

32 UNDERSTANDING THE EXCHANGE INTENTION OF AN INDIVIDUAL BLOGGER

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the issue of how a blogring, a circle/community of blogs with a common theme (Xanga 2008; Chua and Xu 2007), could be utilized to form a loosely distributed exchange of products for monetary and nonmonetary returns. Specifically, we present a research model that identifies factors influencing a blogger's intention to participate in a *commercial exchange*, a commercial activity involving a blogger and a reader within a blogring.

A blogring is conceptualized as a *natural segmentation of user-alike* whereby members (i.e., bloggers and readers) converge toward common interests reflected in the blog contents (Kumar et al. 2004; Gumbrecht 2004). The formation of this social network provides bloggers with the social capital to engage in collaboration and cooperation with other members (Putnam 2000; Peece 2002). Economizing on this social capital, bloggers could engage in product, service, and/or money exchanges. We term this process the

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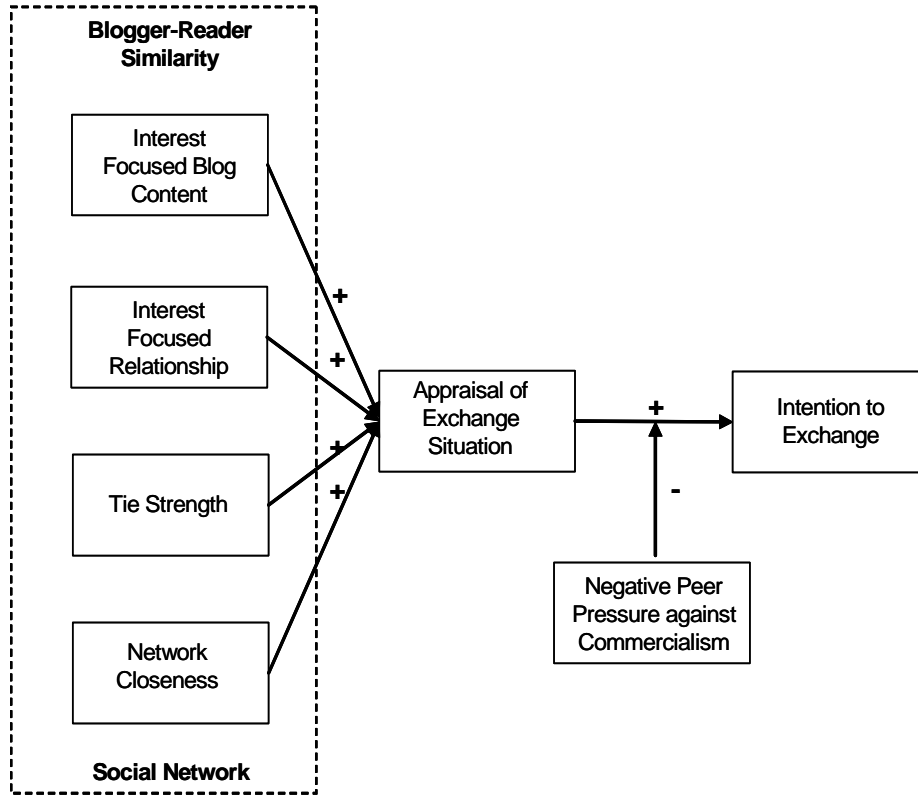


Figure 1. Research Model

economic leverage of personal blog (Balasubramanian and Mahajan 2001). Such an economic leverage includes selling, barter trading, and outright giving away items that can be identified or associated with the shared interests of the blogging. In other words, any exchange between bloggers and readers need not necessarily be for monetary returns but could also involve an exchange of knowledge or expertise in return for approval-related utility (Balasubramanian and Mahajan 2001). With this understanding, we next present our research model.

The research model (Figure 1) draws from three streams of literature. First, we reference the similarity attraction theory (Byrne 1971), which posits that people prefer to interact with like-minded others. For instance, salespeople generally prefer to sell to prospects sharing characteristics (e.g., gender and age) with themselves (Dwyer et al. 1998). Hence, we conjecture that bloggers could be more inclined to commercial exchange with readers who have similar interests. We term this *blogger-reader similarity*. Second, the general premise of the social network dictates that members could place higher priority on relationships and ties with other members within a blogging compared with individuals' personality attributes. Hence, we could posit that the stronger the tie (Frenzen and Davis 1990; Marsden and Campbell 1984) between a buyer and a seller, the

higher the likelihood for purchase (Frenzen and Davis). Additionally, the closer a reader is to the blogger, the greater the ease of engaging in an exchange due to greater influence exerted by the blogger over the reader (Burkhardt 1994).

Third, building on the decision-making framework proposed by Luce, Bettman, and Payne (2001), we hypothesize that the decision of whether to engage in an exchange depends on the appraisal of the exchange situation, which in turn is influenced by blogger-reader similarity and social network. A positive appraisal should lead to a higher exchange intention from the blogger. However, any negative peer pressure against commercialism exerted by other blogging members could negatively moderate the appraisal (Luce et al. 2001), thus leading to lower exchange intention.

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