

CHAPTER V CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents a summary of the study. The overall research results are briefly stated. The study's contribution and recommendations for further research are also included.

5.1 Summary of Research Results

Guided by relationship marketing, with the definition extracted from various literatures, the study is based on the structure of Christopher, Payne & Ballantyne (1991) – the relationship marketing ladder of customer loyalty, intending to examine the importance of interaction as the determinant of relationship marketing in the blogger-blog reader relationships, and most significantly, to test if relationship marketing can fit-into the blogosphere.

5.1.1 Conclusion 1

The major points for the pretest survey were to probe into the interactions between professional bloggers and blog readers, also blog readers' attitude toward blogs. There were nine professional bloggers listed in the questionnaire to examine their level of popularity, and the two most popular and famous bloggers, Wan Wan and Queen, were extracted to be the target bloggers in the following research process.

The indicator of interactions at this stage was to comment or leave message on blogs. The result showed that most participants did comment or leave message on blogs before for different reasons. Moreover, more than half of participants believed that replying comments or messages is instrumental for improving level blog popularity. The blog interactivity scale

showed that participants agree blogs/blogging are interactive, free participatory, and are continuous, frequent interactions between bloggers and blog readers. Blogs are co-productions between bloggers and blog readers. Blogs are accumulation of dialogues between bloggers and blog readers, and are communication platforms.

Through pretest survey, the existence of interactions between bloggers and blog readers is basically confirmed. Therefore, more precise and comprehensive information about interactions is needed for further research.

5.1.2 Conclusion 2

The questions in the discussion panels are about four aspects: 1. blog readers' general impression and understanding about the target blogs (Wan Wan & Queen), 2. blog readers' attitudes and opinions about interactions, 3. sales of blog publications, and 4. blog readers' general ideas and opinions about blogs/blogging. From two focus group discussion panels, indicators of interactions, expectations (level of agreement), and satisfactions were captured, and became the basis of the final-round survey.

There are some interesting and conflicting ideas in the focus group discussions. Participants indicated that there are too many comments and messages per day. Professional bloggers like Wan Wan and Queen would not have time to reply all messages, and it is understandable and acceptable. However, participants also pointed out that they would want to have professional bloggers' reply if they indeed left messages. Some implied that the fact that the professional blogger do not have time to reply all messages make them less likely to leave message at all.

As for real life interactions, some participants indicated that they think off-line interactions may be good ideas, but they also worry about meeting professional bloggers in person would be a disappointment if the interaction process is commercialized or the personality of the professional blogger is not that charming. Though participants in general stated that they think becoming commercialized is inevitable since professional bloggers financially rely on the blogs. However, they still prefer those postings without product placement, and of bloggers' original style.

5.1.3 Conclusion 3

In conclusion, the study indeed confirms that interactions are of great importance in blogger-blog reader relationships. Through the process of examining the research framework of fulfilling expectations to achieve satisfaction, and eventually, to reach the goal of having blog readers spread word-of-mouth; relationship marketing is perfectly fit-into the scene.

Interactions between the blogger and blog readers can further deepen their relationship and fulfill blog readers' expectations toward the blog and the blogger. If their expectations are fulfilled, their level of satisfaction toward the blog and the blogger would also be higher. The higher satisfaction level increases the possibility of these blog readers spreading word of mouth and risking their own integrity and credibility to recommend the blog or the blogger to other.

5.1.4 Other Findings

Interestingly, the study indicates that, for Queen's blog, females are more likely to interact and have higher scores on level of agreement. It may be because I am Queen blog is

often considered feminism or even female chauvinism. For Wan Wan's blog, blog readers who are younger, less educated, are more willing to spread word of mouth. The average age groups of Wan Wan's blog readers are indeed younger than Queen's.

Age, gender, income and education level are more or less correlated with interactions, level of agreement, level of satisfactions, and willingness to spread word of mouth. Since there are many different categories of blogs and bloggers, in the future study, these variables can be further explored.

5.2 Suggestions for Professional Bloggers

The study has two professional bloggers as targets to examine the interactions and relationship marketing application in blogosphere. The results emphasize the importance of interactions between bloggers and blog readers. For professional bloggers who financially rely on their blogs and activities derived from blogs, interaction is key to their success.

Though blog readers can understand that bloggers are so popular and would not have enough time to interact with all blog readers, but they value the interactions between bloggers and look forward to interacting with them via different methods. If the blogger can remain the interactions with blog readers constantly, they are likely to have more and more blog readers along with time through spreading word of mouth by satisfied blog readers.

5.3 Contributions of this Study

First of all, for people who intend to be professional bloggers as Wan Wan or Queen, this study can serve as a reference to understand blog readers' attitudes toward interactions, to

know their expectations, so to better manage their blogs and their reader relationships.

Second, the studies and researches so far focus on blogger's side to explore how these professional bloggers can be so successful. However, blog readers, as customers who actually visit these blogs and bring benefits for these professional bloggers are neglected. This study provides both qualitative and quantitative data about blog readers' attitudes, opinions, and ideas about blogs/blogging.

Third, in the past, blogs are regarded as tools to implement relationship marketing, but not the other way around. Blogging is only one sort of channel to distribute information or to promote products. This research tends to attract attention on the blogging itself as an independent professional field as its importance is of no doubt.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

There are five suggestions for future research. First, though the study means to base on blog readers' perspective, bloggers' opinions can also be instrumental to the research to get a whole picture of the story. Second, a longitudinal research can be applied to observe blog readers' interactions with bloggers over time. Blog readers' expectations toward the blog may evolve along with ever-changing technologies. Third, a larger sample can provide more accurate and more meaningful results. Fourth, to be more focused, blogger types can be categorized and studied respectively. For different types of bloggers, there may be different level of interactions with blog readers, thus different strategies can be further suggested. Last, but not the least, behavioral aspect can be further explored to transform the study results into real business value.