

Examining the Credibility and Influence of Agile Leadership Blogs on Transformation

Gail Ferreira, DM

Abstract

The use of online sources for decision information continues to grow among consumers. One of these sources is the blog, a venue for user-generated content that simulates word-of-mouth communication. The growth and influence of blogs create opportunities for marketers to use them as part of strategy development. To facilitate an understanding of blogs and their potential influence on consumers' decisions, this study was an examination of the influence of the credibility of blogs on blog readers' behavioral intentions (e.g., agile transformation), as mediated by trust and moderated by involvement. The appraisal of blog credibility was characterized as tri-dimensional – assessed by characteristics of site, message, and source.

Problem

Strategies for social media marketing are not being implemented by leaders because of their inability to understand the measurement and influence of blogs on consumers.

Specifically, the process to measure and analyze the influence of transformational leadership was not in place for the organization.

Purpose

The purposes of this research was to develop and assess credibility scales for agile blogs (site, message, and source) and test the influence of a blog's credibility on consumers' behavioral intentions (agile transformation) based on trust. Phase 1 implemented online focus groups to gather characteristics of the agile blog that signal credibility to the reader. Centering resonance analysis was used to generate items for scale development. Phase 2 used online survey data to validate the proposed scales and test the influence of a blog's credibility on a reader's intentions as specified in the model.

Relevant Literature

Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) **multi-attribute model of attitude** provides the conceptual framework to study the credibility beliefs and trust attitude effects of the agile blog on agile behavioral intentions.

Three dimensions of **agile blog credibility** (site, message, and source) are discussed as cognitive belief predictors of affect-based trust attitude that leads to behavioral intentions (follow product purchase or non-product recommendations, engage in word-of-mouth communication about the agile blog, and continue to interact with the same agile blog).

This study also used Petty and Cacioppo's (1981) **elaboration likelihood model** to explore the moderating effect of blog involvement on the relationship between credibility beliefs and trust.

The number of blogs have grown because of easy-to-use publishing tools (e.g., Google®; eBlogger.com®; WordPress.com®; MovableType.com®) and it appears that they are widely accepted as an information exchange channel. As of the 2008 State of the Blogosphere report, Technorati® (WWW search engine for blogs) had indexed over 133 million blogs published in over 120 languages with a reported 346 million worldwide blog readers. However, it is likely that the amount of experience readers have with the blog environment will influence how blogs are evaluated and used.

Research Questions

- 1) What are the characteristics of the agile blog that individuals use to assess site, message, and source credibility?
- 2) What are reliable and valid measures of the three dimensions of perceived agile blog credibility (site, message, and source)?
- 3) How do evaluations of agile blog site, message, and source credibility impact trust in an agile blog?
- 4) How does trust in an agile blog influence behavioral intentions?
- 5) How do different levels of involvement associated with agile and agile blogs impact the relationship between credibility and agile blog trust?

Procedures

The 118 online participants were solicited through agile blog posts and the data were collected using an online survey.

Using a random split of the dataset, items were selected that highly correlated ($r > .50$) with the measure (all items) as a whole and with the dimensions developed from the original content analysis and evaluation.

Data Analysis

The model encompassing relationships between agile blog site, message, and source credibility beliefs, agile blog trust attitude, and agile and agile blog behavioral intentions was tested in a structural equation model.

The moderating effects of agile and agile blog involvement on the relationship between perceived credibility and trust attitude were also examined.

Findings

All three credibility dimensions demonstrated a **positive, significant relationship** with agile blog trust attitude, only source credibility indicated practical significance.

In addition, the data supported the hypothesized influence of blog credibility on the intention to follow recommendations and to continue blog participation as mediated by trust.

However, the findings indicated that source credibility was the main contributor to the proportion of variance in both intentions.

Furthermore, the data did not fully support the central versus peripheral routes hypothesized according to the elaboration likelihood model (ELM). The hypothesized peripheral route of source assessment on trust was predictive for individuals with both levels of involvement and substantively more predictive than either of the other two dimensions (site assessment as peripheral route, message assessment as central route).

Limitations

In this study, one specific domain (agile blogs) with the hope that the findings prove useful for future comparative studies of differing topic domains.

Additionally, the technical and aesthetic features of the blog site (e.g., load speed, graphics) can influence the believability of the blog. Additionally spam messages and other extraneous data will need to be filtered and removed in order to assess a valid set of data.

Conclusions

This study was a first step to quantify the behavioral effects of blogs and it may have raised more questions than it answered.

Little research has explored the characteristics of blogs as an information source. Thus there are further opportunities for research.

The current study needs to expand and include other populations in non-profit and for-profit organizations and also consider how the perceived credibility of blogs compares to their traditional counterpart. At the same time, bloggers have vastly increased their readership and profile as a viable information source.

Social Change Implications

The information from this study can be used to help marketers devise social media strategies to accelerate behavioral transformational changes for individuals to optimize individual and group quality and performance. Findings from this study can be used in a variety of transformational marketing campaigns that change societal outcomes such as elections.