

Who to trust: Examining trustworthiness of product review blogs

Everyone has an opinion - and with the numerous social networking platforms available, it is easy to make those opinions heard. Product review blogs are becoming increasingly popular among consumers. Blog writers who share their opinions with others are numerous and their numbers are growing exponentially, covering all possible genres and topics.

While all bloggers are not necessarily experts, consumers tend to increasingly use product review blogs to minimise advertising noise and confusion. Furthermore, these bloggers also gain honest peer evaluations of products, services and technology. A key question, however, is to what extent blog readers perceive these product review blogs as a truly credible source.

Blogs have several strengths, including their usefulness as a research tool as well as for message framing and persuasion. Blogs are particularly useful for research, issue monitoring, and environmental scanning. The emergence of Web 2.0 offers new communication technologies in practice and brought both major challenges and major opportunities to public relations.

In this regard, blogs are playing an important role in shaping PR 2.0. Blogs have been used as an important information distribution channel and as a knowledge-sharing tool. This communicative use of blogs in public relations enables PR professionals and marketing practitioners to use blogs as a market research tool to analyse the market and gauge public opinion on their business.

A study was undertaken by a team of researchers including [Dr Gene van Heerden](#) (staff member in the [Department of Marketing Management](#)) in order to measure respondents' source trustworthiness toward blogs that review or discuss products, services and technologies. The study also examines whether consumer demographics have a significant impact on their level of trust.

The results indicate that while source trustworthiness does not seem to be related to either gender or level of education, there appears to be some relation to age. The younger respondents exhibited higher levels of source trustworthiness, while the oldest group scored significantly lower. The results suggest that demographics are not a strong predictor of source trustworthiness in the blogging context. There is a positive and significant relationship between source trustworthiness and both the frequency with which respondents access blogs and the number of blogs accessed. The results also suggest that heavy blog readers rated blogs more credible than light blog readers.

The findings of this study suggest that blogs are a more appropriate PR tool when companies are targeting younger segments. If the target market is older consumers, it may be more effective to use traditional communication channels, such as product reviews in print media, for example newspapers and magazines, rather than product review blogs.

The full reference for this study is:

Ghazisaeedi, M., Steyn, P.G. and [Van Heerden, G.](#) 2012. Trustworthiness of product review blogs: A source trustworthiness scale validation. *African Journal of Business Management*, 6(25): 7498-7508 – also available via [UP Space](#).