

**FACTORS INFLUENCING INTENTION TO VISIT RESTAURANT  
TOWARD RESTAURANT REVIEW IN CONSUMER BLOGS**

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## **ABSTRAK**

Blog merupakan salah satu fenomena baru dalam Internet. Ia membolehkan pengguna Internet mengongsi ilmu pengetahuan dan pendapat di antara satu sama lain. Berbanding dengan laman web korporat, kandungan blog dipamerkan dengan lebih peribadi and kurang resmi. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menguji impak blog pengguna terhadap kunjungan pelanggan ke restoran-restoran yang tersebut dalam blog. Data telah dikumpul daripada 223 responden di Malaysia. Faktor pertama yang mempengaruhi pelanggan melawati restoran ialah isi kandungan daripada pengguna, diikuti dengan manfaat dan kesenangan penggunaan. Walaupun kesenangan penggunaan ialah salah satu faktor yang penting, impaknya tidak menunjukkan dengan kewujudan isi kandungan daripada pengguna dan manfaat. Kajian ini membolehkan pihak pemasaran terutamanya dalam bidang perkhidmatan menggunakan blog sebagai salah satu saluran pemasaran yang baru dan kos rendah.

## **ABSTRACT**

Blogging is a new phenomenon on the Internet allowing users to share knowledge and opinions to the public. Compared to corporate websites, blog contents appear to be more personal and “natural”. This research seeks to identify the impact of consumers’ food blogs on customer visit to restaurants. Data collection from 223 respondents confirms that the main driver for the intention to visit restaurant is consumer-generated content, followed by perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Although perceived ease of use can be viewed as an important driver, its impact is insignificant in the present of consumer-generated content and perceived usefulness. The research implies that marketers should make use of blogs as a new and cost-effective marketing channel for service industries.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

Today, Internet becomes a technology people cannot live without, especially on younger generation. 88% of Americans aged 12-29 and 32% of people over the age of 65 are online (Fox, 2005). In year 2008, for the first time, Internet had surpassed newspapers as an outlet for national and international news. According to Pew Research (2009), 4 out of 10 Americans get most of their news from Internet, while 35% cited newspapers as their main outlet.

Blogging, an online journal writing activity, is one of the new phenomena on the Internet. One of the biggest advantages of blogging is the ability to let someone to participate in communities he/she want to cultivate. Individuals are much more comfortable using blogs as a place to express their opinions and read about opinions of others (Singh, 2008). This includes blogs held by businesses in order to promote their products or services.

Meanwhile, online customer review plays an important part in product sales. They can be usually found in online merchant websites and forums. Studies show that online user-generated reviews could significantly influence the sales of products such as books, CDs, and movies (Ye, Law, & Gu, 2009). User review is important since the quality of the product is usually unknown before consumption (Ye et al., 2009). By knowing the rating of the product by other users, a person is able to make further decision on whether or not the product is worth the value and eventually buy it. The user review can be as simple as giving 1 to 5 stars on each product purchased online, or in an essay form.



**Apple iPod touch 16 GB (2nd Generation)** by Apple

Buy new: ~~\$299.99~~ **\$279.95** 58 Used & new from ~~\$229.99~~

Get it by **Tuesday, May 12** if you order in the next **24 hours** and choose one-day shipping.

Eligible for **FREE** Super Saver Shipping.

★★★★★ (916)

**Electronics:** See all 3,412 items

*Figure 1.* Product rating using 1 to 5 stars by customers on Amazon.com.

As long as reviews on service sector are concerned, most of them are focused on hospitality industry, such as accommodation, travel and gastronomic tourism. Three-quarters of travelers, especially females, have considered online consumer reviews as an information source when planning their trips (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; Okazaki & Hirose, 2009). Most of the service reviews available on the Internet today are related to hotel reviews and they are usually published in online forums which serve many purposes other than tourism reviews. According to Caribbean Tourism Organization, gastronomic tourism refers to trips made to destinations where the local food and beverages are the main motivating factor for travel. In year 2008, Malaysia had changed its previous tagline emphasizing on nature such as sun and beaches, to local foods when promoting Malaysia in U.K. Malaysia could no longer rely on the historical linkages with Britain since the younger generation of Britons had neither knowledge nor connection with Malaysia.

This paper attempts to investigate the role of blogs in terms of marketing hospitality industry to the public. Specifically, restaurant service is studied in this paper. Blog readers' behavior is studied after they read food blogs, which are specialized blogs usually written by foodies or food lovers to share their opinions on the food they had tried at public eating places. Factors motivating them to use the blogs are also studied.

## 1.2 Background

Before blog was introduced, publishing an article online was difficult for non-technical users. Most websites prior to 1990s were static. In general, publishers must subscribe to a paid web hosting package in order to allow public to access their content. They must also know of web scripting languages, such as HyperText Markup Language (HTML), in order to come out with a single page of web content. Since 1990s, web developers had come out with many web applications with easy to install and use interfaces. Most of them were database-driven, in which the web content was generated dynamically based on user selection. With the introduction of web-based forum in year 1996, online discussion becomes easier. The topics (also known as “threads”) are usually generated by registered members from all around the world. Other members are allowed to reply on most of the topics. The forum owners (also known as moderators) are usually the one doing housekeeping and filtering out offensive contents.

Blog is a contraction of the term weblog. The term “weblog” was first introduced by John Barger in December 1997. It is a type of website which is usually maintained by an individual. Blog is like a personal diary or journal, kept on the Web. It is usually sorted in reverse-chronological order in which the latest content is always shown on the top of the first page. Since the blog is maintained by the individual, there is usually no limitation on the content to be published. It can be personal opinion on certain events, journal, media sharing, and even criticisms. In return, readers can submit comments on each article (also known as “post”). Due to popularity, “blog” is treated as a verb as well, for example “Have you blogged today?”.

In blog applications, the individual him/herself is the owner of the site, providing them more controls over his/her website. Compared to emails which is usually used for formal communication, blogs appears to be more personal and “natural”. Today, there are many free blog hosting service providers around with the famous ones being Blogspot and Wordpress. With little-to-none technical skill, users can have their own domain and first article to be posted with just a few clicks. Blog applications have gone through 2 generations within a short period of time (IP & Wagner, 2007):

Table 1.1  
*Blog Generation*

<b>Generation</b>	<b>Improvement</b>	<b>Description</b>
1	First person diary	Developed with non-technical users in mind with minimum clicks in order to publish contents.
2	Communication feature and user interface	Readers are able to comment on posts. Bloggers are able to compose articles in an environment similar to word processing applications such as Microsoft® Word.
3	To enhance productivity and connectivity on the web	Blogs begin to move toward “application blog”, providing integration with other software applications, such as Global Positioning System (GPS), Facebook, multimedia devices, and so on.

From the table above, it is clear that blog applications are moving toward ease of use while at the same time adding more features into it to make it look richer. The figure below shows a snapshot of blog article composer using Generation 2 of blog applications which looks similar to desktop word processing tools such as Microsoft® Word.

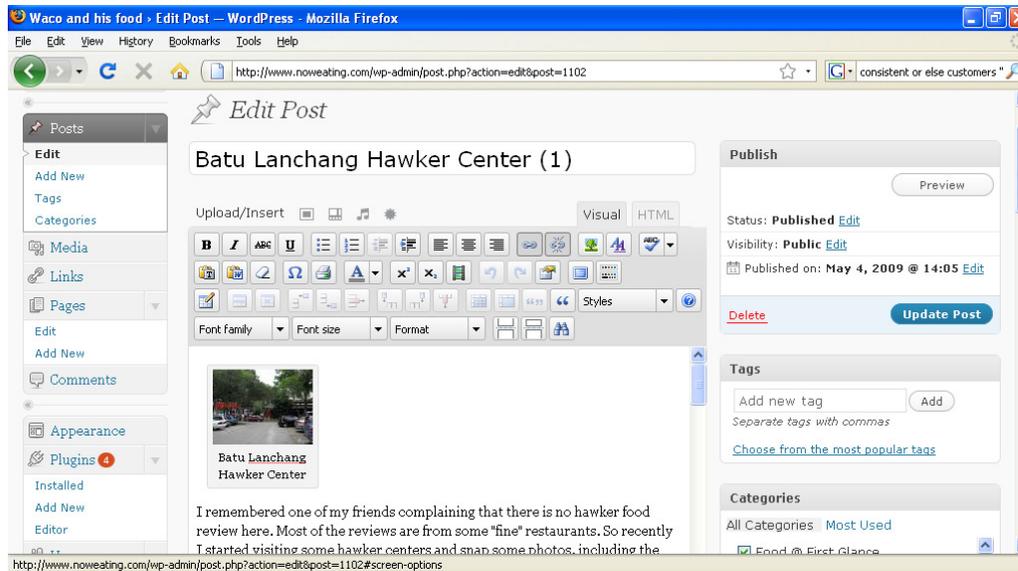


Figure 2. Screenshot of a blog editor.

“Blogger” usually refers to the one who write the blog. It can be further categorized into 4 types (IP & Wagner, 2007): *Habitual*, *Active*, *Personal*, and *Blogging Lurker*. Habitual users had formed strong habit of visiting their own blogs. They make several posts per day and usually also have a list of friend’s blogs to visit. Active bloggers access their blogs once per day and have strong group belonging. Similar to active bloggers, personal bloggers access their blogs once per day but keep their blogs for personal use. For blogging lurker, they have their own blog but rarely or never post to it. They have nothing interesting to share their story but eager to learn from their friends’. This is the least involved type of blogger with unknown or non-existent objective in owning a blog.

Bloggers are usually from younger generation. 71% of 16-34 year olds in the U.S. have participated in blogging activity, and they are three times more likely than people from the age of 35-49 to manage or write their own blogs (Singh, 2008). They are not likely to have physical interaction with people they met online and did not meet them in person (Mitchell, Wolak, & Finkelhor, 2007).

Due to the advancement in transportation and information technology, comparing products by customers has become easier. Other than attending offline venues such as trade shows and stores, customers also take initiative to compare products online as it is more convenience and economic. Comparing products online provides a win-win solution for both customers and marketers. Online merchants and search engine, such as Amazon and Google usually keep track of users' browsing behaviors. From the keywords they typed, the company knows which products the customer interested more, which products having the most problems (by checking on the phrases they typed in search engine or number of post in forums), and which products they eventually buy. Best of all, the location of visitors is tracked. This provides an opportunity for marketer to market potential products in appropriate countries.

Some companies use consumer's blogs as a free marketing tool. For example, McDonald's (<http://www.mymcd.com.my/bloggercontest/howtowin.html>) was running an online campaign in which prizes were given for the most creative bloggers promoting their McValue LUNCH from the blogger's website. Bloggers used photos or videos to promote the meal. The campaign, however, received negative comments from some online community (<http://not2eat.blogspot.com/2009/05/mcdonald-free-marketing-through-blogs.html>) such that it forced consumers to purchase their products and at the same time help the company to promote the meal for free. Some anti-branding websites are also appeared to target major brands, such as Coca-Cola, Starbucks, Microsoft, and McDonald's (Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2008).

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

When marketing a product or service, it is important for marketers to explain the product/service features and advantages to consumers clearly. In the absence of comprehensive information, customers choose their own baseline decision criteria for comparing products or services. Though a manufacturer may design a product with rich features in mind, a customer may overlook these features and focus on the form factor or price. Unless both features and advantages are fully exposed to customers, a study in consumer pre-purchase behavior is usually difficult. A customer may choose product B because he/she has not much information on product A. Customers usually have difficulties in determining the quality of a product/service from official (corporate) websites as the messages are usually focused on good points regardless of actual attributes. Due to business practices, product manufacturers are usually not allowed to expose competitor information on their official websites, such as with the intention to compare its product with others. An example of a corporate website is shown in Appendix A.

To gather more information on a product before purchasing it, Internet users use search engines such as Google and Yahoo! to look for related reviews by trusted parties. Review means to appraise critically on a subject matter. Product reviews can be found in most of the online retail stores such as Amazon.com, buy.com, and shop.com. Those reviews are written by customers after they purchased products from the online store and are visible to the public. Since not all customers purchased products online, some websites such as epinions.com and trustedreview.com are designed to allow users to share their opinion on any product they used. While product reviews can be found from the Internet, little reviews can be found for service industry, such as restaurant, hotel, and banking services. Service

products are intangible and cannot be easily described. Consumers tend to rely on word of mouth from an experience source to lower perceived risk and uncertainty (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). Furthermore, negative or indecent reviews are usually monitored by the e-commerce companies or moderators of the online forums, causing the overall rating less transparent.

On the other hand, searing honesty that appears more frequently on personal blogs may have the potential in becoming the new marketing channel for service segments in the hospitality industry. Even though online forums allow users to share their thoughts, most of the forums are being monitored by moderators who are also system administrators. Users have limited freedom of speech and violating forum rules usually means their account being suspended. Blogs, on another hand, allow Internet users to become the “system administrator” (blogger) easily. They will have full control over the articles they posted and at the same time allowing other Internet users to participated in commenting the articles. Compared with e-mail and forums, blogs offer their users powerful and easy-to-use mechanisms to manipulate blog contents, aesthetics and functionality (Yang & Liu, 2009). Table below shows a comparison between blogs and corporate websites:

Table 1.2

*Feature Comparison between Blogs and Corporate Websites*

	<b>Blog</b>	<b>Corporate Website</b>
Message Format	Informal, frequent use of first person addressing	Formal, third person point of view
Feedback from readers	Using or via comments, all readers can contribute	Using or via helpdesk, handled by professional
Feedback visibility	Visible at the end of related article	Not visible or being filtered
Website layout	Usually single column with latest article on top	Varies and based on web designers
Content update	By bloggers	By dedicated professionals
Content coverage	Usually wide and brief	Only company related products/services and in detail
Update frequency	Many times daily	Usually only when there is product information changes
Multimedia content (e.g. photo, video, animation)	Yes	Yes
Membership required?	No	No
Email notification on content changes	Yes (optional)	Yes (optional)

While corporate blogs do help the company attract more customers, little research has been conducted to determine if consumer blogs will impact the company business positively or negatively especially in service industries. Previous studies on blogs are more focused on factors which motivated Internet users to blog. More specific, it will be interesting to find out if blogs play a significant role in marketing restaurant service which is one of the most popular tourist and local travel destinations in Malaysia. This research attempts to determine

if the official website is sufficient enough to attract customers for service offered. Being one of the new Internet technologies, we try to verify if the restaurant reviews in personal blog able to influence a consumer's decision to visit a restaurant. Finally, as blogging is still at growing stage, we are also interested on the preferred features to have in blogs from the consumer's point of view.

#### **1.4 Research Objective**

For years, blogs are widely used as an online journal by individuals. The blogs share one purpose – knowledge sharing. The benefit of blogs toward organizations remains unclear. The purpose of this research is to discover the potential of blogs in becoming a marketing channel for the hospitality industry. Specifically, we intend to identify consumers' source of information, and the level of significant of the blog posts in affecting consumer decision in selecting a restaurant. With this study, hopefully the impact of blogs toward organizations can be identified and thus providing marketers a new source of marketing channel to advertise their products or services.

## 1.5 Definition of Key Terms

<b>Key Term</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Blog</b>	A personal or corporate website in the form of an online journal, with new entries appearing in sequence as they are written, especially as dealing with reflections or opinion, and typically incorporating links to other articles.
<b>Blog applications</b>	Software usually pre-installed by system administrator on web server in order to allow end users to use it to generate blog contents and share them with the public.
<b>Blogger</b>	A person who owns and writes a blog.
<b>Consumer-Generated Content</b>	Messages created by consumer after using certain products/services.
<b>GUI</b>	Graphical user interface. A user interface based on graphics (icons, pictures and menus) instead of text; uses a mouse as well as a keyboard as an input device.
<b>Intention to Visit Restaurant</b>	The degree to which a person willing to visit a restaurant after obtaining sufficient information regarding it.
<b>Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU)</b>	The degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free of effort.
<b>Perceived Usefulness (PU)</b>	The degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance.
<b>Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)</b>	TAM postulates that information system use is determined by two belief constructs, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use.

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

This study discusses the evolution of blogs and at the same time, provides insight for service companies a potential new, inexpensive, and more attractive medium of advertising through blogs. It also helps bloggers to understand readers' needs.

## **1.7 Organization of Remaining Chapter**

Chapter 2 introduces the literature review on elements related to this research, important constructs and variables with definitions. Theoretical framework and hypotheses development are defined in this chapter. Chapter 3 discusses the proposed methodology which covers the research design, variables of the study, population and sample, procedures and data analysis. Chapter 4 presents in detail the profile of the respondents, descriptive analysis and the results of statistical data analysis. This study concludes with Chapter 5, discussing the results of the research, implications, limitations as well as the recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Literature in blogging is rather new as blogging was only made available late 1990s. The initial reviews were related to the study of marketing trend as found in literature. This included the way a restaurant was trying to market itself. The literature review ends with the discussion of the popularity of blog with the adaption of blogs into organization environment.

#### **2.2 Review of the Literature**

##### **2.2.1 Food Away From Home (FAFH)**

Food is categorized as physiological need, which is the lowest level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Appendix C). It can also serve to satisfy needs beyond bodily satisfaction, such as emotional and social (Jang, Ha, & Silkes, 2009). People fall under lower income groups must fulfill their physiological need for food. With the increase in income, people climb to a higher level of the pyramid and start paying for the better quality, healthier, and safer of food. According to United States Department of Agriculture, each Malaysian household spent 14.6% or US\$3,127 (RM11,418) of their income on food in year 2007. Each capita spent about US\$455 (RM1,668) on food. Food is able to bridge people in a given society, to show social status, and to express sentiments such as laughter and joy (Jang et al., 2009). Food is usually used as the medium for cooks and advertisers in order to influence food choices. Consumers not only simply purchase for food, but also consider the attribute of the food such as:

- a) Energy content
- b) Nutrient content/health properties
- c) Taste
- d) Status/Prestige properties
- e) Environmental, political, and ethical properties
- f) Time/Convenience attribute

As more women get into the workforce, a household must decide if it wants to spend time in preparing food or have their meal outside. Initially known as the meal planner at home, women now spend more time working outside. It is not surprising that Food Away From Home (FAFH) sectors shows a dramatic growth. Even though FAFH is considered less healthy, the demand for convenience overrides health attributes (Lazaridis & Drichoutis, 2006).

FAFH is a form of leisure in which leisure is defined as time spent outside of both the labor force and household production (Stewart, Blisard, Bhuyan, & Nayga, 2005). Full service and fast food restaurants provide leisure to a household manager as he/she is freed from cooking, cleaning, and shopping. The demand of FAFH is dependent on the number of members in the household. As a household adds one more member, food prepared at home may become more economical. For example, it takes 20 minutes for a person to prepare a meal only for the person. However, it only takes 30 minutes to prepare a meal for four persons. Single-person household will most likely spend their time having a meal outside because it is more economical. This, however, does not favor low income groups who cannot afford independent transport (Coveney & O'Dwyer, 2009).

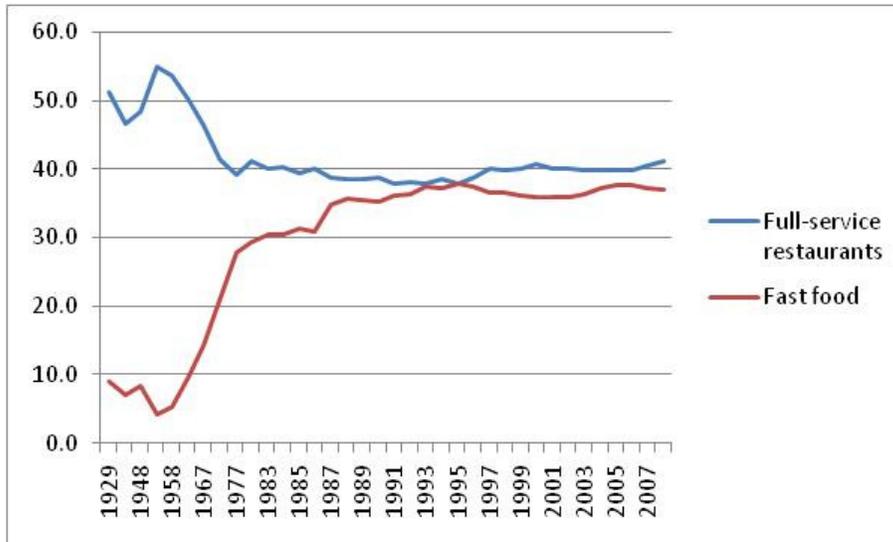


Figure 3. The away-from-home market by outlet type.

As long as FAFH is concerned, full service and fast food restaurants will continue to grow over the remaining of the decade (Stewart et al., 2005). Fast food restaurant is also known as limited-service restaurant, in which they have limited menu with the food usually cooked in advance and ready to take away. Some major brands are McDonald, Burger King, Starbuck and KFC. Recently, the fast food market in U.S., however, seems to come to a halt while the full service market continues to grow as seen in Figure 3. Some of the factors include the awareness of obesity among people in developed countries and the ageing population. As of 2007, full service restaurants in U.S. occupied 40.8% of the FAFH market while fast food restaurants occupied 37.4%.

### 2.2.2 Marketing on hospitality industry and restaurant

According to American Marketing Association (AMA), marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large. Kotler (2002)

suggests some desirable qualities for any marketing communications and should follow a framework called AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action):

Table 2.1  
*AIDA Framework*

Attention	Attract the attention of the customer.
Interest	Raise customers' attention by demonstrating features, advantages, and benefits.
Desire	Convince customers that they want and desire the product or service and that it will satisfy their needs.
Action	Lead customers towards taking action and/or purchasing.

Marketing in most developed economies is no longer just about advertising a product or service; it is about marketing a feeling, and having customer's experience the product or brand (Singh, 2008). Communicating with customers usually involves using more than one marketing tool and is known as integrated marketing communication (IMC). IMC composes of advertising, sales promotions, tradeshows, personal selling, direct selling, and public relation (Cateora, 2008). However, some traditional tools, such as TV, radio, print, and billboards may become less effective nowadays. As computer becomes more accessible, people spend more time in front of their computers than in front of TV. The internet has emerged as a viable medium for advertising and should be included as one of the media in a company media mix (Cateora, 2008).

Service marketing is different from product marketing. When marketing a product, the quality of the product can be easily identified because the product is tangible. For example, one can tell if a TV has better picture compared to others. Products can be returned if they are defective or unsatisfied. Marketing a service, such as food service, is different.

Comparing quality between services is usually difficult as the service is intangible. The service quality is built on how well a particular person delivered the service. When someone markets a service, he/she is actually marketing relationship and value (Frohock, n.d.). Compared to products, services are not returnable.

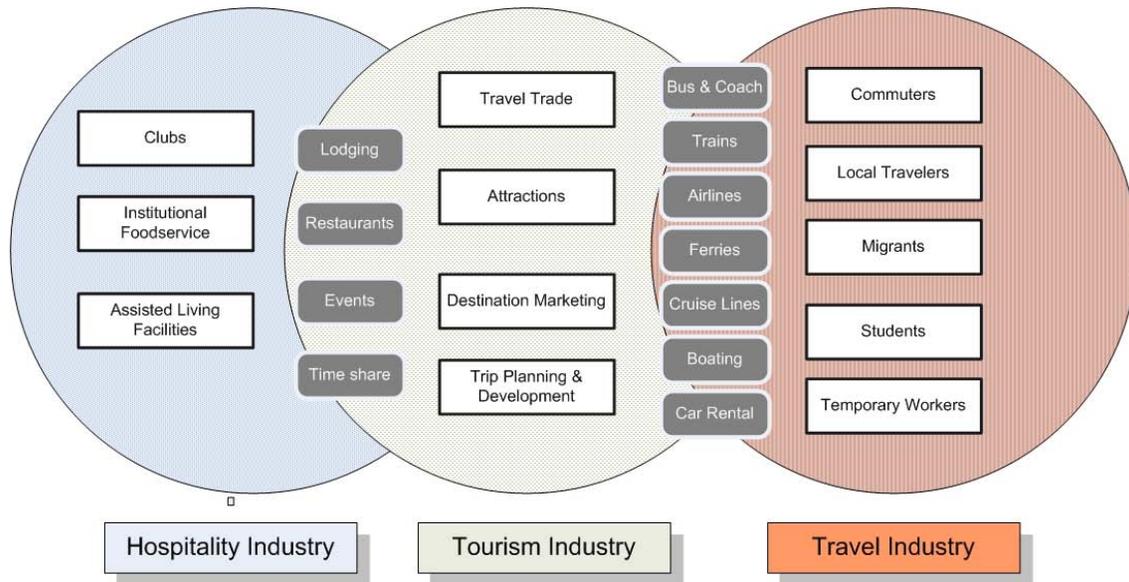


Figure 4. The relationship among the travel, tourism, and hospitality industries.

Restaurant falls under the hospitality industry in which foods are served to customers in a retail establishment. With reference to Figure 4, it can be further extended to the tourism industry (Pizam, 2009), or also known as gastronomic tourism. Not only local food able to cure hunger for locals, it is also one of the unique and original attractions during a holiday (Kim, Eves, & Scarles, 2009). Similar to travel products, restaurants are “experience goods” in which full information on certain attributes cannot be known without the direct experience (Klein, 1998). Food quality, service reliability, and environment cleanliness are positively related toward customer satisfaction and post-dining intention (Liu & Jang, 2008). It is found that advertising expenditures create intangible benefits to restaurant firms, such as product

introduction, differentiation, and positioning (Hsu & Jang, 2008). Other than advertising on traditional media, some restaurants also implement membership marketing in order to retain loyal customers. Customers sign up with a certain fee in order to enjoy cost benefit provided by the restaurant. However, the membership program will only positively influence customer choice if the market is competitive (Jang, Mattila, & Bai, 2007).

In terms of information technology (IT), restaurants in general are not oriented towards incorporating new technology in their operations as well as functional aspects of businesses (Oronsky, 2007). Even for full-service chain restaurants, the use of IT is not innovative enough. Most chain restaurants (for example Pizza Hut, TGI Friday, and KFC) have official websites as well as being listed in online directories. One of the limitations of these websites is that restaurants are often recommended simply based upon a limited number of functional attributes such as price, cuisine, and location and thus there is a lack of adequate representation of the holistic experience of dining (Xiang, Kim, Hu, & Fesenmaier, 2007). Most of the existing online recommendation systems have been built based on the information given by the producers and may not speak the same language with consumers. For example, consumers may find themselves difficult in knowing the exact restaurant location from the official website. With the emergence of new forms of communication such as personal blogs, social networking tools, and collaborative tagging, numerous opportunities exist for hospitality and travel businesses to tap into the consumer knowledge readily available online and in abundance in textual format (Xiang et al., 2007).

### **2.2.3 Viral marketing in new age**

Viral marketing is a form of marketing technique using pre-existing social networks to increase brand awareness. Some advantages of viral marketing are cost effectiveness and

voluntary customer participation. It can be word-of-mouth delivered or using the network effects of the Internet. Word-of-mouth (WOM) has received extensive attention from both academic and practitioners for decades (Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). Some researchers reported that WOM has greater influence than print ads, personal selling, and radio advertising (Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). WOM recommendations have different effects depending on the type of purchase (eMarketer, 2009). Over one-half of US consumers believed that WOM influenced the restaurants they went to, which coincidentally is the type of “purchase” this study is focusing on.

Table 2.2

*US Consumers Who Believe WOM Influences Their Purchase*

**US Consumers Who Believe Word-of-Mouth Influences Their Purchase, by Category and Race/Ethnicity, October 2008 (% of respondents in each group)**

	White	African-American	Asian	Hispanic	All
Eating out	56.2%	45.8%	43.5%	44.1%	52.9%
Electronics	45.8%	42.2%	44.0%	40.6%	44.4%
Grocery	41.5%	41.1%	37.0%	39.1%	40.7%
Home improvement	37.2%	29.3%	31.8%	31.6%	35.2%
Apparel/clothing	33.3%	38.6%	37.2%	37.5%	34.3%

Source: BIGresearch, "Simultaneous Media Usage Study (SIMM12)" as cited by MediaPost, October 22, 2008

WOM is usually passed from a peer who used the product to another peer. There are two types of WOM: offline and online mode. Before Internet becoming popular, most WOM is communicated through offline mode. Online mode is different from offline mode in two significant ways (Bruyn & Lilien, 2008):

- They are electronics by nature in which no face-to-face communication is performed.

- The one who passes the message (Referral) is usually unsolicited, in which it is sent to recipients who are not looking for information, and hence may not be willing to pay attention to them.

As long as the online mode is concerned, networks of friends (as opposed to networks of professionals or colleagues) are more suited to the rapid and effective diffusion of peer-to-peer online referrals (Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). Recipients not only pay attention to the referrals having the same demographics (e.g. sex, age, and social status), but most probably will purchase the product as well. However, due to the increase in spam and email-based viruses, advertising through emails proved to be difficult. Many email service providers have spam filter running in the background which delete unsolicited emails automatically. Furthermore, people are usually defensive toward email marketing (Lin, 2005). Blog works as a viral marketing media as it uses social network and user-generated contents to spread the message. Compared to word-of-mouth which is usually unidirectional, blogging provides two-way communication and has a longer lifespan.

#### **2.2.4 Popularity of blog**

In order to understand the popularity of blogs, features provided by blog hosting providers must first be studied. Free blog hosting providers such as Blogger and Wordpress.com are studied in this research as it is found that the majority of subscribers opt for the free service even though paid members can use more features (IP & Wagner, 2007). As shown in Appendix B, some common features available are the ability to upload images to the blog, post comments, receive notification on the comments, and ability to save the article before publishing. Users carry out activities (such as commenting) using social technology to satisfy their individual and social needs. This is similar to organizations in which employees

carry out tasks using technology to archive organization goals. The success of blog software as a social technology is directly related to the fit of its technology features with the need of its users (IP & Wagner, 2007). Ease of use, enjoyment, and knowledge sharing were positively related to the attitude toward blogging (Hsu & Judy, 2007). Woman who are high in neuroticism are likely to maintain a blog than a man (Guadagno, Okdie, & Eno, 2007). From readers point-of-view, demographics, motivation, and belief factors such as the quality of the information in the blogs were positively related to the believing in blogs (Yang, 2006).

The popularity of blogs also brings some negative effect to bloggers, such as the increase of online sexual solicitation and harassment from negative comments posted in their blogs (Mitchell et al., 2007). There is no control on whom to post. The commentator can be someone from marketing or a robot trying to post irrelevant messages on all blogs it found. From the reader's point-of-view, blogs also can create information overloading especially on novice readers due to rich information (Chen, Shang, & Kao, 2009). They make wrong decision and eventually lead to wrong result.

### **2.2.5 Blogs and organizations**

Previous studies showed that majority of the companies use Internet only for email checking, buying and selling product online purposes (Zhang & Moussi, 2007). The access of the Internet is also depending on the company's size (Zhang & Moussi, 2007). Even though companies cannot rely solely on Internet to improve their business performance, blog is important for the companies to broadcast messages to public (Singh, 2008; Soto-Acosta & Merono-Cerdan, 2009). While most of the companies have their own official website, some companies incorporated blogs into their websites. They can be further classified into internal and external blogging (Lears, 2003). Internally, blogs are used to manage knowledge and idea

among employees and to collaborate between teams or departments. Intra-firm knowledge sharing can enhance marketing operations efficiency (Kalaignana, Kushwaha, & Varadarajan, 2008). Internal blogs are accessible by employees only. Externally, blogs are used to communicate and collaborate with suppliers and customers (Lears, 2003). It can be the blog from Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or marketers of the company. Compared to formal product/service introduction as shown in official website, the blog content is presented in a more “natural” way. Instead of promoting their own product or service, stories, general knowledge, advice, tips and tricks are usually shared in the corporate blogs. These contents indirectly refer back to their own product or service. Blogs are global by nature. Publishing a blog provides a global platform for firms to reach a world audience.

The corporate blog provides differentiation to a company in terms of marketing (Singh, 2008). Since blogs provide an opportunity for ordinary people to voice their opinions, blogs enable the firm to see their organizations from the viewpoint of the customer (Singh, 2008). Companies that allow customers to communicate directly with them can get a deeper understanding of their customers’ likes, dislikes, interests, and concerns. Direct communication provides marketers with an opportunity to respond to or address customers’ comments, while setting the expectation that their opinion will result in a better product, service, or brand in the long run.

In summary, blogs are conceptually similar to other channels, like print, video, and audio. However, the interactivity inherent in blogs allows for a higher level of connectedness with the customer (Singh, 2008). In that sense, blogs have a better ability to manage customer relations, facilitate internal collaboration, aid knowledge management, improve media relations, and test new ideas for products and services. However, the organization must

ensure that the quality of blogs is monitored and the blogs are not contributed to information overload (Lears, 2003). Some employees may have difficulty in adapting the technology due to cultural background.

### **2.2.6 Blogs as service marketing tool**

Previously, service businesses usually advertise their business on TV, radio, and newspaper. Each media has its own advantages as well as disadvantages. TV allows the information to reach larger audience but is expensive. Radio is cheaper but people only listen to radio when driving. Many successful businesses published their advertisement on newspapers. This, however, requires right timing and right place. For example, a Chinese restaurant that targets families' customers should advertise in Chinese newspaper with coupons for kids' free meal. Regardless of the media used, advertising must be consistent or else customers may easily forget about the existence of the service business.

Research suggests that customers value a unique, more personalized message, and marketers continue to seek opportunities that will deliver that message in innovative and interesting ways (Buhalisa & Law, 2008; Kalaignanam et al., 2008). Blogs offer firms the ability to connect with customers in a unique and personalized manner where everything from brand promotions to new product ideas can be effectively communicated. Blog also helps in promoting tourism as well. For example, it has promoted Greece, which is relatively unknown by Taiwanese before a Taiwanese visited Aegean Sea in May 2003 and puts 124 photographs onto a website. The website has drawn much attention and Greece has become a popular destination not only for Taiwanese, but also people around the world (Lin, 2003).

Studies found factors contributed to the success of a blog as a marketing tool are such as photos and simple website content. Readers usually become curious about the person taking those amazing photos. This will actually inspire them to do likewise. As a single post in blog is usually organized in a single column with simple text and photos, this provides readers a user-friendly environment to browse through the content without much hassle.

## **2.3 Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses**

### **2.3.1 Model Development**

This study attempts to identify the impact of recommendations from bloggers on customer visit to restaurants by adapting Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). In other words, this study tries to identify the **intention to visit restaurant** after Internet users read the articles about the restaurant in blogs. Due to the limited literature on the impact of blogs toward end users, this research is more toward exploratory study. Many researchers used TAM developed by Davis to explain how users come to accept and use a technology (Lee, 2008; Margaret, Sophe, & William, 2006; Rahman & Seyal, 2007; Ramayah, Muhamad, & Noraini, 2003). TAM has been tested across a wide range of computer settings and has been shown to be a robust predictor of computer use (Shen, Laffey, Lin, & Huang, 2006). It is able to explain a substantial amount of the variance (typically about 40%) in intentions to use and usage behavior of technologies (Shen et al., 2006). TAM claims that information system use is determined by two belief constructs, perceived ease of use (PEU) and perceived usefulness (PE). In TAM, these two belief constructs are the determinants of behavioral intention. Additionally, perceived ease of use influences behavioral intention through two causal pathways, a direct effect as well as an indirect effect through perceived usefulness which is