase products/services are shaped by blogger recommendations generated by highly reputable, trustworthy, and useful blogs. Hence, marketers should consider these factors when adopting bloggers in their marketing strategies to get effective outcomes.

VI. Limitations and Future Research

Like any other research, this study is not free of limitations. The results should be interpreted and accepted with caution for the following reasons. First, the main limitation is the choice of the sample as it was drawn only from undergraduate and postgraduate students in various colleges and universities in Kuwait, even though the results offer valuable insights and better understanding of the importance of blogger recommendations in consumer purchasing decisions. Precautions should be taken when generalizing these results to other settings and contexts because the respondents were relatively young and educated. However, the results can still provide better understanding of the effects of blogger recommendations and are intended to be used as a starting point to test those relationships in other contexts. Moreover, the subjects were blog readers in Kuwait. Culture, norms, traditions, and lifestyle may differ among people from different countries. Previous studies indicate that culture will impact IT usage (Leidner and Kayworth, 2006). Therefore, proper care should be taken into account when generalizing the results.

Future research is needed to further replicate the study by investigating the possible differences among various demographic factors. Such factors mainly include age, education levels, income levels, and different cultures. Other considerations may influence blog readers' attitudes toward purchasing products/services, such as education of blogger, attractiveness of blogger, perceived enjoyment of blogger, and negative blogger recommendations ("electronic word of

mouth” or “eWOM”). It may be important to study how negative eWOM affects a blog reader’s purchasing behavior, potentially leading to a variety of unexpected but useful results for marketers.

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