Building Trust with Corporate Blogs

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Abstract
The personal relationships that companies once had with customers degenerated into the cold automaticity of data-gathering with the widespread adoption of management information systems. By restoring a human face to a company's self-presentation, blogging has been heralded as a paradigm shift in the way companies interact with customers. This study tests a model relating the content of an author's blog posts to readers' responses. It suggests that companies can use blogging to complement customer relationship management processes to the extent their customers exhibit an organic desire to commune by combining provocative informational content with expressions of benevolent intent. Such consumers respond well to these overtures, showing evidence of increased subject-matter involvement, liking and trust. The study also proposes a way to measure diversity of thought in reader comments to guard against being unduly swayed by a vocal minority.

Keywords
Virtual community, word-of-mouth, trust, cultural tribalism.

1. Introduction
On May 2, 2005 the cover of *BusinessWeek* proclaimed "Blogs will change your business". *Wikipedia* (an online encyclopedia based on collaborative knowledge creation) defines a *blog*, a shortened form of *weblog*, as a website where an author displays articles, called *posts* or *entries*. A blog differs from a forum, newsgroup or general online community in that a single author, or discrete set of authors, initiates the discussion. Most blogs permit readers to add comments to posts and facilitate *trackbacks*, permanent linking to posts by other blogs and websites. The collection of all blogs is often called the *blogosphere*.

The basis for *BusinessWeek's* declaration is that since the web is host to millions of public, product-related conversations in chat rooms, message boards and forums companies should be interested in what is said about them and their competitors. In September 2005, the Pew Internet & American Life Project reported that 5% of the near 150 million US internet users participate in some kind of internet-based conversation on a daily basis and that 27% of these users have read a weblog at least once. While not every such conversation is product-related, it stands to reason that in a consumerist society product and product-related experiences will have frequent mention.

Corporate blogging pundits, such as Scoble and Israel (2006), recommend two courses of action in responding to this phenomenon: monitoring (the easiest and most important action) and participation, the initiation of a committed, ongoing, open and honest dialog with the market. Marketing scholars will find nothing earth shaking about these recommendations as they are consistent with a long stream of literature on the general theme of customer, and indeed market, orientation. This study is divided into two parts: the first part proposes a model relating the content of author's blog posts to readers' responses, specifically the effect of blogging on involvement and trust. The second part proposes a method for determining whether there is enough diversity among the blog commenters for the marketer to rely on the general applicability of views expressed. First, I review the principal marketing papers that support the concept of blog monitoring and participation. Then, I describe what is currently known about involvement, trust-building and the expression of thought in groups. I then propose a conceptual model explaining how blogs affect involvement and trust, and propose a means of measuring commenter diversity. Finally, I offer empirical support for the proposed model and the method for detecting diversity among the commenters.

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2. Theoretical foundation
Through blogging a company converses with an unknown proportion of its customers in full view of the world, including its competitors. In so doing it acts in an arena that combines *customer relationship management (CRM)* with building brand community. When Boulding et al (2005) wrote their introductory article to a special issue of the *Journal of Marketing* they considered claims about CRM that were similar to those made about blogging today. Some say blogging requires a paradigm shift in firm behavior. Some say it is a passing fad. I propose, like Boulding et al (2005) did for CRM, that blogging is the "outcome of the continuing evolution and integration of marketing ideas".

Some observers of corporate blogging tend to regard Levine et al's (2000) *The Cluetrain Manifesto* as the book that gave birth to the idea for blogging with its central thesis: Markets are conversations. However, marketing scholars should see the roots of this idea in the foundations of CRM when Levitt (1960) said that firms should focus on fulfilling needs rather than merely selling. Bagozzi (1974) moved us further down the same path by emphasizing that marketing is an exchange of value brought to the table by both the buyer and seller. Berry (1983) pointed out that the heart of marketing was relationships and that nurturing long-term relationships should be the goal of marketing practice. With the advent of huge quantities of consumer data since the 1980s, firms began to use the term CRM to refer to technological solutions for storing, analyzing and using data to gain insights into customer behavior and the performance of the company in conducting its operations. Even though the core concept of CRM has always been what Payne and Frow (2005) call the "dual creation of value", Boulding et al (2005) point out that some see the practice of CRM as having fallen to the status of customer surveillance and a means to get the upper hand in the extraction of consumer surplus rather than a good-faith means of value co-creation.

Blogging seeks to enhance CRM by putting a human face (i.e., the blog author) on the cold automaticity of data gathering. In doing so, its goal is to increase consumers' affective commitment as well as improve information gathering through its conversational dynamic. In the blog conversation, some sample of the customer base and potential market speaks in its own voice. That voice may not be representative of the whole market, but it has a quality of genuineness that warrants its inclusion as a supplement to CRM insights. Blogging is not likely to supplant CRM; rather, blogging will be part of a new mutation of CRM that will make the whole system more fitted to its purpose. Regardless of whether or not the practice of CRM has sometimes fallen from its ideal, blog-based community building and well-executed CRM seek the same result: increased customer retention.

2.1 What activities does blogging assist?

Scoble and Israel (2006) note that two of the most important reasons to engage in the blog dialogue are to get a more accurate perception of customer needs (i.e., organizational learning) and to engender trust. A third important reason should be to make customers more involved in a company's products.

2.1.1 Increased product involvement

One of the most referenced studies of the involvement construct defines involvement as "a motivational state based on the personal relevance of some stimulus, object or situation" (Zaichkowsky, 1985). She characterized involvement as a state rather than a trait because of three factors that could change the level of involvement: the characteristics of the person, stimulus and situation. Although she described her scale as "context-free", she really only applied it to three contexts: involvement with advertising, with products or with purchase situations.

Celsi and Olson (1988) seem to have come closest to explaining involvement in the context of the blog conversation by building on previous research related to involvement and advertising. Celsi and Olson (1988) found that an ad can activate "personally relevant knowledge," about an individual's needs, goals and values as well as existing knowledge about product attributes, and create a motivational state "that 'energizes' or 'drives' consumers' overt behaviors." The blog conversation is able to perform the same kind of activation, whether through the author's post or the comments of others, and one type of overt behavior that results is the writing of more comments in the blog.

McAlexander, Schouten and Koening (2002) and Gustafsson, Johnson and Roos (2005) demonstrated a link between brand community participation, and indeed relationship-building activities in general, and the consumer's attitude toward a company, its products and their awareness of the relevance of those products to their lifestyle (i.e. product involvement). We should, therefore, be able to see evidence of increased product involvement if blogging is an effective means of creating community.

2.1.2 Trust-building

There is a large body of research that suggests that conversations create trust. Morgan and Hunt (1994) named communication an important antecedent of trust. However, most research indicates that the communication must contain certain qualitative attributes before it can inspire trust. Strub and Priest (1976) found that when a supplier shares confidential information with a buyer, the buyer is more likely to trust that supplier. Swan and Nolan (1985) found that a sincere expression of concern for the consumer's well-being (i.e., benevolence) creates trust. Research by Nicholson, Compeau and Sethi (2001) found that liking precedes trust. Nicholson et al define liking as an emotional connection between two people. Rempel, Holmes and Zanna (1985) found that such connections are partly based on "the perception of intrinsic motives in a partner" that leads one to believe that the partner cares. Das and Teng (1998) also found that understanding motive is a prerequisite for trust. McCullough and Hoyt (2002) characterized benevolence as a motivation. Therefore, the perception of a benevolence motivation provides strong evidence of caring and should result in liking and then trust.

2.2 What hinders blogging effectiveness?

Scoble and Israel (2006) highlight cultural fit and the *echo chamber* phenomenon as two major issues that could hinder the effectiveness of blogging as a strategic activity. Blogging is a highly collaborative activity that opens the internal thinking of the company to customers and competitors alike. A company must be truly comfortable with the risks this openness presents or the potential benefits of blogging will not be unlocked.

Scoble and Israel's (2006) "echo chamber" effect refers to the illusion of vibrant community that frequent communication between a few parties can create:

> Blogging can fool you. You may think you are conversing with the world, when it's just a few people talking frequently, back and forth to each other, creating the illusion of amplification. The echo chamber can deceive a business into thinking it is either more widely successful or further off the mark than it is in reality, because a few people are making a lot of noise. (pg. 134)

This phenomenon has been addressed in academic research under the term: *cultural tribalism*. Kitchin (1998) wrote:

> … communities based upon interests and not localities might well reduce diversity and narrow spheres of influence, as like will only be communicating with like. As such, rather than providing a better alternative to real-world communities cyberspace leads to dysfunctional on-line communities … (p. 90)

This study addresses this issue and presents evidence to justify monitoring the diversity of community participation.

The preceding conceptual discussions make it clear that for blogging to be effective as a creator of value for both the company and customer both parties have a dual responsibility to participate. This study proposes that the dynamic of this participation is as detailed in Fig. 1. The author is responsible for leveraging the consumers' inherent or organic interest in the product with conversation starters that provoke consumer reply. The quality and quantity of reply depends on the level of benevolent intent invoked by the author and perceived by the consumer. The corporation is able to observe the discussion and learn from it, creating consumer trust, better products, increased retention and superior market performance as a result. The degree of organizational learning will be moderated by the extent collaboration is embraced by the firm. The degree of consumer trust engendered is mediated by the benevolent intent perceived during the conversation and the extent that the consumer likes the company.

The preceding theoretical discussion should provide ample justification for proposing the blogging dynamic of Fig. 1 and its ability to foster trust and organizational learning. It also justifies the link between dialog-based learning and better products. The remaining portion of Fig. 1, the interacting roles of trust, better products and retention in creating superior market performance, while far beyond the scope of this or any single study, is consistent with the integrated nature of the research agenda that Boulding et al (2005) propose to demonstrate a link between CRM and performance. Indeed, if some such linkage cannot eventually be proven then much of marketing practice must be questioned.

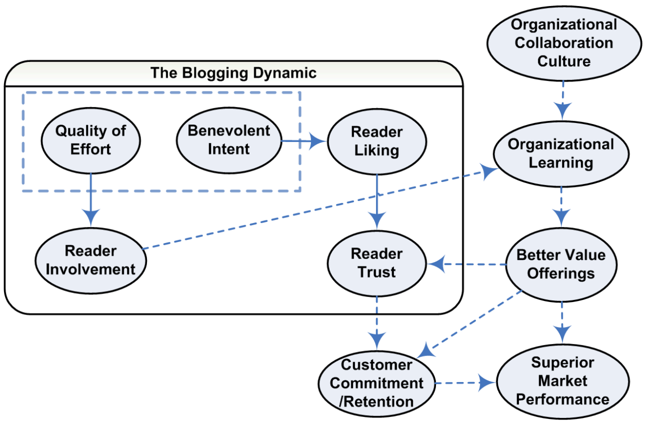

Fig. 1: *Operational model*

2.3 Measuring the constructs

Two contemporaneous aspects of an author's posts are represented in this study: the effort expended and the benevolence expressed. Similarly, I represent reader comments as the involvement the community shows in their comments and the liking and trust expressed. To clarify the dual nature of an author's posts I have drawn a dashed box around the two latent variables representing author posts in Fig. 1. A similar box could be drawn around the involvement, liking and trust latent variables to show those are contemporaneous representations of reader comments.

Measuring emotion as it applies to benevolence, liking and trust is important to this study. In previous research these constructs have been measured using survey scales, however in order to be more relevant to the current needs of marketing research practitioners who mine the web for blog-based insight, I decided to use an automated content analysis system, Kelly and Stone's (1975) *General Inquirer*. I performed a content analysis of the text of author posts and member replies to measure emotional states that previous research has determined indicative of benevolence, liking and trust. I adopted Kelly and Stone's (1975) *General Inquirer* method of automated content analysis using the combined Harvard-Lasswell IV (H-L4) tag dictionary. A tag dictionary is a collection of words that have been assigned to one or more thematic categories. General Inquirer uncovers latent themes in a body of text by "classifying [the] words into a smaller number of thematic categories … the relative occurrence of the different categories indicates the underlying thematic content" (Genovese, 2002). H-L4 categorizes 11,788 of the most-used words in the English language into 182 psychographic categories. The dictionary does not specifically have liking, trust or benevolence categories; however it does have categories similar to what previous scale-based research associated with liking, trust and benevolence. The primary criticism of Kelly and Stone's (1975) method is that it poorly interprets how words are used in sentence context. However, Hart (2001) compared manual context-sensitive approaches with more detached word count strategies by drawing on a metaphor of two people trying to understand a city: one drives on the streets while the other views it from a helicopter. Both get quite different – but equally valid – pictures of a city. Where the helicopter is likely to miss details at the corner of a specific street, it is able to pick up differential patterns of light. Where word count approaches sometimes miss what a child could see, they provide linguistic information from a distance, a distance that the average reader does not have because it is almost impossible to ignore what is being said and concentrate on how something is said.

2.3.1 *Quality of effort*

The "Quality of Effort" construct is intended to represent qualitative and quantitative aspects of a blog author's posts that reflect the initiation of a conversation with the user. "Quality of Effort" is an established construct in the educational theory literature and refers to how often students engage in meaningful activities known to contribute to their learning and development (Pace, 1980). *WordNet*, Princeton's online dictionary, defines effort as "earnest and conscientious activity intended to accomplish something." This definition's core ideas of earnestness, activity and intent are the basis for my discussion of the following indicators that an exploratory factor analysis of the data resulting from a content analysis of the blog posts associated with a single factor: the number of words used, the author's follow-up comments and the number of trackbacks, a measure of noteworthiness and therefore quality.

2.3.2 *Benevolence*

The "benevolence" latent variable is designed to measure the expression of good-will in the authors' posts. The H-L4 dictionary defines various psychographic categories that are consistent with the principal scale that measures benevolence (McCullough and Hoyt, 2002). Exploratory factor analysis on the data resulting from a content analysis of the blog posts indicated that the following indicators were related to a single factor: supportiveness, positive feelings, an expression of moral values, positive wording, affection and the expression of gained enlightenment. The latter category was selected because it conveys motive to the audience: the blog author's purpose is to learn.

2.3.3 *Liking*

Nicholson et al (2001) found liking to be antecedent to trust in buyer-seller relationships. Similarly, Dunn and Schweitzer (2005) found that positive emotions toward the trustee are the primary influences underlying an assessment of trustworthiness. Rubin (1970) defined the liking scale most used in psychological research. Nicholson et al (2001) give a definition of liking consistent with Rubin (1970): a "global affective attachment … specifically, it is an emotional connection that one feels for another that can be viewed as fondness or affection – a feeling that goes beyond mere acceptance … an attraction such that [one] … would desire to "be around" the other out of choice." Exploratory factor analysis found the following H-L4 categories to be strongly associated with a single factor calculated from the content analysis of comments to blog entries: supportiveness, positive wording and affection.

2.3.4 *Trust*

Nicholson et al (2001) define trust as "confidence in the other party's reliability and integrity." They base this definition in part on Das and Teng's (1998) definition: "positive expectations about another party's motives in situations entailing risk." Note the overlap between McCullough and Hoyt's (2002) characterization of benevolence as a motivation and Das and Teng's (1998) use of the word "motive" in their definition.

Exploratory factor analysis found the following H-L4 categories to be strongly associated with a single factor calculated from the content analysis of comments to blog entries: the expression of gained enlightenment, relatedness, social relations and moral values.

2.3.5 Involvement

Zaichkowsky (1985) is generally regarded as the standard reference for measuring the involvement construct. She states "researchers generally use the resulting behaviors as indicators of the level of involvement". Clarke and Belk (1978) found that product involvement manifests itself in consumer effort. Other studies (Dichter, 1966; Sundaram, Mitra and Webster, 1998) found that product involvement is a motive for engaging in word-of-mouth (WOM) behavior. Participation in online communities has been characterized as online WOM and similarly tied to product involvement (Hennig-Thurau et al, 2004). Participation is therefore a well-substantiated indicator of involvement. Exploratory factor analysis found these measures of participation to be associated with a single factor: the number of comments a blog entry attracted, the total number of words in all the comments a blog entry attracted and the number of individuals that wrote comments (readers can add more than one comment per blog entry).

It might seem to lack credibility that many of the words used to indicate benevolence are also used to indicate liking and trust. Neiderhoffer and Pennebaker (2002) found that the terminology used between two parties in conversation tends to be similar:

> In two studies from Internet chat rooms, individuals getting to know one another in dyads exhibited linguistic style matching on both the conversational level as well as on a turn-by-turn level. This coordinated use of language occurs at a remarkably low level and includes word count and use of … affect words and cognitive words. These effects appear to hold up across the perceived quality … length … [and context] of the interaction. (pg. 566)

Note that even though the indicators overlap, the exploratory factor analysis did not associate the indicators together in precisely the same way.

2.3.6 Cultural tribalism

I have mentioned that one of the reasons to engage in blogging is to facilitate organizational learning. March (1991) argues that cognitive diversity is the key to knowledge development because it results in new alternatives being applied to problem solving rather than a constant recycling of old solutions. He says that cognitive diversity is achieved by the constant influx of new voices. This is the principle that I apply to the blog conversation in developing my metric for cultural tribalism. I measure the proportion of community members participating in the current week that also contributed in the previous week. I also measure the proportion of community members participating in the current week that ever participated before.

3. Purpose

This study seeks to make empirical and methodological contributions to marketing science:

1. Empirically demonstrate the ability of Kelly and Stone's (1975) methodology to detect the relationships in the "blogging dynamic" of Fig. 1, that is, the ability of the author to inspire liking, trust and increased involvement in the blog's subject matter by posting provocative content showing benevolent intent, and
2. Empirically demonstrate and validate a method for detecting cultural tribalism.

Name	Description
6 A.M.	PR guru Richard Edelman's blog.
Blog for America	The Democratic Party's blog.
Blog Maverick	Entrepreneur Mark Cuban's blog.
FastLane	GM Vice Chairman Bob Lutz's blog.
Freakonomics	The blog for the book *Freakonomics*.
IEBlog	Microsoft's Internet Explorer blog.
Kinky Friedman	The independent Texas gubernatorial candidate's blog.
Naked Conversations	The blog for the book on corporate blogging, *Naked Conversations*.
Next Big Thing	EDS blog on the future of technology.
PlayOn	Xerox PARC's blog on the social dimensions of virtual worlds.

Table 1: *Data sources*

Blog	Posts	Comments	Commenters	Trackbacks
6 A.M.	74	740	326	29
Blog for America	167	31515	8929	4
Blog Maverick	204	13586	5645	113
FastLane	101	9024	3114	25
Freakonomics	114	1926	836	29
IEBlog	179	14216	5863	100
Kinky Friedman	51	306	205	4
Naked Conversations	357	1790	513	324
Next Big Thing	95	263	126	28
PlayOn	48	286	155	42
Total	1390	73652	25712	698

Table 2: *Data source quantities*

4. Data source

The study uses posting and community response data from ten diverse blogs of Table 1 to achieve its purpose. In accordance with the *netnography* methodology proposed by Kozinets (2002), these blogs were purposively selected because they are highly active (Table 2), diverse in rationale, allow comments from readers and maintain complete archives of all activity. In every case but one, the entire blog archive was used. Blog for America (BFA) is a very large blog whose presence would dominate the study as its size is greater than the rest of the blogs combined. As a result a random sample of entries was taken from BFA in a quantity that was an approximate average of the other blog sizes.

5. Method

The study was conducted in two phases: test the operational model proposed in Fig. 1 with empirical data and confirm the proposed method for detecting cultural tribalism. Two of the major benefits of using General Inquirer with the standard H-L4 dictionary are that the classification of words is standardized and the probabilities of finding comparable results from a similar study are higher. A disadvantage of not using a custom dictionary is that I had to accept the categories as given and sacrifice some degree of content validity, a complete measure of every known aspect of my study's constructs.

When the table of category word-counts was used in an exploratory factor analysis my judgment was used to determine if the factors mapped to the previously-defined theoretical constructs. I also determined what categories should be retained as good indicators of the factors. However, since there are standard definitions for each category, their applicability to a specific construct-factor was readily apparent if they possessed high *face validity* and a deep rooting in theory. As a secondary test of validity the factor loadings were examined. Indicator categories had to have a minimum loading of 0.3 (Hair et al, 2005 pg. 128). If an indicator loaded greater than 0.3 on more than one factor then the indicator was associated with the factor of highest loading if a wide margin existed between the highest and other factor loadings. Indicators with similar high loadings on more than one factor were discarded.

After all the factors were identified I followed Bagozzi, Yi and Phillips' (1991) procedure for assessing construct validity using confirmatory factor analysis and Campbell and Fiske's (1959) criteria for construct validity: convergent and discriminant validity. The four major constructs of interest satisfied Thorndike's (1996) criteria for internal consistency and convergent validity as presented in Table 3. Note that Table 3 intends to show that only one eigenvalue greater than one existed for each latent variable.

The four major constructs also satisfied Straub's (1989) criteria for discriminant validity using confirmatory factor analysis. As a secondary test of discriminant validity I used Bagozzi, Yi and Phillips' (1991) procedure of constraining the correlation between trust and liking in the structural equation model to 1.0 and performing a chi-square difference test between the constrained (χ^2 = 1242, df = 147) and unconstrained (χ^2 = 1138, df = 146) models. The difference (χ^2 = 104, df = 1) is significant at ρ = 0.001, thus the trust and liking factors do not overlap enough to be the same.

Latent Variable	Reliability*	Eigenvalues > 1
Involvement	0.796	2.18
Benevolent Intent	0.914	4.21
Liking	0.701	1.90
Trust	0.815	2.61

*Cronbach's (1951) alpha.

Table 3: *Reliability and uni-dimensionality of measures*

5.1 The operational model

Prior to fitting the 19 measurements in the model in Fig. 1, I measured the between-within variance for the 10 blogs in the dataset on estimated values for the trust, liking, involvement and benevolence latent variables. The results showed that 97.1% (ρ < 0.05) of the variance occurred within the blogs and there was little difference between them. I therefore converted all the measurements into z-scores to remove any effects due to differential size or *heteroskedasticity* and combined them into one dataset. The benevolence, liking and trust latent variables are solely measured by content analysis as described. I assumed that in general communications there is an ambient or base-level of expressed emotion that might be captured by my measures. So I calculated a mean level of benevolence, liking and trust across all the textual content and expressed each measurement as an offset from that mean.

The unit of analysis is the blog author's post. Each post generally elicited more than one comment. The various metrics used on the comments to measure involvement and the content analysis were aggregated and matched to their respective posts. Since the blog post precedes the comments in time and the comments are specifically linked to the blog post that inspired them, individual measures of the post can be correlated with the summary and aggregated measures of the comments. After calculating this correlation matrix, I translated the model into simultaneous equations and used maximum likelihood estimation to get the results in Fig. 2 (see last page; AGFI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.07, Hoelter's Critical N = 217).

5.2 Cultural tribalism

Since each member of a blog community has a unique member name their activity can be easily tracked. For each blog in the dataset I found the percentage of contributing members in each week that also made a contribution in the previous week. Additionally, I found the percentage of contributing members in each week that had contributed at some point in the past.

Blog	Week-to-Week Average (%)	Whole Life Average (%)
6 A.M.	10.71*	23.49*
Blog for America	55.02* (σ=7.39)	83.53* (σ=10.04)
Blog Maverick	12.90*	45.29*
FastLane	19.28*	53.4*
Freakonomics	17.65*	29.08*
IEBlog	15.57*	44.66*
Kinky Friedman	6.78*	17.44*
Naked Conversations	22.52*	53.20*
Next Big Thing	15.97*	39.19*
PlayOn	13.76*	41.38*
Intercept	19.79	44.36

*Satisfies the Dickey and Fuller (1981) test of *stationarity* with t < -2.89 (95% sig.)

Table 4: *Repeated contribution metrics*

6. Results

You can see from Fig. 2 that the predicted relationships are strongly supported. Table 4 shows the repeat participation statistics for each blog as defined in the Method section of this paper.

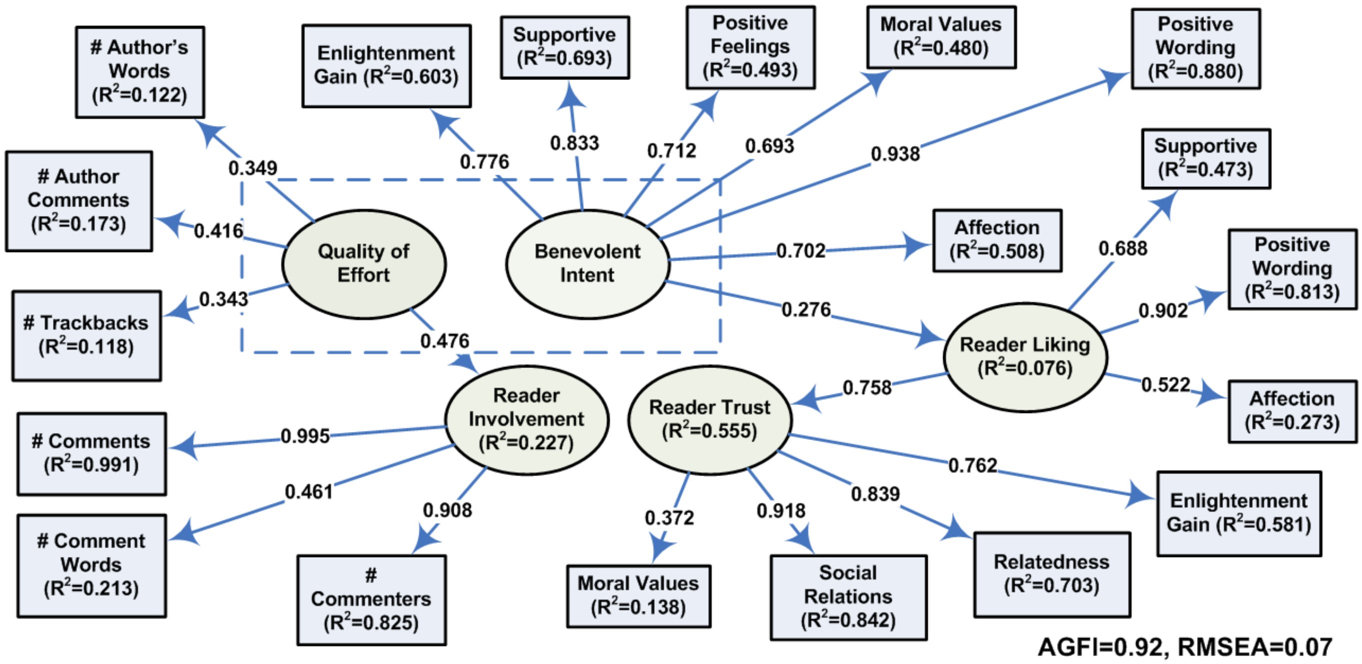

Fig. 2: *Fitted operational model*

A between-within analysis of variance revealed a 50.4% total variance between blogs on the week-to-week measure and a 50.4% total variance between blogs on the whole life measure. Patterns of repeat participation are very different from blog to blog. Figure 3 shows how the week-to-week metrics are distributed and Fig. 4 shows the distribution of whole life metrics. The vertical lines denote the confidence intervals for Blog for America's (BFA) participation because that is the only sampled blog. It seems that the other blogs naturally cluster on both metrics while BFA is an outlier.

When BFA is removed from the between-within analysis only 5.2% of total variance is between blogs on the week-to-week measure and 25.7% of total variance is between blogs on the whole life metric.

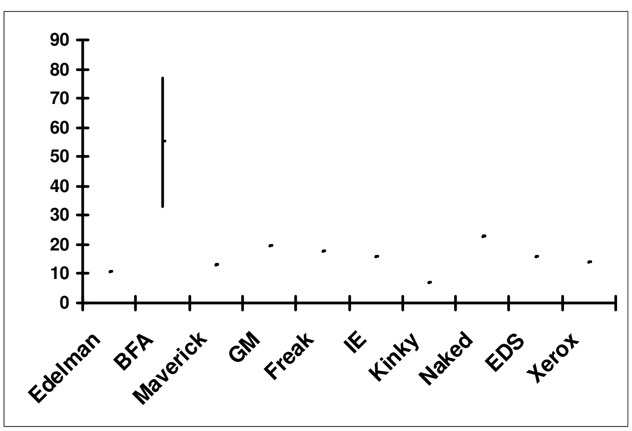

Fig. 3: *Week-to-week repeated participation*

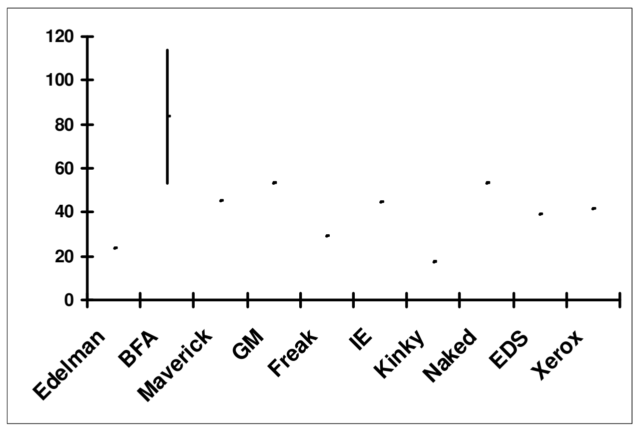

Fig. 4: *Whole life repeated participation*

7. Discussion

7.1 Operational model

Although the explained variance in liking is weak at 7.6%, the explained variance in trust is high at 55.5%. I thought that liking would be an easier construct to measure than trust. Rubin (1970) based his liking scale on a very diverse set of constructs: sameness, admiration, respect and trust, whereas Nicholson et al (2001) heavily based their liking scale on companionship. Even though the two studies differed in context I am surprised at the small degree of overlap in indicators. Since my word categories from General Inquirer covered no more than 30% of the spectrum of psychological indicators from the other two studies I attribute my low explained variance to the constrained content validity I have already discussed. Note though that impaired content validity did not keep the study from yielding the expected results. I think that if I was not using an acceptable representation of the constructs and inaccurately depicting how they interact, the results would not be so well-conforming to theory.

7.2 Cultural tribalism

On the surface, BFA seemed like an active blog with a large community that should have yielded a conversation with diverse input. Using the metrics presented you can see its activity is the result of the actions of a more limited group of people than the other blogs. Note that even though the Kinky Friedman blog is also a political blog its content comes from the most diverse array of people of any blog in the dataset. Therefore, low diversity is not an attribute of all political blogs. When BFA is removed from the dataset, week-to-week repeat participation is correlated with whole life repeat participation at 0.605 ($\rho < 0.01$). Therefore, a blog owner could use the week-to-week metric alone as an indicator of cultural tribalism by comparing one's own measures with the intercept of approximately 20% given in Table 4.

8. Research implications

The results replicate Nicholson et al's (2001) findings on the relationship between liking and trust in a manner very different from the methods they used. Even though General Inquirer required compromises to be made, it seemed to justify the support other researchers have given it. I would encourage other marketing researchers to try using General Inquirer in at least a supplementary role to the more usual scale-based methods. It seems that success depends on achieving some minimum level of content validity so researchers should use General Inquirer only to the extent its word categories adequately reflect the constructs to be measured.

9. Managerial implications

My results support the admonition of blog pundits who recommend that companies monitor the blogosphere for mention of their brands, products and competitors. If your products and competitors get frequent mention then it is likely that sufficient organic consumer involvement exists to reward you in creating your own blog. Inherent consumer involvement is the key to getting enough community participation for good co-created value.

Expressions of benevolence seem rewarded by a positive attitude from the customer. While previous research says that this may indicate liking and trust, the low level of explained variance in this study suggests that liking and trust are more complicated constructs than previous research portrays. My intuition suggests that trust is more influenced by a customer's experience with products and service than by anything said in a blog no matter how honest and sincere. Regardless of what pundits may claim, blogs supplement rather than supplant more substantive activities.

Jayachandran et al (2005) noted that *information integration* is an important dimension of relational information processes. The insights gained from blogs must therefore be integrated with intelligence from other sources in a way that matches consistency and highlights inconsistency. Consistency mapping is one protection from the potentially negative effects of cultural tribalism. Blog owners should be wary of cultural tribalism when more than 20% of commenters are the same from week-to-week.

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