Research on Relationship between the Perceived Transparency and Perceived Authenticity of Bloggers and Their Corresponding Perceived Credibility

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Abstract: Perceived transparency refers to the disclosure of information through new communication technologies and perception of the extent to which bloggers disclose and share information on social media. Perceived authenticity refers the result of the consumer's feeling and imagination after viewing the projection about how the item "ought to look" created by the storytellers (bloggers). With the rapid development of social media, bloggers are playing an increasingly important role in advertising and marketing. This research explores the relationship between the perceived transparency and perceived authenticity of bloggers and their corresponding perceived credibility. Based on the literature review, this research puts forward two hypotheses: the perceived authenticity of bloggers is positively related to the perceived credibility of them, and the perceived authenticity of bloggers is positively related to the perceived credibility of them. In this study, 174 valid samples were collected in UIC campus by questionnaire. After data analysis, all the above two hypotheses have been verified.

1. Introduction

With the popularity of mobile devices and the Internet, social media has developed rapidly, effectively filling the fragmentation time and immediacy needs of users. In this process, bloggers, as content creators, have more and more influence on social media by virtue of personalized content and timely interaction with users. For users, bloggers have special identity attributes, which are between celebrities and friends: compared with celebrities, bloggers are closer to users in identity, and their published content is more realistic and more suitable for users; Compared with friends in life, bloggers have a more comprehensive, extensive and professional understanding of all kinds of information. Because of the special identity of bloggers, more and more users choose bloggers as their channels and ways to obtain information. Bloggers' advertising value is gradually increasing, which plays an increasingly important role in the marketing and promotion of products. Therefore, it is very important to discuss the role of bloggers in users' daily life based on the new features of social media era. Based on this, this study explores the influence of bloggers' content on users' cognition, attitude and behavior from the perspective of users.

The purpose of this research is to understand the user's preference and discrimination of bloggers' content, to better understand the method of establishing identity and trust between bloggers and users through content, and to have a more specific and comprehensive understanding of how bloggers should effectively draw closer to users' perception, so as to better help marketers use bloggers as advertising carriers to influence consumers' purchase intentions.

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2. Literature Review

2.1 Transparency

There are substantial and systematical research define transparency with different disciplines in multiple areas. Most commonly definition is from the perspective of PR practitioners as a way of organizational communication. Marina and Dean define transparency as "both voluntarily and involuntarily disclosed, easily accessible, shared information, which, through the means of new communication technologies, is usually immediate and inexpensive, if not free." (Marina & Dean, 2016) They broaden the concept of transparency, not just in organizations and PR, but the definition of transparency in the new media era.

Our research attempts to explore bloggers' use of social media, where the information can be easily shared and disclosed. Therefore, in this article, we define the transparency as the information disclosing and sharing of bloggers on social media.

2.2 Transparency with Disclosure of Third-Party Influence

Transparency is still a broad concept, unless we define a specific kind of information which would influence on bloggers' transparency. In a research of transparency of fashion and beauty influencers, it mentions, "Transparency involves disclosing the ways in which the media gather and check material (including when this material is promotional), how editorial decisions are made and topics are chosen, which sources are used and how, who writers are and what are their potential biases." (Marina D., 2020) Our research will focus on the disclosure transparency, and it includes how the bloggers disclose the sources of their promotional materials. To step a little further, the third-party sponsorship would be a strong factor of the source of bloggers' information (Caleb & Rebecca, 2014). Perhaps

because of their wide and influential influence, companies and PR firms are looking for key bloggers, trying to develop relationships and/or influence reviews of their goods and services (Jarvis, 2006).

Therefore, to narrow the measurable scope of a variable, we constraint the disclosure of information to the disclosure of third-party sponsorship.

2.3 Effect of Transparency on Credibility

Transparency is important for gaining trust in all media, but it is even more important on platforms such as blogs (Singer, 2007). "How a maven discloses sponsorship is expected to influence others' perceptions of the opinion leader's credibility." When bloggers explicitly mention the impact of third-party sponsorship on their recommendations, audiences perceive credibility to be the highest (Caleb & Rebecca, 2014). Consequently, we may draw to find out the relationship between transparency of bloggers' disclosure of sponsorship and the perceived credibility of them. Based on the work of Caleb and Rebecca, we have the first hypothesis as follow:

H1: The perceived transparency of bloggers is positively related to the perceived credibility of them.

2.4 Authenticity

Authenticity is based on subjective internal experiences that relate to one's self- knowledge, understanding and relationship behavior (Fritz & Bruhn & Schoenmueller, 2017). Within the field of philosophy, it is indicated by Heidegger (1962) and Sartre (1943) that individuals enable to be perceived as authentic if they sincerely take responsibility for what they act with individual explicit value instead of agreeing pre-programmed or socially imposed values and actions. Authenticity is the end of the consumer's perception and vision rather than an estimation rooted in proof. (Beverland et al., 2008). Thus, we are now describing perceived authenticity as the consequence of a consumer's thought after viewing the projection about how the item "ought to look" created by the storytellers (bloggers) (Beverland et al., 2008).

2.5 Effect of Authenticity on Credibility

A significant idea applied in the study, higher credibility enables to generate better attitude toward the brand being promoted because a source (Zha et al., 2015) suggests whether or not the consumers are willing to show acceptance to the message sent from the bloggers, a part of marketing, depends on the credibility they have perceived. In addition, authors gave explanations and hypotheses about ads authenticity, credibility to brand-related communication, Trust in blogger and the connection with purchase intention. Ad authenticity means if the products or objects fit with it ought to be thought by consumers (Grayson & Martinec 2004).

Researchers has designed an online survey to examine participants' attitudes toward bloggers and their advertising including their perceived trust in the bloggers themselves as well as the authenticity and credibility of the brand-related communication received from bloggers. (Tran & Nguyen, 2017). Authenticity and credibility variables play great roles in the DV – willingness to buy. In other words, consumers are more likely to form credibility or trust toward the blogger when they perceive advertisements as more authentic and more credible.

Consequently, in this article, we intend to find out what is the relationship between perceived authenticity and the perceived credibility of bloggers and set the second hypothesis:

H2: The perceived authenticity of the bloggers' image is positively related to their perceived credibility.

2.6 Credibility as Defined

When measuring the perceived credibility, Johnson and Kaye (2004) edit a scale which is helpful for telling us to estimate the accuracy, fairness, and believability of a blogger. Trust is the degree you are willing to rely on the bloggers and the information in their posts (Lim et al, 2006). When connecting to the purchase intention, consumer's objective intention to a brand (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1977), the positive attitude which can show with "I trust the blogger" affects fairly consumer's willingness of buying (Chen et al., 2008; Fiore et al., 2005). In this way, the authors suggested that if consumers enable to believe the content of a sponsored recommendation post, they will be more likely to form a purchase intention regarding the product recommended by the bloggers. The genuineness of content provided to meet the purpose of the blog-was cited as a significant trust factor (Tran & Nguyen, 2017).

2.7 Hypothesizes

- H1: The perceived transparency of bloggers is positively related to the perceived credibility of them.
- H2: The perceived authenticity of the bloggers' image is positively related to their perceived credibility.

2.8 Conceptual Model

- 1) Perceived transparency: Disclosure of information through new communication technologies (Marina & Dean, 2016), and perception of the extent to which bloggers disclose and share information on social media.
- 2) Perceived authenticity: The result of the consumer's feeling and imagination after viewing the projection about how the item "ought to look" created by the storytellers (bloggers) (Beverland et al., 2008).
- 3) Perceived credibility: How accurate, in-depth, fair and believable a blogger is in consumer's objective intention. (Johnson and Kaye's, 2004)

3. Methods

3.1 Variables

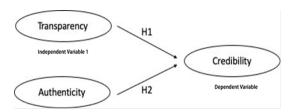


Fig.1 Variables Survey Design

We used Wenjuanxing to build an on-line questionnaire was our data collection method. In our questionnaire, 5-point Likert scale was a main format.

For each independent variable, we set up two questions to collect participants' attitudes. For the dependent variable, we choose three aspects to collect the relationship between itself and independent variables. Therefore, every independent variable has three questions from these three aspects.

In total, every independent variable / hypothesis has five questions in order to collect data.

3.2 Target Population and Sample

We choose all UIC students as our target population. To ensure the objectivity of the survey results, we had plan to collect 150-200 samples (half the number of men and women). The representative sample of participants were recruited randomly. We made a complete questionnaire on the WenJuanXing, and distributed it to UIC students' WeChat groups in the form of a QR code. UIC students were randomly selected to scan the code to enter and participate in our questionnaire survey.

3.3 Measurement

The constructs in the model were measured by using different items selected from a relevant academic reference (Jun, S. & Yi, J., 2020). These items were adapted to the particular framework of our research: The relationship between blogger's behavior authenticity and transparency and the credible perception of KOL. All items had a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree (level of agreement) or from slightly to severely (degree). Table 1 shows the items associated with each construct.

Table 1 Construct Measure

Construct	Items
Transparency	(T1) I prefer bloggers to disclose sponsorship information in content directly.
	(T2) I prefer bloggers to disclose sponsorship information in content indirectly.
Authenticity	(A1) The blogger reflected a fair and unbiased product review.
	(A2) The blogger wants to do his or her best at providing his/her content.
Credibility	(CT1/CA1) I will keep on following his or her
	account as long as s/he provides me with
	satisfying content.
	(CT2/CA2) I will buy products recommended by

him/her.
(CT3/CA3) I would love to recommend this
influencer to my friends.

(CT3/CA3) I would love to recommend this influencer to my friends.

4. Findings

4.1 Frequencies

Table 2 Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
	1	82	47.1	47.1	47.1	
Valid	2	92	52.9	52.9	100.0	
	Total	174	100.0	100.0		

Result:

5. Represents Male and 2 Represents Female, with a Total of 174 Samples, Accounting for 47.1% of Male and 52.9% of Female.

Table 3 Division

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	1	16	9.2	9.2	9.2
	2	64	36.8	36.8	46.0
Valid	3	71	40.8	40.8	86.8
	4	23	13.2	13.2	100.0
	Total	174	100.0	100.0	

Result:

1-4 respectively represent four divisions in UIC. Among 174 samples, DST accounted for 9.2%, DCC accounted for 36.8%, DHSS accounted for 40.8%, DBM accounted for 13.2%. DCC and DHSS accounted for a large proportion.

5.1 Normality Testing

Table 4 Tests of Normality

Kolmogorov-Smirnova Shapiro-Wilk						
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
MeanofT	.311	174	.000	.808	174	.000
MeanofCT	.187	174	.000	.925	174	.000
MeanofA	.249	174	.000	.821	174	.000
MeanofCA	.154	174	.000	.923	174	.000

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

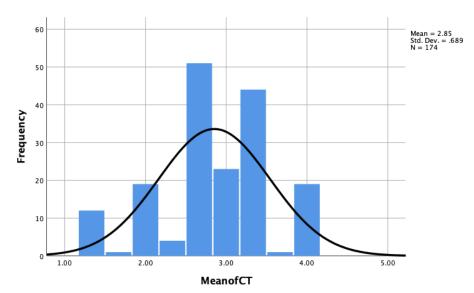


Fig.2 Histogram of Meanoft

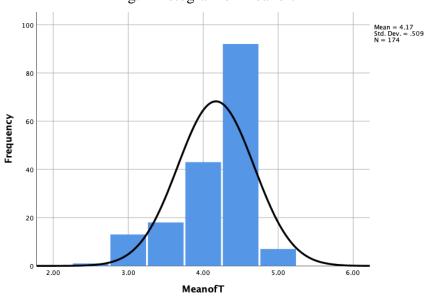


Fig.3 Histogram of Meanofct

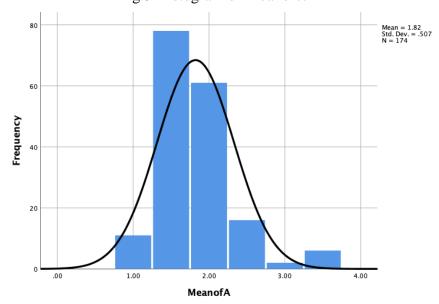


Fig.4 Histogram of Meanofa

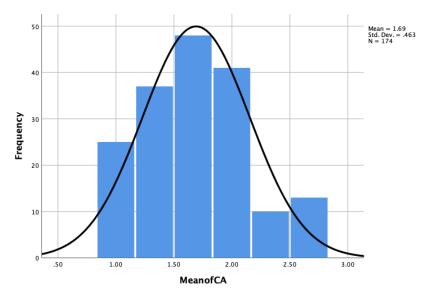


Fig.5 Histogram of Meanofca

Results:

In the part of Tests of Normality, we can see that the p-values of MeanofT, MeanofCT, MeanofA and MeanofCA are all given from Shapiro-Wilk test and Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, which are all equal to 0.000. Under the test level of α =0.050, p <0.050. The data of the perceived transparency, perceived credibility of being transparent, perceived authenticity and perceived credibility of being authentic are considered not to obey normal distribution.

5.2 Reliability Testing

Transparency

Table 5 Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.687	2

Result:

The Cronbach's Alpha of perceived transparency is 0.687, which has marginally reliability in transparency.

5.3 Authenticity

Table 6 Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.693	2

Result:

The Cronbach's Alpha of perceived authenticity is 0.693, which has marginally reliability in authenticity.

5.4 Perceived Credibility of Being Transparent

Table 7 Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.670	3

Result:

The Cronbach's Alpha of perceived credibility of being transparent is 0.670, which has marginally reliability in perceived credibility of being transparent.

5.5 Perceived Credibility of Being Authentic

Table 8 Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.668	3

Result:

The Cronbach's Alpha of perceived credibility of being authentic is 0.668, which has marginally reliability in perceived credibility of being authentic.

5.6 Correlations

Table 9 Correlations

		MeanofT	MeanofCT
	Pearson Correlation	1	.748**
MeanofT	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	174	174
	Pearson Correlation	.748**	1
MeanofCT	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	174	174

^{**.} Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 10 Correlations

		MeanofA	MeanofCA
	Pearson Correlation	1	.433**
MeanofA	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	174	174
	Pearson Correlation	.433**	1
MeanofCA	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	174	174

^{**.} Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Result: A strong positive correlation was found between perceived transparency and perceived credibility of being transparent, r = 0.748, p < 0.001, and a moderate positive correlation was found between perceived authenticity and perceived credibility of being transparent, r = 0.433, p < 0.001.

5.7 Linear Regressions and Graph

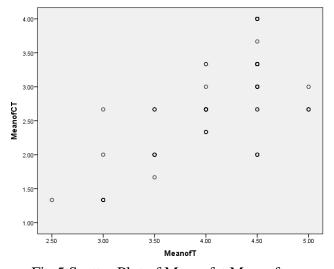


Fig.5 Scatter Plot of Meanofct Meanoft

Table 11 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.748a	.560	.557	.45839

a. Predictors: (Constant), MeanofT

Table 12 Anova^a

	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.			
	Regression	45.963	1	45.963	218.747	.000b			
1	Residual	36.140	172	.210					
	Total	82.103	173						

a. Dependent Variable: MeanofCTb. Predictors: (Constant), MeanofT

Table 13 Coefficientsa

	37.11	Unstandardized Co	efficients	Standardized		a:
	Model			Coefficients	t	Sig.
		В	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-1.373	.288		-4.771	.000
	MeanofT	1.013	.069	.748	14.790	.000

a. Dependent Variable: MeanofCT

Result:

The simple linear regression analysis illustrates that there is a significant relationship between perceived transparency and perceived credibility of being transparent (F(1, 127))

= 218.750, p < 0.001, $R^2 = 0.560$). The regression coefficient, 1.013 was statistically significant (t= 14.790, p < 0.001).

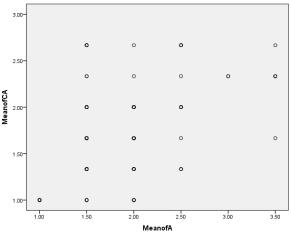


Fig.6 Scatter Plot of Meanofca Meanofa

Table 14 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.433a	.188	.183	.41865

a. Predictors: (Constant), MeanofA

Table 16 Anova^a

	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	6.969	1	6.969	39.761	$.000^{b}$
1	Residual	30.146	172	.175		

т					
	Total	37.114	173		1

a. Dependent Variable: MeanofCA b. Predictors: (Constant), MeanofA

Table 16 Coefficientsa

	Model	Unstandardize	d Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		В	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.970	.119		8.176	.000
	MeanofA	.396	.063	.433	6.306	.000

a. Dependent Variable: MeanofCA

Result:

The simple linear regression analysis illustrates that there is a significant relationship between authenticity and perceived credibility of being authentic ($F(1, 172) = 39.760, p < 0.001, R^2 = 0.190$). The regression coefficient, 0.396 was statistically significant (t = 6.306, p < 0.001).

5.7.1 T-Test

Table 17 Independent Samples Test

t-test for Equality of Means							eans		
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95 Confi Interva Diffe	dence l of the
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	1.953	.164	.388	172	.699	.04065	.10488	16637	.24767
MeanofCT	Equal variances not	.384	161	.606	.701	.04065	.10573	16814	.24944

Result: There wasn't a significant difference about the perceived credibility of being transparent between female and male (t=0.388, p =>0.050).

Table 18 Independent Samples Test

		Test Equal	ene's t for lity of ances			t-test	for Equality	of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95 Confid Interval Differ	dence of the
									Lower	Upper
	Equal variances assumed	.000	.990	.204	172	.838	.01440	.07054	12483	.15364
MeanofCA	Equal									

variances not assumed		.205	171.684	.838	.01440	.07024	12425	.15306

Result: There wasn't a significant difference about the perceived credibility of being authentic between female and male (t=0.204, p >0.050).

6. Discussion

The purpose of this research is to explore the relationship of the perceived transparency, perceived authenticity of bloggers and their corresponding perceived credibility. According to our findings, two variables are positively correlated with perceived credibility: the higher the transparency and authenticity are, the higher perceived credibility is.

If bloggers accept sponsorship, but honestly revealing that they were sponsored by a third-party, they will gain more positive attitude and more trust from users than that of when they try to mislead or deceive users. When recommending products, bloggers show that providing true information of product and themselves is more likely to gain users' trust than providing false product information. This situation is possibly due to the cognitive dissonance, because once users perceive nonmentioned sponsorship or false information the bloggers provide, cognitive dissonance will be caused, and then negative emotions and evaluations will be generated.

On social media platforms, bloggers should maintain their image by ensuring their perceived transparency and perceived authenticity. Firstly, in the choice of sponsored brands, bloggers should choose brands or products that are consistent with their own image and blog content. Secondly, bloggers should be credible and honest when publishing their content. Authentic contents are more likely to gain users' trust and being transparent is more likely to strengthen users' recognition and build fidelity to the brand or self. Blogger's "performance" can't really satisfy users' demands. However, in this research, we did not delve too deeply into the influence of different aspects of transparency, as it is a complex and broad concept. Generally speaking, the results of this research not only confirm but also expand the previous ones on the key factors that influence the perceived credibility of bloggers in different content: transparency and authenticity.

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Appendix: on-Line Questionnaire

Hello! This questionnaire is established by four UIC students from Public Relations and Advertising. In order to learn about your views of bloggers (the group of people who often publish some product related contents on social media and try to influence your purchase pattern). We'll fairly appreciate if you can help us complete the following questions. Thanks for spending your 1-2 minutes to help us. All your answers will be protected well, so don't worry about privacy disclosure.

When answering the following questions, we want you to combine your former experiences subscribing those bloggers in your daily life.

1)Your division:

DST	DCC	DHSS	DBM
			_

2)Your gender:

Male	Female
3.3	

3)Sponsorships are proactively proposed and introduced during the blogger's recommendation process.

_ F				
1- Strongly Unacceptable	2- Unacceptable	3- Neutral	4- Acceptable	5- Strongly Acceptable

4)There was no active sponsorship instrument during the recommendation process, but the blogger responds to me quickly and efficiently.

	T	1		
1- Strongly Unacceptable	2- Unacceptable	3- Neutral	4- Acceptable	5- Strongly Acceptable
5)I accept the bloggers provide false personal information (such as height, weight or self-				
demands) in the released content so as to highlight or overstate the efficacy/ value of the product.				
1- Strongly Disagree	2- Disagree	3- Neutral	4- Agree	5- Strongly Agree
6)I accept the bloggers provide improper product information (such as product ingredients) in the				
released content so as to highlight or exaggerate the efficacy/ value of the product.				
1- Strongly Disagree	2- Disagree	3- Neutral	4- Agree	5- Strongly Agree
7)I will keep an eye on the bloggers whether or not the bloggers acknowledge the sponsorship.				
1- Strongly Disagree	2- Disagree	3- Neutral	4- Agree	5- Strongly Agree
8)I will buy the product recommended by the bloggers whether or not the bloggers acknowledge				
the sponsorship.				
1- Strongly Disagree	2- Disagree	3- Neutral	4- Agree	5- Strongly Agree
		•		
9)I will always recommend this blogger to my friends whether or not the bloggers acknowledge				
the sponsorship.				
1- Strongly Disagree	2- Disagree	3- Neutral	4- Agree	5- Strongly Agree
		•		
10)I will keep on following these bloggers account, whether the promotion contents sent by them				
are right or not.	8 88	,	1	3
1- Strongly Disagree	2- Disagree	3- Neutral	4- Agree	5- Strongly Agree
	<u> </u>	· ·	, <u> </u>	
11)I will still buy the products recommended by these bloggers, whether the promotion contents				
sent by them are right or not.				
1- Strongly Disagree	2- Disagree	3- Neutral	4- Agree	5- Strongly Agree
1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Tiourus	i rigico	5 Strongly rigide
12)I would like to recommend these bloggers to my friends, whether the promotion contents sent				
by them are right or not.				
1- Strongly Disagree	2- Disagree	3- Neutral	4- Agree	5- Strongly Agree
1 Subligity Disagree	2 Disagree	J Hounai	+ 115100	5 Subligity rigide