THE EFFECTS OF BLOGGER RECOMMENDATIONS ON CUSTOMER BUYING INTENTIONS: A CASE STUDY OF UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY (USIU) - AFRICA STUDENTS

BY

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UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY AFRICA

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A Project Report Submitted to the Chandaria School of Business in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree Masters in Business Administration (MBA)

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare this is my original work and has not been submitted to any other college, institution or university other than the United States International University in Nairobi for academic credit.

Signed: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________
Lucia Musau (650212)

This project has been presented for examination with my approval as the appointed supervisor.

Signed: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________
Dr. P.N. Kiriri

Signed: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________
Dean, Chandaria School of Business
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ABSTRACT

Bloggers represent a powerful group in the marketplace because they are able to influence consumers via word of mouth. They tend to be knowledgeable about a product category rather than one specific product. Since bloggers are becoming increasingly influential in consumer decision making process, it is necessary to understand how they influence their followers. This study sought to assess the influence of bloggers recommendation on customer’s buying intentions. The study was guided by the following research questions. Does customer perception of the blogger influence their buying intentions? Does the popularity of the blogger have an effect on customers buying intentions? And, Does the expertise of the blogger have an effect on customers buying intentions?

The research adopted descriptive research design to seek opinions of the respondents on the subject matter. Their perception on the subject was considered to be important and of value since it will give the researcher a real picture of the problem area and will allow the researcher to establish the effects of blogger recommendations on the customers buying intentions. The target population was 6398 USIU students who were be stratified into undergraduate, graduate and doctoral students. A sample size of 362 was selected for the study. Questionnaires were used as data collection instruments. The collected data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which the three independent variables (perception, popularity and expertise) influenced customers buying intentions. Data was presented using tables and figures.

On the effects of bloggers perception on consumer buying intention, credibility of the blogger was found to affect the consumer buying intention within the range of a moderate extent to a great extent. Out of the various aspects of credibility that were studied, being informative ranked the highest where as being influential ranked the least. On trustworthiness the study established that the respondents followed bloggers recommendations because they were trustworthy and that they were likely to purchase a product if they trusted the blogger.

On the effects of bloggers popularity on the customer buying intentions, it was established that the respondents frequently visited popular blogs, the respondents developed a strong bond and
close interpersonal relationships with the blog or blogger, by frequently visiting, reading, and exchanging information. The study also established that a higher credibility caused a greater impact of the perceived persuasive intent, the number of likes a blog had received affected their buying intentions, the higher the number of followers, the more a blogger was perceived as trustworthy and that the higher the number of followers, the more a blogger was perceived as an expert.

On the effect of bloggers expertise on the consumer buying intentions, the study established that bloggers that showed expertise in a particular field were more credible, bloggers who were experts were trusted more, having an ability in a special area was the key factor of being an expert. The study further established that consumer liked to read blogs that taught them useful information and that offered knowledge in certain areas. It was also established that providing accurate information was important when consumers read blogs and that they followed bloggers recommendations because they viewed the blogger as skilled, experienced and experts.

The study concludes that bloggers perception has a significant effect on consumers buying intent. Credibility of the blogger in terms of being informative, authentic consistent, fair and focused had the highest rating which points to the conclusion that consumers are have not only become information seekers but are also looking for information that is authentic and focused to enable them make their purchase decisions. Consumers frequently visit popular blogs and develop a strong bond and close interpersonal relationships with the blog or blogger by frequently visiting, reading, and exchanging information. Bloggers that show expertise in a particular field are more credible as the consumers regard the information as more useful. Offering information in a specific field of one’s qualification and ability promotes trust among the consumers and hence the likely hood of positively affecting their purchase intent.

The study recommends that bloggers should invest in acquiring more authentic information that is consisted and focused. Marketing managers should be keen on following recommendations by popular bloggers who may have a lot of influence over their customers. They should also invest in finding and working with bloggers who possess the qualities highlighted in this study. Bloggers should adopt strategies that will help increase the number of visitors and followers to their blogs. Building relationships through social media platforms
such as Facebook, twitter and Instagram can help in enhancing bloggers network. To maintain and increase the number of followers the blogger should display professionalism at all times and refrain from offensive language. Good quality work and more frequent updates on the blog will help in attracting more visitors and followers. Bloggers should focus on area of their strength in terms of knowledge and competence by investing in research.
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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Communication is crucial for the day today running of all organizations regardless of the sector it belongs to. Information flows either downward, upward and laterally through the various structures which maybe formal or even informal (Schermerhorn, Osborn, Uhl-Bien & Hunt, 2002). The need for communication may vary from one organization to another depending on the sector, for example in a manufacturing firm communication may be needed in order to get materials and services to undertake their business activities, or to collaborate and coordinate with others to secure suitable distribution of their goods and services (Jamieson, 2011). Given the current technological advancement, consumers are more informed and so are the strategies of marketing communication practices (Schultz, 2009).

Marketing communication practices are of great importance to the organization because of the role they play in meeting customers’ needs which in turn determines the profitability and the ultimate survival of the organization. Consumers are not only looking for fair prices but also for relationship that is personalized (Jakada, 2006). If well utilized, marketing communications practices can create competitive advantage for the organization at the same time increase sales and profits while saving time, money and stress. Marketing communication focuses on communication that revolves around the customer and helps the customer in the decision making process while making a purchase. The practice helps strengthen the bond with customers and cushions the organization from competitive pressures that can pull away customers (Messah & Immaculate, 2011).

Marketing communication practices is the approach with the aid of which organizations attempt to inform, convince, and remind consumers directly or indirectly about their products, offerings and brands that they deal with. The purchasers are able to know how and why a product is used, by who and when to use them. The brand and corporation image may be superior if powerful marketing communication practices are adopted. The practices are meant to tell and persuade a target market so as to influence the conduct of that target audience (Abubakar, 2014). Advertising and marketing communication practices strategies goes a long way to contributing within the growth of commercial enterprise in many factors if practiced
correctly like growth in extent of income, sales volume on funding and maintain goodwill (Gassmann, Kausch & Enkel, 2005). There are four forms of marketing communication practices as identified by Fill (2005), they include; advertising, sales promotion, personal selling and publicity

Digital Marketing is the practice of promoting services and products through the usage of digital platforms as channels of distribution and the international availability and accessibility of the internet has made it a very powerful mode of conversation between agencies and customers (Rowley, 2011). The boom of internet era has great capability as it reduces the prices of product and service delivery and also reduces the geographical obstacles that arise in bringing customers and sellers together. The net also allows small businesses to get right of entry to markets and to hold a presence that helps them to compete against the huge players within the enterprise.

Mobile, the internet, electronic mail, and video are some channels which are increasingly more trending and there is need to have know-how of these techniques due to the fact that customers use the net as a supply to locate suppliers on a worldwide level (Leek Turnbull & Naude, 2008). Businesses have explored digital-marketing means such as video commercials, subsidized content material and online promotions. Because digital products and services, such as images and on-line banking, can be delivered through the net, they are naturally considered as information-orientated products or services.

Blogs are an influential social media platform and a powerful advertising device (Hsu & Tsou, 2011). Organizations establish blogs to permit customers have interaction with the organization as well as amongst themselves to create relationships among members who share common norm and values (Nambisan & Watt, 2011). The net has significantly changed the sources for delivery of information, seller-centric advertising and marketing messages are no longer as powerful. Lee and Koo (2012) indicate that customers agree with peer consumers more than they accept as true with businesses, and are possibly to use records supplied by way of fellow purchasers to evaluate merchandise/offerings earlier than they make a buy selection. When customers share their experiences on products and services, other potential customers can examine those opinions to evaluate the attributes of products/services before shopping.
Blogs have come to be a vital device for communication in modern society, from seeking recommendation to conveying private views on a topic. In keeping with a recent research from the social media research 77% of net customers examine blogs and 74% search on-line for consumer digital critiques before shopping. Almost a hundred and fifty million blogs have been published at the net, with over 27,000 new blogs created each 24 hours (Social media blog, 2013).

The upward push of virtual technologies has enabled purchasers to attach and engage with one another via the net, but it has additionally advocated clients to proportion their feelings and evaluations on merchandise and corporations (Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006). The sharing of client reviews online is referred to as digital phrase of mouth (eWOM) and may be defined as any positive or negative announcement made former or current clients about a product or agency, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions through the net (Hennig-Thurau Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler, 2004). Unlike the traditional WOM, with the internet customers can now hook up with hundreds of individuals through on line discussion boards, social networking web sites, on-line groups, overview websites and blogs.

The capability to evolve the enterprise’s virtual advertising strategy to fit the current market is crucial if the enterprise is to survive the competition. The rate and nature of change nowadays is not like past evolutions and as a result the need to respond to this change more appropriately. The digital marketing model has to be reworked from the ground up based on the analysis of the prevailing market conditions. Lack of proper planning for digital marketing will create problems and hence give competitors an upper hand. Coordination between departments is key in ensuring achievement of digital advertising and marketing. Mauro and Tschoegl (2008) said that in some cases the organizational culture has to change for departments to work together properly. New virtual advertising technologies like social media, mobile, and analytics are advancing unexpectedly on the economic landscape. These innovations are used extensively by purchasers and employees alike

Bloggers represent a powerful group in the marketplace because they are able to influence consumers via word of mouth (Stockberger-Sauer & Hoyer, 2009). They tend to be knowledgeable about a product category rather than one specific product (Shoham & Ruvio, 2008). Since bloggers are becoming increasingly influential in consumer decision making
process, it is necessary to understand how they influence their followers. As noted by Vilpponen, Winter and Sundqvist (2006), consumer blogs and online news sources are likely to influence early adopters because by their very nature they are more likely to seek for information from external sources such as the internet as opposed to seeking from what may be considered as internal sources such as family and friends. Phau and Lo (2004) stated that innovators will tend to use new products as a trial before spreading the word to later buyers. They also stated that innovators are likely to act as promoters of new fashion through word mouth to the late adopters.

Marketers are consistently looking for and utilizing new strategies that are meant to influence behavior and consequently convince customer to purchase their products or services (Spears & Singh, 2004). One of these strategies that is commonly used by companies in social media campaigns is the use of blogs. The blogs provide detailed reviews of products and services which are aimed at influencing the attitudes and intentions of the target group. Bloggers have been viewed as opinion leaders and hence the raising need for product recommendation. Mendoza (2010) opines that opinion leaders can be identified as the people within a reference group who have a great influence because of their knowledge, personality and social standing. Besides giving information about a product, they also share personal knowledge on the product and give recommendations.

When consumers are considering to buy goods, they search for relevant information to weigh and evaluate different options. After these comparisons and judgements, a consumer will engage in purchase behavior (Wang, Cheng, & Chu, 2013). The eventual purchase starts with an intention, therefore, research concerning consumer behavior mostly uses purchase intentions to measure consumer behavioral intention. A purchase intention is a consumer’s objective intention toward a product (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). As mentioned, blogs are possible information sources which can contribute to the formation of a purchase decision. The term purchase intention was defined by Spears and Singh (2004) as a consumer’s conscious plan or intention to make an effort to purchase a product. Bouhlal, Mzoughi, Ghachem and Negra (2010) suggest that a consumer’s attitude toward a blog positively influences consumer purchase intention.
A research conducted by Knowledge Network (2011), which is an online research company aimed at showing that consumers are much more likely to refer to social media before making purchase decisions. The findings of the research demonstrated that the purchase decisions of 38 million 13 to 80 years old in U S are influenced in various ways of social media. Out that a blog is an important source of online content and their survey of consumer intention and behavior suggests that 87% of consumers will search for related product information and other users’ comments on the Internet before purchase. Technorati’s (2008) report concerning global blog status showed that 80% of bloggers had posted comments on some brands or products, of which 37% frequently write blogs of this kind. The report also pointed out that while browsing blogs, consumers are likely to express their disagreement on information given by different blogs.

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) in 2008 75% of Internet surfers were users of social media, actively joining social network sites, following blogs, and uploading their own content. They further stated that blogs can be used a tool of self-presentation and self-disclosure, gathering information helpful to update employees, customers, business partners and others on important developments, and to improve the transparency of the company. On the contrary they admit that not many firms seem to be comfortable in the environment where consumers can freely communicate with each other and thus they have increasingly less control over the information concerning their business activities. Sanna and Heidi (2012) did a study on the effect of blogs on young women’s online buying behavior when purchasing fashion items from online stores. The results of the research indicated that reading blogs can have a significant effect on the behavior of young women when purchasing fashion products from online web stores.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The business environment today has become very competitive especially with the use of internet where clients have emerged as increasingly more informed as a result easy access to information. There is increased competition in the marketplace and hence the need to understand a customer buying decision process and cast light on the factors that finally determine a customer’s choice between different companies or brands (Leppaniemi & Karjaluot, 2005). Blogging has become part of a consumer’s decision making process when
shopping; however, the understanding of blog recommendations effect on consumers purchase decision is still vague.

Despite the importance blogs as influential social media platform and a powerful marketing tool, few studies have been carried out in this area. Studies reviewed show that there is more concentration of related studies by global online research companies such as the Knowledge Networks (2011) and Technorati’s (2008). Other studies reviewed focused on different aspects of social media such as Kaplan and Haenlein (2009) who studied on the challenges and opportunities of social media. Sanna and Heidi (2012) did a study on the effect of blogs on young women’s online buying behavior when purchasing fashion items from online stores, this study was limited to women only and also focused on fashion items. In Kenya, Karanja (2016) carried out a study on using blogs to create a competitive advantage. This study therefore sought to fill the research gap that exists on the effect of bloggers recommendations on the customers buying intention.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This study sought to assess the effects of blogger recommendations on customer buying intentions.

1.4 Research Questions

The study was guided by the following questions:

1.4.1 Does customer perception of the blogger influence their buying intentions?

1.4.2 Does the popularity of the blogger have an effect on customers buying intentions?

1.4.3 Does the expertise of the blogger have an effect on customers buying intentions?

1.5 Importance of the Study

1.5.1 Marketing Managers

This study would equip managers with the requisite knowledge and guide them to make an informed decision on the effects of blogger recommendations on customer buying intentions. Resource allocation is a critical function of management and firms derive their success from the way they utilize their scarce resources. The findings from this study would assist firm
managers to identify and allocate resources on marketing platforms and strategies with the greatest positive impact on the performance of the organization. The understanding of the effects that blogger recommendations have on customer buying intention would help in determining how the company handles the recommendations by various bloggers based on the various attributes that were studied (perception, popularity and expertise of the blogger).

1.5.2 Bloggers
The findings of the study would be beneficial to bloggers in understanding how customers perceive them based on their recommendations. This would help them in understanding what influences customers buying intention and hence focus on those areas.

1.5.3 Researchers and Academicians
For academic researchers, this study would build the knowledge pool in the area of bloggers recommendations and customer buying intentions. The study would also act as a source of reference for future scholars besides suggesting areas for further research.

1.6 Scope of the Study
The scope of the study was limited to USIU-Africa students who included undergraduate, graduate and doctoral students. This study sought to assess the effects of blogger recommendations on customer buying intentions. The study was carried out in March, 2018 at the University grounds.

The main limitation of the study was the choice of the sample as it was drawn only from USIU-Africa students, even though the results offer valuable insights and better understanding of the effect of blogger recommendations in customer buying intention. Precautions should be taken when generalizing these results to other settings and contexts because the respondents were relatively young and educated.

1.7 Definition of Terms
1.7.1 Blog
Refers to a web page that contains regularly posted inlays that are achieved and arranged in reversed chronological order (Wright & Hinson, 2008).
1.7.2 Blogging
This refers to the act of either reading and/or writing in a blog (Walker, 2007).

1.7.3 Blog Post
An inlay in a blog this could be either in form of a comment or original post itself (Andersson, Sims, Price & Brusa, 2007).

1.7.4 Bloggers
These are individuals who read or write in blogs who can either be paid professionals or ordinary people (Walker, 2007).

1.7.5 Customer Perception
The process by which a customer’s selects organizes and interprets information inputs to create a meaningful picture of products or services (Kotler, 2001).

1.7.6. Purchase Intention
This is the likelihood that a customer will buy a particular product or service (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2000).

1.8 Chapter Summary
This chapter has presented the background of the study which touches on marketing communication, digital marketing, recommendations and customer buying intentions. The problem statement has been the research gap that exists on the effect of bloggers recommendations on the customers buying intention. The chapter provided the research questions that guided the research: how does customer perception, popularity and expertise of the blogger effect customers buying intentions? The chapter further provided the significance of the study to various stakeholders. The scope of the study and the operational definition of terms used in the study have also been presented.

The next chapter will present the literature review on studies that had been conducted in the past in relation to the objectives of this study. Chapter three will present the research methodology which will be used to achieve the objectives of the study. This includes the research design, population, sampling procedure and sample size, data collection method and data analysis. Chapter four will present results and findings in relation to the study objectives
and lastly, Chapter five will focus on discussions, conclusions and recommendations based on the findings of the study.
CHAPTER TWO

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical orientation of the study and empirical literature regarding the effects of blogs on customer buying intentions. The chapter is presented in subsequent sections based on the objectives of the study. These subsections include: Influence of bloggers' perception on customer buying intention, influence of bloggers' popularity on customer buying intention and the influence of bloggers' expertise on customer buying intentions. A chapter summary will also be presented.

2.2 Influence of Bloggers' Perception on Customer Buying Intention

An individual's notion serves as the process where individuals select, coordinate and interpret stimuli into a significant and coherent picture of the world. Quite simply, people understand things based on their experience and track record, not according to what is objectively real or true. Thus, it's quite common for two visitors to perceive a similar thing differently. Hence, it is of great importance for marketers to comprehend this diversity to be able to inspire the aspects that affect the consumers' buying action (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015). Kotler et al. (2009) asserts that perception impacts consumers' genuine behaviour. When individuals are highly encouraged, they will understand environmental stimuli related with their needs and acquire more info about their brand alternatives in order to evaluate them more favourably (Loken, 2006).

A couple of stimuli's affect individual action though it has been witnessed that generally people subconsciously prevent those stimuli's (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015). The writer further asserts that the stimuli experienced by online consumers already surpasses their capacity of attention. Which means that consumers are more and more blocking information and marketers think it is challenging to activate their audience. How firmly the stimulus is experienced depends upon the effectiveness of the sensory source. An advertorial over a magazine's main site among all the headlines can certainly go unseen, as the sensory suggestions is quite strong.

If a post succeeds to activate or advise but it does not achieve the establish business goals, it is not content marketing. Thus, keeping the strategy and goals in the fact of most activities is
essential. Offering entertainment or information that pays to for the prospective audience makes this content valuable. The task is to know what kind of content has value to the audience you are targeting. When subjected to stimuli, individuals are selective in two techniques determines if the stimulus is recognized or not. First of all, the backdrop of the individuals alters their targets. Subsequently, their motives (for example needs or pursuits) affect the way the stimulus is identified. For instance, if an 18-year-old scholar with limited income reads a commercial post in regards to a luxury beautification product, it's likely that the stimulus is not recognized well and the average person may also find this content provoking (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015).

2.2.1 Credibility of the Blogger

The term credibility refers to whether the source of information is deemed as impartial, believable, true, or factual. The positive characteristics of communications can enhance the worthiness of the source and so increase popularity among readers. If receivers of the information believe that a note has bias or emerges for other reasons than to provide consumer activities and recommendations, they could downgrade the trustworthiness of the source and avoid the persuasive purpose of the subject matter (Lee & Koo, 2012).

Whenever a blogger is regarded as more credible, buying motives of the targeted audience are higher. This may claim that this impact is bigger for a plan which runs on the blogger endorser, when compared to a campaign by using a celebrity. The trustworthiness of blogger is assessed through know-how, trustworthiness and appeal. Know-how is the degree to which an endorser is looked upon to really have the satisfactory knowledge, experience or skills to market product. Trustworthiness is the credibility, integrity and believability of any endorser. Likeability is the main attribute where trustworthiness is assessed. A market is much more likely to understand a blogger as more likeable for their familiarity, when compared to a spokesperson that is established by the business itself. Perceived appeal is the stereotype of positive association that people tend to have with a physically attractive person. When an endorser is recognized to more attractive, chances are that this can lead to higher buying motives (Silvera & Austad, 2003).

The perceived credibility of a blog can be an important part in the persuasive effects of blogs. Research has showed that the reliability of online information options is very important to
Internet surfers as few of them would depend on the source that is not regarded as credible (Sweetser, Porter, Chung & Kim, 2008). As stated by Kaye and Johnson (2011), individuals examine the reliability of personal blogs differently from other styles of sites like news or media. Several research workers have reported that viewers consider personal blogs as a far more credible source, because they are a fair option as compared to company-controlled websites which often times include a commercial or marketing purpose (Flanagin & Metzger, 2007). Furthermore, bloggers often offer more up-to-date and genuine sites because they're closer to the source than mainstream media sources, and for that reason, are believed as more dependable (Zhu & Tan, 2007).

Fashion blogosphere is recognized as a democratic space where everyone can match, whatever the scale, communal repute, sexuality, or gender. Despite the fact that personal blogs have been viewed as more credible sources of information, there have been cases where some bloggers have been found to compromise with brand manufacturers and get compensated either in cash or other items. This loophole has raised questions on their authenticity, trustworthiness and credibility. The enhanced commercialization brings about some controversies and criticism inside the influencer marketing. Will the bloggers or influencers be sincere when offering a view in regards to a product? is this integrity certainly payed for, or are they true in their purpose? Does it depend upon the number of repayment they obtain when blogging or marketing and advertising something? (Vineyard, 2014).

According to Chu and Kamal (2008), credibility and perceived trustworthiness of influencers have been found to be key factors that make influencers powerful brand promoters. Trustworthiness is one of the fundamental protruding factors in persuasion especially in on-line setting up whilst your client does not have the likelihood to absolutely feel and touch the merchandise (Everard & Galetta, 2006). Furthermore, reliability is essential for the bloggers and micro celebrities since it nurtures their efficiency, and boosts their particular marketing picture and self-brand (Chu & Kamal, 2008). When an influencer sometimes appears as more credible, the purchase intents of the prospective group is higher because the influencer sometimes appears as having higher knowledge, trustworthiness and attractiveness. Therefore, they augment the existing marketing techniques, as customers might still feel some level of
detachment from the celebrity but more attached to the blogger hence making the later more favourable (Silvera & Austad, 2004).

2.2 Trustworthiness of the Blogger

Trust is thought as a determination to depend on an exchange partner in whom you have self-confidence and in online e environment, trust comes with an essential role for online community to assemble informed action from other people (Ridings Gefen & Arinze, 2002). Consumers understand social advertising as a far more reliable way to obtain information about products than traditional press (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). However, when interconnection in online networks is weighed against other social media tools such as product review sites and forums, consumers may highly understand sociable network as a far more dependable source while making a purchase, because they more rely on product information of their friends as opposed to unfamiliar people (Chu & Kim, 2011). Because of this, friendship in online networks increases trustworthiness and establishes sociable trust because of their information search in their buying process.

Trust has been viewed as a main player in influencing the customers' habit, as it is a two-way foundation of the partnership which exist between a client and the producer. The customers are fearful of negative surprises after purchasing a product or service. The shopping tendencies are consequently inspired by several factors such as on-line advertising (Manchanda, Dube, Goh & Chintagunta, 2006). Customers subjected to banners are usually more vulnerable in direction of purchasing, which means extended purchasing rationale, combined with repeat purchase probabilities.

Brand exposure in the web environment will probably have similar result in real life as consumers build an online representation of themselves through the internet (Schau & Gilly, 2003). This therefore means that being inspired on-line will impact the purchase purpose in real life, in the same way it is the case when one encouraged to buy something or something in real life. However, it remains essential to determine what are the true factors which can impact on your client in such commercialized promotion. Humans being do nothing like to be lied to, as no one wants to reduce cash through searching for a non-functional product or unsatisfactory service, credited to misleading marketing and advertising.
Trustworthiness is foreseen as an essential variable in an online environment. Clients understand trust as the amount of confidence a source is considering conversing valid assertions (Willemsen, Neijens, Bronner & Ridder, 2011). This means that even though businesses might be experts in their area they might not exactly be regarded as honest. However, consumers will read personal blogs, or see an evaluation by an influencer who is assertive and judge it as trustworthy. From customer's viewpoint, the influencers have emerged to be providing sincere assessments about the goods. Accordingly, their followers have a tendency to trust them more than the manufacturers, and eventually trusting the merchandise information higher (Cheong & Morrison, 2008).

Product information that customers get from various reference point communities and personal marketing such as blog assist in reducing transaction doubt that is triggered by insufficient information. Websites are a few of the favourite eWOM programs that are believed by internet surfers as an extremely credible source among all resources in various marketing channels (Lee & Youn, 2009). Trust which is made by repeated discussion experiences between bloggers and blog visitors (Gefen, Karahanna & Straub, 2003). Through reading and repeated interactions on a blog, blog readers understand bloggers and the content they offer, and subsequently trust is created. On top of that, this trust creation may depend seriously on blog cues such as earlier connections between bloggers with the blog viewers. A blog audience may consider bloggers' positive advice and then shop over an internet site that blogger suggests for specific products (Johnson & Kaye, 2009).

### 2.3 Influence of Bloggers Popularity on Customer Buying Intention

Another key feature of websites is the capability to generate para-social connections between bloggers and their viewers. Para-social connection is the illusionary connection of a face-to-face rapport with a mass media persona like a blogger. Unlike other advertising or media channels, bloggers often provide visitors with a perception of their lifestyle through pictures, personal reports or even videos. Para-social relationship strengthens and advances with each point in time of connection with the blogger. After multiple relationships, more powerful emotions will be developed and the audience may learn to consider the blogger as a personal or a good friend (Colliander & Erlandsson, 2015).
Significant amounts of the study on influencers has been conducted viewing them as brand enthusiasts, in the framework of influencers as brand advocates, checking out their success and development because they are considered personal brands (Abidin & Thomson, 2012). The influencers, their reliability and authenticity have been explored in the framework of brand messaging and cognizance, or in the context of fashion bloggers (Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki & Wilner, 2010). How popular and important the influencers are, is a subject appealing for several analysts. Kwak, Lee, Area and Moon (2010) assessed the impact of the influencers on Twitter by using looking at three factors; number of followers, get ranking of the net-web site, and selection of retweets, with score being the most sizable one. Cha, Haddadi, Benevenuto and Gummadi (2010) on the other hand used three measures also; number of followers, number of mentions, and volume of retweets. They established that influencers with the highest number of fans did not necessarily score high on the other two measures.

Bloggers have a market that is inquisitive about particular subject matter for conversations, and the acceptance of on-line websites is not unrecognized by marketers. As stated by Mc Grail (2013), 77% of all net customers examine blogs. Therefore, marketers have started to adopt the practise of using bloggers as endorsers, as they have increasingly been perceived as more credible than celebrities (Mendoza, 2010). Therefore, the connections forged through the internet point towards the conclusion that brands attempting to be regarded as authentic will focus their advertising initiatives toward seeding information or goods with influencers, relying on their potential to offer clients with the feeling of "people like me" (Solis, 2016). This therefore means that brands should cautiously look for influencers who create true interest, and these influencers may differ from the traditional stars and paid endorsement (Nielsen, 2013).

2.3.1 Number of Visitors

The growing recognition and rapid development of the blogging trend is also shown by the actual fact that popular bloggers are considered celebrities. These bloggers have an incredible number of regular visitors and also have made their living out of blogging (Chiu & Ho, 2009). Popular sites that are generally visited and also have an incredible number of regular guests are an important source which consumers use to assemble information. These websites exert a significant effect on consumer's purchase patterns. Visitors create a strong connection and
close social relationships with a blog or blogger, by frequently browsing, reading, and exchanging information. Because of this, bloggers and their websites are a robust advertising medium and which results in an ever-growing development of blog advertising (Zhu & Tan, 2007). Leading brands have taken advantage of this growing recognition by work in partnership with popular bloggers to either to endorse, represent or promote their products. (Chu & Kamal, 2008).

Hsu and Tsou (2011) noted that blogs have grown to be one of the very most popular online activities and an extremely influential medium. One of the defining nature of blogs is their regular update and as such provide current information (Walker, 2007). To stay relevant and reach consumers in the same way as bloggers, traditional shops and fashion brands have created commercial websites. Trammel and Keshelashvili (2005) stated that popular bloggers are essential influencers amongst their readers, for their huge reach comprising loyal site visitors. Jin and Phua (2014) assert that online acceptance has a multitude of connotations, including the wide popularity by peer group participants or public dominance (Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1998). However, the amount of friends or fans account owners have on the websites or internet sites is most regularly used as signals of online attractiveness (Jin & Phua, 2014). With this study, popularity has been expressed as the number of visitors a blog has, the number of comments and the number of likes a blog receives.

Smart bloggers with an incredible degree of attractiveness, may attract visitors with more web page views within a day than even the major newspaper circulation. Therefore, their effect on other netizens may be converted into a business opportunity and become the hot market that the major stores seek to get into. The information industry Connection (2007) determined consumer’s online shopping process as six steps namely: demand arising, information search, information analysis, transaction verification, consumer service, and comment. In the process of finding information, consumers most regularly depend on product information through search engines, reference entries and shopping sites. On the other hand, for evaluating information and placing remarks, most reviewers will mainly take up blogs, shopping areas and professional review websites. Through blogs, consumers have a system for a variety of connection with other consumers and the tone of voice of one specific consumer may be broadened and disseminated over the Internet. When consumers get positive responses from a
blog system, they will become more positively involved. Laurent and Kapferer (1985) believed that involvement comprises four measurements: pleasure value, symbolic value, interest, and perceived risk; and various degrees of participation will affect the information collecting, handling, and decision-making.

2.3.2 Number of Followers

Jin and Phua (2014) showed in their investigation that the level of popularity on Twitter social network impacts the perceived credibility of the source. The more well known the source, the more he or she is seen as solid. Previous research has revealed big names with a higher number of Twitter adherents are seen as higher in three measurements of source validity (physical fascination, trustworthiness and competence) than superstars with a lower number of followers. Accordingly, a higher validity causes a more noteworthy effect of the apparent enticing purpose (Lee & Koo, 2012). In spite of the fact that the study was conducted on Twitter, it demonstrates the impact of online prominence which may likewise be the same for bloggers. Because of the huge number and assorted variety of bloggers, it is a challenge for readers to differentiate or assess the level of credibility of different bloggers (Lindquist, 2015).

The reputation of the influencer usually prevails upon their popularity. A good reputation will maybe be more compelling and have more effect than popularity. Baer and Naslund (2011) contended that the scope of fans, is basically a pointer of prominence and may not be a genuine impression of execution. It is basic that a decent influencer will be in contact with their fans/fans, keeping the verbal trade alive and taking part in discussions (Schaffer, 2013).

It is a normal expectation that a more famous blogger will have more positive influence as compared to less popular blogger. These conceivable contrasts amongst prevalent and disliked bloggers could have an effect on purchase choices of their readers. Jin and Phua (2014) showed in their examination that the level of popularity on social site such as Twitter influenced the perceived credibility of the source. The more well known the big name, the more he or she is seen as valid. The analysts exhibited that famous people with a higher number of Twitter adherents are seen as higher in three measurements of source believability (physical fascination, dependability and ability) than superstars with a lower number of supporters. In this way, a higher validity causes a more noteworthy effect of the apparent influential intent (Lee & Koo, 2012).
Two conceptual models have been proposed in earlier studies which aim at identifying the factors affecting the popularity of branded posts. The primary customary model was proposed by Sabate, Berbegal-Mirabent, Canabate and Lebherz (2014). In that model, the measure of preferences and remarks a post gets are the measurements for post prominence. They contend that richness of substance and the time allotment would fundamentally impact the popularity of a branded post. In addition, the number of followers a brand page has and how long the brand post is, are two control factors which may impact the popularity of a post.

Numerous analysts found that the post can be made more striking by utilizing recordings, pictures or brilliant colours (Goodrich, 2011). In the investigation by Vries, Gensler and Leeflang (2012), the discoveries display that high level of clarity is significant and positively related to the number of likes. One clarification for this outcome is that posts which are more distinctive are more fit for getting the consideration of readers and in this way making the posts more famous. Sabate, Berbegal-Mirabent, Canabate and Lebherz (2014) likewise noticed that dynamic animations and splendid pictures with a tone of colours could empower diverse faculties of clients and result into a more elevated amount of consideration and fame which can be reflected by the quantity of preferences and remarks.

Vries, Gensler and Leeflang (2012) contended that photos did not have such a high level of distinctiveness as recordings or videos, since when clients watched recordings they expected to utilize the faculties of both seeing and hearing. Brookes (2010) did another investigation however differentiating discoveries were accounted for. Contrasting and recordings, pictures got 22% more engagement than recordings. In a similar report, the discoveries additionally demonstrated that pictures got 54% a bigger number of remarks or likes than text posts while recordings got 27% more engagement than text posts. These discoveries demonstrate to us that pictures and recordings are the most famous sorts of substance from the online networking clients' perspective

The investigation done by Vries, Gensler and Leeflang (2012) about the level of interactivity demonstrates that if the interactivity of a post is low, the post will not get many likes. Nonetheless, their discoveries additionally demonstrate that a medium level of interactive posts gets a high measure of preferences. Marketers ought to take a lot of caution in the light of the fact that posts with a great degree of abnormal state of interactivity is not great because of the
way that these posts get less likes. All things considered, one might say that a medium-level of interactivity is great, but in the event that it gets too much interactivity the popularity decreases.

The position of an advertisement on a social media page plays an important role in determining the number of readers who are likely to click on it. A study by Rutz and Bucklin (2011) revealed that advertisements that are positioned at the top of the social media page get more clicks. On the same line, Vries, Gensler and Leeflang (2012) stated that brand posts which are the most recent ones and the ones at the top are likely to get more likes than the ones which are already at the second or third place.

2.4 Influence of Bloggers Expertise on Customer Buying Intention

Expertise is the degree to which a blogger is respected to have the sufficient information, experience or aptitudes to advance item. Concurring Chu and Kamal (2008) express that bloggers are self-declared specialists, as they frequently concentrate their blog on a particular subject or topic of intrigue and on account of items, they tend to center around particular item classification. Agarwal, Liu, Tang & Yu (2008) add to this thought that bloggers everywhere frame their own particular exceptional intrigue groups where they share thoughts, assessments or thoughts regarding this particular subject. Well known bloggers have probably more noteworthy opportunities and more access to valuable resources as compared to less known and relatively unpopular bloggers. Therefore, famous bloggers are more equipped for putting forth substantial expressions or give precise data.

Likewise, the bloggers' energy and aptitude, the readers earlier knowledge and experience, and also product distinction influence the level of impact a reference group applies. Consumers under comparative influence are more easily affected by the group’s power. As it were, readers that admire the blogger will probably buy the items suggested by the blogger. This sort of energy may however be more shallow contrasted with groups where the readers feel equal to the blogger. In groups with less power, readers may be more averse to simply imitate the blogger yet the possibility of changing attitude is more grounded than in control groups. This implies bloggers with more equal relationship to their readers have more potential in changing the purchasing conduct and devotion of the readers over the long haul, while bloggers with
more control over readers are more powerful to support sales in the short term (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015).

Authenticity is a standout amongst the most vital idea in marketing these days and the developing commercialization has changed the way shoppers comprehend authenticity in the contemporary world (Holt, 2002). In most instances bloggers will engage in topics that are of interest to them. In this manner, their readers are probably going to see them as specialists and regard them as such, making them more tenable than celebrities. Customers are likely to associate a celebrity simply with monetary gains they are likely to get by promoting or selling a brand as opposed to a blogger who they view as a person giving genuine information (Forrest and Cao, 2010). Authenticity makes the peculiarity of the influencer for buyers scanning for legitimacy in the business and brands. Clients require a genuine encounter, not a powdered replication of a creative ability as is the case with big name endorsers. Authenticity is considered as the capacity to be genuine to at least one's self (Molleda, 2009).

Findings from a research by Aller's (2014) on consumer behaviour in relation to blogs show that, 77% of respondents concurred that blogs have turned out to be more professional and hence provide reliable information. Also, 49% of the respondents asserted that they search for products reviews in blogs with a view of making their purchase choice. A noteworthy 47% of shoppers who read fashion blogs concurred that they were influenced by bloggers who introduced a certain product in their blog which stirred their interest and they later purchased the product. Web journals are powerful mediums as organizations utilize bloggers to showcase their items. On account of Finland, 40 percent of the organizations in the Finnish Advertisers Union utilize bloggers to showcase their products by sending items to test. (Keppola, 2012). This shows bloggers are viewed as being of great value from an organization viewpoint. From the writer's perceptions, despite the fact that luxury brands do not give any rebates to readers of the websites, bloggers have turned into the trendsetter of any great, including extravagance brands. Blogging appears to have turned into a wonder everywhere throughout the world.

2.4.1 Knowledge

Customers' purchasing intent increases whenever an influencer demonstrates knowledge of the product they are trying to promote. This can be expressed through granting exact assessments and working case for the use of the item, notwithstanding in demonstrating a customary regular
usage design for the item. This thus expands the degree of customers' trust in the influencers which affirms to what previous research has found – when endorsers have better level of learning and know-how they are in this way perceived with additional reliability, prompting higher purchaser's intent (Fred, 2015).

The outstanding features of an item or products is additionally an applicable factor to consider in online blogs. For instance, luxury items are particularly outstanding as they reflect status. In this way, a specific watch or a perfume can be all the more easily bought due to its apparent value among the reference group. Interestingly, a choice to purchase toothpaste or soap can be less influenced by the qualities and assessments of the reference group. Additionally, the purchasers experience matters. Readers with prior information or experience regarding the matter are less inclined to be impacted by the blogger. Readers with no or less information can find the information more helpful. Whatever the power connection, each group has a tendency to have an opinion leader, who will influence the rest of the group members. In online journals, bloggers are the pioneers of their group (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015).

The opinion leaders are progressive in knowledge of the issues essential to the group whether it is in fashion or political matters. As a result of their assumed mastery, they are esteemed and are in a situation to impact different individuals in the group. From the starting point of blog commercialization, organizations have been anxious to offer bloggers with free products with the hope of getting greater brand visibility (Lu et al., 2014).

2.4.2 Competence

Competence refer to the degree to which a source is viewed as a master, making it honest, depending on the learning and expertise capacity about a theme (Willemsen, Neijens, Bronner & Ridder, 2011). The idea of competence identifies with the capability of the influencer to propose positive intent as competence is a measurement of human social perception. Also, it echoes qualities which are identified with perceived capacity, which incorporate knowledge, ability, inventiveness and efficacy (Fiske, Cuddy & Glick, 2006). Through self-declaring their know-how individuals aim at creating a feeling that influences others to look at them positively and in better light and maybe develop their persuasive characteristics. Besides, competence is
directly connected with credibility and the ability of the influencer to put forth genuine expressions (Chu and Kamal, 2008).

Competence assumes a basic part in inducing shoppers and influencing their reactions. How much a source is considered as a specialist, and in this manner dependable, is controlled by assessing the learning and competence that the source holds with respect to the point (Willemsen et al., 2011). Competence is thought to be a key dimension of how persons or a group is described (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007). It is a general measurement of human social discernment (Fiske, Cuddy & Glick, 2006). The idea of competence connects with the capacity of the blogger to sanction certain expectations (Fiske et al., 2006) and making legitimate attestations (Lim & Van der Heide, 2015).

Competence reflects attributes that are identified with perceived capacity, including knowledge, aptitude, inventiveness and adequacy (Fiske et al., 2006). Self-declared mastery makes the feeling that the generator of the information wants to introduce himself positively and possibly with the aim to convince others (Willemsen, Neijens & Bronner, 2012). These concerns are legitimate legitimate in the sponsored product reviews on blogs. The apparent thought processes from the blogger can add to the impression of the apparent ability. It is closely connected to questions such as ‘Does the other individual or group intend to harm or be of assistance to me?’ and ‘Does the individual have the ability to implement those motives?’ (Fiske et al., 2006).

Considering that communication is two ways, it is of great importance to provide accurate information since it leads to a higher competence notion to the recipient. Independence in communication can be defined as degree to which an individual is able to use their thought and frame regardless of social limitations or conscience. Independence is a component of authoritarianism that makes somebody to act on his power without questioning or being inquisitive of their morals, ethical quality and integrity. It is a tool for measuring the buyer's view to persuade with regards to social influencers. That leads to the idea that the higher the independence an individual has, the higher their capacities are to utilize strategically their persuading powers (Langner, Hennings and Wiedmann, 2013).

Blogging sites, particularly those frequently expounding on consumption encounters of products or services, have as of late developed in popularity. Reviews by bloggers contain
bloggers' encounters and product information; as needs be, the ownership is categorised as private. Bloggers regularly consider themselves to be specialists of certain product classes and subsequently specialise on these in their review sites. The aim of private online journals is along these lines to share experiences about certain categories of products and offer suggestions to others. Consequently, shoppers utilize this information to equip themselves before making buying choices (Huang, 2015). Because of its specialization on an item class, blog passages are regularly found by purchasers through search engines over the internet (Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, 2013).

Since bloggers suggestion posts are viewed as a useful marketing devices and an indispensable reference in a purchaser decision making process, a good number of bloggers have moved to become opinion leaders in certain in their areas of specialisation. The profile of the blogger is for the most part extremely detailed and correspondence with the blogger is possible. The review content is for the most part shown through open-ended client composed writings, bolstered by media like photographs or recordings. The content in these reviews is generally significantly more detailed than on retail or independent reviewing websites and incorporates more personalised thoughts and self-divulgence (Wang, 2011).

2.5 Chapter Summary

Chapter two gives a review on the literature blogger recommendations on customer buying intentions. The chapter has presented a detailed review of the influence of bloggers perception, popularity and expertise on customers buying intention. Under bloggers perception two aspects have been discussed, they include credibility and trustworthiness of the blogger. On popularity, the number of visitors and followers have been discussed. Finally, two aspects of bloggers expertise which include knowledge and expertise have also been reviewed. Chapter three will outline the research methodology that will be deployed which includes the research design, population and sampling and how data will be analyzed.
CHAPTER THREE

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research methodology that was used in this study and provides a general framework for this research. The section presents details of the research design, sampling design, data collection, data analysis and reporting, ethical issues in research and the limitations of the study.

3.2 Research Design

The study adopted descriptive research design. Descriptive research is defined as the process of gathering data in order to test hypothesis or to answer questions concerning the current status of the element of the study (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The research was carried out on USIU-Africa students whose perception on the subject was considered to be important and of value since it gave the researcher a real picture of the problem area and allowed the researcher to establish the effects of blogger recommendations on the customers buying intentions. The independent variables were bloggers perception, popularity, image and expertise. The dependent variable was customers purchase intention.

3.3 Population and Sampling Design

3.3.1 Population

Population is a relatively large collection of people, groups or categories, items or cases that a researcher studies and about which generalizations are made (Andersen & Taylor, 2012). It is also defined as totality of any group of subject sharing some characteristics (Boone & Sabo, 2013). The population of this study was 6398 which consist of undergraduate, graduate and doctoral students as shown on Table 3.1.
Table 3.1: Population Distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Student</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate students</td>
<td>4939</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate students</td>
<td>1333</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral students</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>6398</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: USIU-Africa (2017)

3.3.2 Sampling Design

3.3.2.1 Sampling Frame

According to Cooper & Schindler (2006), a sampling frame is a list of elements from which the sample is actually drawn and closely related to the population. In this study, the sampling frame was drawn from all students at United States International University as at February, 2018. This was to ensure that the sampling frame was current, complete and relevant for the attainment of the study objectives.

3.3.2.2 Sampling Technique

A study sampling technique is a method that researchers use to select an appropriate list of respondents from the entire study population (Cooper & Schindler, 2011). To come up with an appropriate study sample, the study used both the simple random sampling and stratified sampling technique. The process was handled carefully so as to draw a sample that would give relevant, accurate and valid information that would aide in the study. Stratified Random sampling was adopted in this study in order to break the population into mutually exhaustive sample population known as strata in ensuring that the in the all the students at USIU-Africa are represented. This helped in reducing bias and ensured that accurate information was collected for this research. The strata were composed of undergraduate, graduate and doctoral students.

3.3.2.3 Sample Size

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), sample size reflects the representative degree of the entire population from which the research findings are generalized. Sampling is the selection of some parts of an aggregate or totality on the basis of which a judgment or inference
about an aggregate or totality is made (Kothari, 2004). The formula suggested by Kothari (2004) was used to determine the sample size for finite population.

Sample size \(n\) = \(\frac{z^2pqN}{e^2(N-1) + z^2pq}\)

Where:  
\(n\) = sample size  
\(N\) = Population  
\(p = 0.5\)  
\(q = (1-p) = 0.5\)  
\(e = 0.05\)  
\(z = 1.96\).

Substituting the values in the formula;

\[ n = \frac{6398 \times (1.96)^2 \times (0.5) \times (0.5)}{(0.05)^2 \times (6398-1) + (1.96)^2 \times (0.5) \times (0.5)} \]

\[ n = 362 \]

Hence the sample size was 362 students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.2: Sample Size</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graduate students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.4 Data Collection Method

This researcher collected primary data using questionnaires. A questionnaire is a research instrument consisting of a series of questions and other prompts for the purpose of gathering
information from respondents. Questionnaires was considered because they have advantages over other types of research instruments in that they are cheap, do not require as much effort from the questioner as verbal or telephone surveys, and often have standardized answers that make it simple to compile data (Lumpkin & Dess, 2001).

The researcher used close ended questions in line with the objectives of the study using a five point Likert scale for the questions. The questionnaire had 4 sections. The first section sought to establish the respondent demographic data while the second to fourth section sought to establish the respondents’ opinions on the three research questions.

3.5 Research Procedures
After development of the draft questionnaire, a pilot test was carried out with ten respondents to test for any inconsistencies, ambiguity and incomprehension. The pre-test participants did not participate in the actual survey to avoid pre-emption of the study at the actual area. In the process of piloting, the researcher ensured rectification of errors of ambiguity existing in the research instrument. After the amendment of the final questionnaire, the researcher explained the purpose of the research to the respondents and sought permission to carry out the research in the given topic. Each questionnaire was distributed directly to each of the 362 identified participants in the study at the University grounds. To ensure a high response rate the researcher engaged the services of research assistants who administered the questionnaires and waited as the respondents filled in.

3.6 Data Analysis Methods
Data preparation was done on the completed questionnaires by editing, coding, entering and cleaning the data before processing the responses. The collected data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The analyzed data was presented using tables and figures.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which the three independent variables (perception, popularity and expertise) influenced customers buying intentions. The following model was used:

\[ Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \varepsilon \]
Whereby

\[ Y = \text{Customer buying intentions} \]
\[ X_1 = \text{Perception} \]
\[ X_2 = \text{Popularity} \]
\[ X_3 = \text{Expertise} \]

3.7 Chapter Summary

Chapter three enumerated the research methodology and design. It gave a detailed analysis of the population and the sampling process that will be used in collecting the research data. Primary data will be collected from the respondents through the application of a structured questionnaire. Data analysis will be done using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The next chapter (Chapter four) present results and findings of the study.
CHAPTER 4

4.0 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction
This chapter presents results and findings of the study as set out in the research questions and methodology. The purpose of this study was to assess the effects of blogger recommendations on customer buying intentions: A case study of USIU-Africa students. The study was guided by the following research questions; does customer perception of the blogger influence their buying intentions? does the popularity of the blogger have an effect on customers buying intentions? And does the expertise of the blogger have an effect on customers buying intentions? The data is presented in form of tables and charts.

4.2 Response Rate
From the findings, a total of 295 respondents filled and returned their questionnaires. This gave a response rate of 82%. Out of the total 362 respondents, the non-response rate therefore was 18%. This response rate was favorable according to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) in which they assert that a 50% response rate is adequate, 60% good and above 70% rated very well. The response rate is presented on Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1: Response Rate
4.3 Demographic Information

This section presents general information which include; gender of the respondents, their level of education, length of time they have worked in the current bank and length of service in the banking industry. The findings are presented below.

4.3.1 Gender

From the findings on Figure 4.2, 55% of the respondents indicated that they were female while 45% indicated that they were female. The findings clearly show good representation of both genders in the study.

![Figure 4.2: Gender](image)

4.3.2 Age

The respondents were asked to indicate their age. From the study finding, 38% of the respondents were between 20-25 years, 35% were between 26-30 years, 14% were between 31-35 years, 9% were below 20 years while only 5% were above 40 years. This shows that the study was spread across the various age groups which could also connected to their level of study where majority would be undertaking their undergraduate studies and hence aged between 20 and 30 years. Findings are presented in Figure 4.3.
Figure 4.3: Age of the Respondents

4.3.3 Length of Time at USIU-Africa

The participants were further required to indicate the length of time they had been in USIU-Africa. From the study findings, 45% had been in USIU-Africa for more than 2 years, 35% had been in the institution for a period between 1 and 2 years while 20% had been in USIU-Africa for less than a year. The high number of students who have been in the institution for more than two years can be explained by the fact that undergraduate studies take longer, also there are graduate students who exceed the 2 years of study due to personal reasons.

Figure 4.4: Length of Time at USIU-Africa
4.3.4 Level of Study
The study sought to establish the level of study from the respondents. Figure 4.5 indicates that 74% of the respondents were undergraduates, 24% were graduate students while 2% were doctoral students. This corresponds with the earlier finding that most of the students had been in the institution for more than two years.

![Figure 4.5: Level of Study](image)

4.4: Bloggers Perception and Consumer Buying Intentions
This section focuses on the effects of bloggers perception on consumers buying intention. Two aspects of perception were studied, this aspect are credibility and trustworthiness of the blogger. The findings are presented in the subsequent sub sections.

4.4.1: Credibility of the Blogger
The study sought to establish the effects of blogger credibility on customer buying intention. To achieve this, several aspects of credibility were listed and the respondents were required to indicate the extent to which they agreed on the effects of these aspects on consumers buying intention on a scale of 1-5 where; 1= No Extent, 2 Little Extent, 3=Moderately Extent, 4= 
Great Extent, 5= Very Great Extent. Mean and standard deviation were used for ease of interpretation and generalization of findings.

Finding on Table 4.1, informative had a mean of 3.57 and a standard deviation of 1.01717, consistent had a mean of 3.48 and a standard deviation of 1.00962, authentic had a mean of 3.37 and a standard deviation of 1.06, reliable had a mean of 3.33 and a standard deviation of 1.02749, insightful had a mean of 3.33 a standard deviation of 1.00188, fairness had a mean of 3.33 and standard deviation of 1.04833, focused had a mean of 3.32 and a standard deviation 1.09794, accurate had a mean of 3.32 and standard deviation of 1.14886, popularity had a mean of 3.32 and standard deviation of 1.23399, passionate had a mean of 3.31 and a standard deviation of 1.00899, timeliness had a mean of 3.30 and a standard deviation of 1.1275, knowledgeable had a mean of 3.29 and standard deviation of 1.06734, transparent had a mean of 3.28 and standard deviation of 1.08673 while influential had a mean of 3.20 and standard deviation of 1.02784.

**Table 4.1: Credibility of the Blogger**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledgeable</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>1.06734</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influential</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>1.02784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passionate</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>1.00899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparent</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>1.08673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliable</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>1.02749</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>1.05782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insightful</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>1.00188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>1.01717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistent</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>1.00962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairness</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>1.04833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>1.09794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accurate</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>1.14886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeliness</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>1.12750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popularity</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>1.23399</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.4.2 Trustworthiness of the Blogger

Several statements trustworthiness of the blogger were listed and the respondents were required to indicate the extent to which they agreed with these statements on a scale of 1-5 where; 1= No Extent, 2 Little Extent, 3=Moderately Extent, 4= Great Extent, 5= Very Great Extent. Mean and standard deviation were used for ease of interpretation and generalization of findings. The finding is shown on in the subsequent sections.

Findings on Table 4.2 indicate that the respondents followed bloggers recommendations because they were trustworthy with a mean of 3.37 and a standard deviation of 1.10768, they also indicated that they were likely to purchase a product if they trusted the blogger with a mean of 3.32 and a standard deviation of 1.05044, trust was a key factor in attracting blog visitors with a mean of 3.30 and a standard deviation of 1.06865. The respondents stated that they were influenced by their favorite blogger’s opinion with a mean of 3.28 and a standard deviation of 1.04667, they followed bloggers recommendations because they were sincere with a mean of 3.23 and a standard deviation of 0.89554, trust in a blogger’s was important for them when they read blogs with a mean of 3.22 and a standard deviation of 1.11593. They also indicated that they followed bloggers recommendations because they were reliable with a mean of 3.16 and a standard deviation of 0.95865.

Table 4.2: Trustworthiness of the Blogger

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I follow bloggers recommendations because they are reliable</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>.95865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I follow bloggers recommendations because they are sincere</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>.89554</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I follow bloggers recommendations because they are trustworthy</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>1.10768</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am influenced by my favorite blogger’s opinion</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>1.04667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust is a key factor in attracting blog visitors.</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>1.06865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in a blogger’s is important for me when I read blogs</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>1.11593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am likely to purchase a product if I trust the blogger</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>1.05044</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The respondents were further asked to indicate the extent to which the perception of a blogger had affected customers buying intention. From the results on Figure 4.5, 45% of the respondents agreed to a great extent, 30% to a moderate extent, 15% to a very great extent, 10% to a little extent while 1% to no extent.

![Graph showing the extent of the perception of a blogger affecting customers buying intention.]

**Figure 4.6 Extent to Which the Perception of a Blogger Affects Customers Buying Intention**

### 4.5 Bloggers Popularity and Consumer Buying Intentions

The study sought to establish the effects of bloggers popularity on customer buying intention. To achieve this, several statement were listed and the respondents were required to indicate the extent to which they agreed with these statements on a scale of 1-5 where; 1= No Extent, 2= Little Extent, 3= Moderately Extent, 4= Great Extent, 5= Very Great Extent. Mean and standard deviation were used for ease of interpretation and generalization of findings. The finding is shown on in the subsequent sections.
4.5.1 Number of Visitors

Results findings on Table 4.3 show that the respondents frequently visited popular blogs with a mean of 3.40 and a standard deviation of 0.88374, they indicated that they developed a strong bond and close interpersonal relationships with the blog or blogger, by frequently visiting, reading, and exchanging information with a mean of 3.38 and a standard deviation of 1.41794. The respondents further indicated that blogs that had regular visitors were important source of information for them with a mean of 3.29 and a standard deviation of 0.8999 and that bloggers were important influencers to them as a reader with a mean of 3.24 and a standard deviation of 0.97797. In their view bloggers recommendations had wide acceptance by peer group members with a mean of 3.21 and a standard deviation of 0.98712. The respondents indicated that the number of visitors a blog had affected their buying intentions with a mean of 3.14 and a standard deviation of 1.01694.

Table 4.3: Number of Visitors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I frequently visit popular blogs.</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>.88374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blogs with regular visitors are important source of information for me.</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.88599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I develop a strong bond and close interpersonal relationships with the blog or blogger, by frequently visiting, reading, and exchanging information</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>1.41794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In my view bloggers recommendations have wide acceptance by peer group members.</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>.98712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloggers are important influencers to me as a reader</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>.97797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of visitors a blog has affects my buying intentions</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>1.01694</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.5.2 Number of Followers

Result findings on Table 4.4 show that a higher credibility caused a greater impact of the perceived persuasive intent with a mean of 3.14 and a standard deviation of 1.11063, the number of likes a blog had received affected their buying intentions with a mean of 3.12 and a standard deviation of 1.1273, the higher the number of followers, the more a blogger was perceived as trustworthy with a mean of 3.11 and a standard deviation of 1.11112, the higher
the number of followers, the more a blogger was perceived as an expert with a mean of 3.11 and a standard deviation of 1.04462. The respondents further indicated that the higher the number of followers, the more a blogger was perceived as credible with a mean of 3.05 and a standard deviation of 1.21864, the number of comments a blog had affected their buying intentions with a mean of 3.02 and a standard deviation of 1.02507. They further stated that a more popular blogger had a more positive influence on purchase intention compared with a less popular blogger with a mean of 2.99 and a standard deviation of 1.10837.

Table 4.4: Number of Followers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The number of comments a blog has affects my buying intentions</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>1.02507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of likes a blog has received affects my buying intentions</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>1.12730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A more popular blogger has a more positive influence on purchase intention compared with a less popular blogger</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>1.10837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The higher the number of followers, the more a blogger is perceived as credible.</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>1.21864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The higher the number of followers, the more a blogger is perceived as trustworthy.</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>1.11112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A higher credibility causes a greater impact of the perceived persuasive intent</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>1.11063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The higher the number of followers, the more a blogger is perceived as an expert.</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>1.04462</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The respondents were further asked to indicate to what extent the popularity of a blogger affected the buying intention of a customer. Findings as presented on Figure 4.6 indicate that 44% of the respondents said to a great extent, 28% to a moderate extent, 15% to a very great extent, 11% to a little extent while 3% stated to no extent.
4.6 Bloggers Expertise and Consumer Buying Intentions

The study sought to establish the effects of bloggers expertise on customer buying intention. To achieve this, several statement were listed and the respondents were required to indicate the extent to which they agreed with these statements on a scale of 1-5 where; 1= No Extent, 2 Little Extent, 3=Moderately Extent, 4= Great Extent, 5= Very Great Extent. Mean and standard deviation were used for ease of interpretation and generalization of findings. The finding is shown on in the subsequent sections.

4.6.1 Knowledge

From the result findings on Table 4.5, the respondents indicated that bloggers that showed expertise in a particular field were more credible with a mean of 3.4897 and a standard deviation of 0.94936, they trusted bloggers who were experts with a mean of 3.4394 and a standard deviation of 0.93762, they also indicated that having an ability in a special area was the key factor of being an expert with a mean of 3.4345 and a standard deviation of 0.89453. The respondents further indicated that they liked to read blogs that taught them useful information with a mean of 3.4132 and a standard deviation of 0.97321, they read blogs that
offered knowledge in certain areas with a mean of 3.4034 and a standard deviation of 1.03869, they followed bloggers recommendations because they were knowledgeable with a mean of 3.3828 and a standard deviation of 1.01973, they followed bloggers recommendations because they were qualified with a mean of 3.3724 and a standard deviation of 1.04199. They further stated that providing accurate information was important when they read blogs with a mean of 3.3552 and a standard deviation of 0.95652, they followed bloggers recommendations because they were skilled with a mean of 3.3414 and a standard deviation of 1.09923, they followed bloggers recommendations because they were experienced with a mean of 3.2724 and a standard deviation of 1.00428 and followed bloggers recommendations because they were experts with a mean of 3.2 and a standard deviation of 1.03636.

**Table 4.5 Knowledge**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think providing accurate information is important when I read blogs</td>
<td>3.3552</td>
<td>.95652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think having an ability in a special area is the key factor of being an expert</td>
<td>3.4345</td>
<td>.89453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I trust bloggers who are experts</td>
<td>3.4394</td>
<td>.93762</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think bloggers that show expertise in a particular field are more credible</td>
<td>3.4897</td>
<td>.94936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I read blogs that offer me knowledge in certain areas</td>
<td>3.4034</td>
<td>1.03869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to read blogs that teach me useful information</td>
<td>3.4132</td>
<td>.97321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I follow bloggers recommendations because they are experts</td>
<td>3.2000</td>
<td>1.03636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I follow bloggers recommendations because they are experienced</td>
<td>3.2724</td>
<td>1.00428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I follow bloggers recommendations because they are knowledgeable</td>
<td>3.3828</td>
<td>1.01973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I follow bloggers recommendations because they are qualified</td>
<td>3.3724</td>
<td>1.04199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I follow bloggers recommendations because they are skilled</td>
<td>3.3414</td>
<td>1.09923</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.6.2 Competence

Result findings on Table 4.6 indicate that competence was directly linked with credibility with a mean of 3.3207 and a standard deviation of 1.05748, competency enhanced the accuracy of information provided by a blogger with a mean of 3.2897 and a standard deviation of 1.07772 and that bloggers had become opinion leaders with a mean of 3.1310 and a standard deviation of 1.01036

Table 4.6: Competence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence is directly linked with credibility</td>
<td>3.3207</td>
<td>1.05748</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency enhances the accuracy of information provided by a blogger</td>
<td>3.2897</td>
<td>1.07772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloggers have become opinion leaders</td>
<td>3.1310</td>
<td>1.01036</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The study further sought to establish to what extent the expertise of the blogger had affected the customers buying intentions. The findings are as shown of Figure 4.7 which indicate that 50% said to a great extent, 27% to moderate extent, 14% to a very great extent and 9% to a little extent.

![Figure 4.8: Extent to which the Expertise of a Blogger Affect Customers Buying Intention](image)
4.7 Regression Analysis

The researcher conducted a multiple regression analysis to determine the extent to which the three independent variables (perception, popularity and expertise) influenced consumers purchase intention. The following model was used:

\[ Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \varepsilon \]

Whereby

\[ Y = \text{Customer buying intentions} \]

\[ X_1 = \text{Perception} \]

\[ X_2 = \text{Popularity} \]

\[ X_3 = \text{Expertise} \]

The findings are shown in the subsequent subsections.

Table 4.7: Model Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>Adjusted R Square</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.603</td>
<td>.364</td>
<td>.357</td>
<td>.53175</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Predictors: (Constant), Expertise, Popularity, Perception

From the findings in Table 4.7, R was 0.603 meaning that there was a positive relationship between all the three factors that influence consumer buying intentions. R² was 0.362 implying that 36.2% of the dependent variable (customer buying intentions) could be explained by the independent variables (bloggers perception, popularity and expertise) with the remaining balance of 63.8% being variations due to other factors that have not been considered in this study. This implies that the regression model has good explanatory and predictor grounds.

Table 4.8: ANOVA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>43.944</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14.648</td>
<td>51.80</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>76.911</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>.283</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td><strong>120.855</strong></td>
<td>275</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Predictors: (Constant), Expertise, Popularity, Perception
b. Dependent Variable: Purchase intention

From the findings on Table 4.8, the significance value is 0.000 which is less than 0.05 thus the model is statistically significant in predicting how bloggers perception, popularity and
expertise influence consumer buying intentions. The F critical at 5% level of significance was 2.60. Since F calculated (value = 51.803) is greater than the F critical (2.60), this shows that the overall model was significant.

Table 4.9: Coefficients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>4.294</td>
<td>.173</td>
<td></td>
<td>24.802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception</td>
<td>.124</td>
<td>.065</td>
<td>.132</td>
<td>1.925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popularity</td>
<td>.369</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>.449</td>
<td>7.573</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expertise</td>
<td>.102</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>.113</td>
<td>1.795</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase intention

The established regression equation becomes;

\[ Y = 4.294 + 0.132X_1 + 0.449X_2 + 0.113X_3 + \varepsilon \]

Where: \( Y= \) Customer buying intentions, \( X_1= \) perception, \( X_2= \) popularity, \( X_3= \) expertise and \( \varepsilon = \) Error Term.

From the findings of the regression analysis if all factors (perception, popularity and expertise) were held constant, customer buying intentions would be at 4.294. An increase in bloggers perception would lead to an increase in customer buying intentions by 0.132. An increase in bloggers popularity would lead to an increase in customer buying intentions by 0.449. An increase in expertise would lead to an increase in customer buying intentions by 0.113. This shows that popularity had the highest effect, followed by perception and then expertise.

4.8 Chapter Summary

Chapter four gave a detailed account of the research findings. It showed the response rate and the demographic information of the respondents. The chapter presented results and findings on the three research questions that sought find out the effect of blogger perception, popularity and expertise on customers buying intentions. Perception covered two aspects, credibility and trustworthiness. Popularity covered two aspects, number of visitors and number of followers while expertise focused on knowledge and competency. The next chapter presents discussions, conclusion and recommendations.
5.0 DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction
The chapter discusses the findings, gives conclusions from the study based on the objectives and gives recommendations to be undertaken. The study sought to assess the effects of blogger recommendations on customer buying intentions: A case study of USIU-Africa students. To achieve the objectives of the study, the following research questions were used for guidance; does customer perception of the blogger influence their buying intentions? does the popularity of the blogger have an effect on customers buying intentions? And does the expertise of the blogger have an effect on customers buying intentions?

5.2 Summary
The purpose of this study was to assess the effects of blogger recommendations on customer buying intentions: A case study of USIU-Africa students. The study was guided by the following research questions; does customer perception of the blogger influence their buying intentions? does the popularity of the blogger have an effect on customers buying intentions? And does the expertise of the blogger have an effect on customers buying intentions?

The study adopted descriptive survey design. This design was applicable to the research since the researcher sought to assess the effects of blogger recommendations on customer buying intention. The research was carried out on USIU-Africa students whose perception on the subject was considered to be important and of value since it gave the researcher a real picture of the problem area and enabled the researcher establish the effects of blogger recommendations on the customers buying intentions. The target population was then classified into undergraduates, graduate and doctoral students. Out of a population of 6398, a sample size of 362 was selected using a formula by Kothari (2004. The study had a response rate of 82% which was statistically significant to analyze the data. The collected data was analyzed using inferential statistics including frequency distribution, mean and standard deviation in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. The analyzed data was presented using tables and figures.
On the effects of bloggers perception on consumer buying intention, credibility of the blogger was found to affect the consumer buying intention within the range of a moderate extent to a great extent. The various aspects of credibility that were studied included; being knowledgeable, influential, passionate, transparent, reliable, authentic, insightful, informative, consistency, fairness, focus, accuracy, timeliness and popularity. Being informative ranked the highest where as being influential ranked the least. On trustworthiness the study established that the respondents followed bloggers recommendations because they were trustworthy and that they were likely to purchase a product if they trusted the blogger.

On the effects of bloggers popularity on the customer buying intentions, the study focused on the number of visitors and number of followers. On the number of visitors, it was established that the respondents frequently visited popular blogs, the respondents developed a strong bond and close interpersonal relationships with the blog or blogger, by frequently visiting, reading, and exchanging information. The respondents further indicated that blogs that had regular visitors were important source of information for them that bloggers were important influencers to them as readers. On the number of followers, the study established that a higher credibility caused a greater impact of the perceived persuasive intent, the number of likes a blog had received affected their buying intentions, the higher the number of followers, the more a blogger was perceived as trustworthy and that the higher the number of followers, the more a blogger was perceived as an expert.

On the effect of bloggers expertise on the consumer buying intentions, the study focused on two aspects, knowledge and competence. On knowledge, the respondents indicated that bloggers that showed expertise in a particular field were more credible, they trusted bloggers who were experts, they also indicated that having an ability in a special area was the key factor of being an expert. The respondents further indicated that they liked to read blogs that taught them useful information, they read blogs that offered knowledge in certain areas, they followed bloggers recommendations because they were knowledgeable and that they followed bloggers recommendations because they were qualified. They also stated that providing accurate information was important when they read blogs, they followed bloggers recommendations because they were skilled, they followed bloggers recommendations because they were experienced and that they followed bloggers recommendations because they were experts.
5.3 Discussion

5.3.1 Bloggers Perception and Consumer Buying Intentions

The study revealed that credibility and trustworthiness of a blogger had effects on consumer buying intentions. The various aspects of credibility were found to influence the buying intent of a customer. Being informative, was found to be of the greatest effect, this finding corresponds with Mangold and Faulds (2009) who stated that consumers understand social advertising as a far more reliable way to obtain information about products than traditional press. However, Chu and Kim (2011) were of different opinion when they stated that when interconnection in online networks is weighed against other social media tools such as product review sites and forums, consumers may highly understand sociable network as a far more dependable source while making a purchase, because they more rely on product information of their friends as opposed to unfamiliar people. Though this might be challenged in instances where a consumer is looking for a product or service that probably has not reached the hands of their friends.

Consistency of the blogger was found to be great effect on the consumer buying intention, this finding was consistent with that of Aller (2014) who studied on consumer behaviour in relation to blogs where 77% of respondents concurred that blogs have turned out to be more professional and hence provided reliable information. The other factor that is closely related to consistency was reliability, this concurs with previous research by Sweester, Porter, Chung and Kim (2008) which showed that the reliability of online information options is very important to Internet surfers as few of them would depend on the source that is not regarded as credible. On the same note, Kaye and Johnson (2011) stated that blog readers examine the reliability of personal blogs differently from other styles of sites like news or media.

Another aspects of credibility that was found to have a relatively high effect on consumer buying intention was authenticity. Authenticity makes the peculiarity of the influencer for buyers looking for legitimacy in the business and brands. As advanced by Molleda (2009), clients require a genuine encounter, not a powdered replication of a creative ability as is the case with big name endorsers. As noted from the literature reviewed there has been a lot of enhanced commercialization in advertising that has brought controversies and criticism when
it comes to the influencer marketing. Consumers have many questions even as they read blogs regarding products or service. Some of the questions are, will be the bloggers or influencers be sincere when offering a view in regards to a product? is this integrity certainly paid for, or are they true in their purpose? Does it depend upon the number of repayment they obtain when blogging or marketing and advertising something? (Vineyard, 2014).

Other factors identified in the study included fairness, insightfulness, focused and accurate. This concurs with Flanagin and Metzger (2007) who reported that viewers consider personal blogs as a far more credible source, because they are a fair option as compared to company-controlled websites which often times include a commercial or marketing purpose. Being influential was found to have the least effect on the buying intentions of a consumer. This finding concurred with Forrest and Cao (2010) who noted that in most instances bloggers will engage in topics that are of interest to them. In this manner, their readers are probably going to see them as specialists and regard them as such, making them more tenable than celebrities. Customers are likely to associate the celebrities motive simply with monetary gains that they are likely to get by promoting or selling a brand as opposed to a blogger who they view as a person giving genuine information.

On trustworthiness, it was established that consumers followed bloggers recommendations because they were trustworthy, they also indicated that they were likely to purchase a product if they trusted the blogger and that trust was a key factor in attracting blog visitors. Trustworthiness is foreseen as an essential variable in an online environment. As noted by Willemsen, Neijens, Bronner and Ridder (2011), consumers understand trust as the amount of confidence a source is considering conversing valid assertions. This means that even though businesses might be experts in their area they might not exactly be regarded as honest. However, consumers will read personal blogs, or see an evaluation by an influencer who is assertive and judge it as trustworthy. From customer's viewpoint, the influencers have emerged to be providing sincere assessments about the goods. Accordingly, their followers have a tendency to trust them more than the manufacturers, and eventually trusting the merchandise information higher (Cheong & Morrison, 2008).
5.3.2 Bloggers Popularity and Consumer Buying Intentions

The study revealed that the respondents frequently visited popular blogs, the respondents developed a strong bond and close interpersonal relationships with the blog or blogger, by frequently visiting, reading, and exchanging information. This finding concurs with Zhu and Tan (2007) who stated that popular blogs that are generally visited and also have an incredible number of regular guests are an important source which consumers use to assemble information. These websites exert a significant effect on consumer's purchase patterns. Visitors create a strong connection and close social relationships with a blog or blogger, by frequently browsing, reading, and exchanging information. Because of this, bloggers and their blogs are a robust advertising medium and which results in an ever-growing development of blog advertising. The finding is also in line with Jin and Phua (2014) who stated that the amount of friends or fans account owners have on their websites or internet sites is most regularly used as signals of online attractiveness.

The respondents further indicated that blogs that had regular visitors were important source of information for them that bloggers were important influencers to them as readers. Smart bloggers with an incredible degree of attractiveness, may attract visitors with more web page views within a day than even the major newspaper circulation. Therefore, their effect on other netizens may be converted into a business opportunity and become the hot market that the major stores seek to get into. Hsu and Tsu (2011) noted that blogs have grown to be one of the very most popular online activities and an extremely influential medium. One of the defining nature of blogs is their regular update and as such provide current information (Walker, 2007).

On the number of followers, the study established that a higher credibility caused a greater impact of the perceived persuasive intent. This corresponds with investigations by Jin and Phua (2014) which demonstrated that the level of popularity on Twitter social network impacts the perceived credibility of the source. The study also established that the number of likes a blog had received affected their buying intentions, this finding is in agreement with Lee and Koo (2012) who established that bloggers with a higher number of Twitter adherents are seen as higher in three measurements of source believability than those with a lower number of followers. In this way, a higher validity causes a more noteworthy effect of the apparent influential intent.
The study further established that the higher the number of followers, the more a blogger was perceived as trustworthy and that the higher the number of followers, the more a blogger was perceived as an expert. In a study by Vries, Gensler and Leeflang (2012), their findings display that high level of clarity is significant and positively related to the number of likes. The investigation done by Vries, Gensler and Leeflang (2012) about the level of interactivity demonstrates that if the interactivity of a post is low, the post will not get many likes. Nonetheless, their discoveries additionally demonstrate that a medium level of interactive posts gets a high measure of preferences. Marketers ought to take a lot of caution in the light of the fact that posts with a great degree of abnormal state of interactivity is not great because of the way that these posts get less likes. All things considered, one might say that a medium-level of interactivity is great, but in the event that it gets too much interactivity the popularity decreases.

5.3.3 Bloggers Expertise and Consumer Buying Intentions
The study revealed that bloggers that showed expertise in a particular field were more credible, customers' purchasing intent increases whenever an influencer demonstrates knowledge of the product they are trying to promote. This can be expressed through granting exact assessments and working case for the use of the product, notwithstanding in demonstrating a customary regular usage design for the item. This thus expands the degree of customers' trust in the influencers which affirms to what previous research has found – when endorsers have better level of learning and know-how they are in this way perceived with additional reliability, prompting higher purchaser's intent (Fred, 2015).

The respondents further stated that they trusted bloggers who were experts. Expertise is the degree to which a blogger is respected to have the sufficient information, experience or aptitudes to advance item. Concurring Chu and Kamal (2008) express that bloggers are self-declared specialists, as they frequently concentrate their blog on a particular subject or topic of intrigue and on account of items, they tend to center around particular item classification. Agarwal et al. (2008) add to this thought that bloggers everywhere frame their own particular exceptional intrigue groups where they share thoughts, assessments or thoughts regarding this particular subject. Well known bloggers have probably more noteworthy opportunities and
more access to valuable resources as compared to less known and relatively unpopular bloggers. Therefore, famous bloggers are more equipped for putting forth substantial expressions or give precise data.

The study also revealed that having an ability in a special area was the key factor of being an expert. The opinion leaders are progressive in knowledge of the issues essential to the group whether it is in fashion or political matters. As a result of their assumed mastery, they are esteemed and are in a situation to impact different individuals in the group. How much a source is considered as a specialist, and in this manner dependable, is controlled by assessing the learning and competence that the source holds with respect to the point (Willemsen et al., 2011). Competence is thought to be a key dimension of how persons or a group is described (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007). It is a general measurement of human social discernment (Fiske, Cuddy & Glick, 2006).

The respondents further indicated that they liked to read blogs that taught them useful information, they read blogs that offered knowledge in certain areas, they followed bloggers recommendations because they were knowledgeable and that they followed bloggers recommendations because they were qualified. Blogging sites, particularly those frequently expounding on consumption encounters of products or services, have as of late developed in popularity. Reviews by bloggers contain bloggers' encounters and product information; as needs be, the ownership is categorised as private. Bloggers regularly consider themselves to be specialists of certain product classes and subsequently specialise on these in their review sites. The aim of private online journals is along these lines to share experiences about certain categories of products and offer suggestions to others. Consequently, shoppers utilize this information to equip themselves before making buying choices (Huang, 2015).

They also stated that providing accurate information was important when they read blogs, considering that communication is two ways, it is of great importance to provide accurate information since it leads to a higher competence notion to the recipient. As highlighted by Chu and Kamal (2008), competence is directly linked with credibility and the ability of the influencer to make valid statements. The respondents also said that they followed bloggers recommendations because they were skilled, experienced and that they were experts. This is in line with Fiske et al (2006) who mentioned some of the traits that are related to perceived
ability that included intelligence, skill, creativity and efficacy. Further, Fred (2015) added that, the more the person who endorses a product or brand fits these criteria, the more likely they are to positively influence the purchase intent, and vice versa.

5.4 Conclusions

5.4.1 Bloggers Perception and Consumer Buying Intentions
Based on the study findings, the study concludes that bloggers perception has a significant effect on consumers buying intent. Credibility of the blogger in terms of being informative, authentic consistent, fair and focused had the highest rating which points to the conclusion that consumers are have not only become information seekers but are also looking for information that is authentic and focused to enable them make their purchase decisions. The study concludes bloggers recommendations have higher effect on consumers buying intention compared to celebrity endorsement since influential status was ranked last. The study also concludes that trust was a key factor in attracting blog visitors which in turn affects consumers purchase intention.

5.4.2 Bloggers Popularity and Consumer Buying Intentions
The study concludes that consumers frequently visit popular blogs and develop a strong bond and close interpersonal relationships with the blog or blogger by frequently visiting, reading, and exchanging information. The number visitors a blog has is key in the importance that consumers attach to the information therein. The higher the number of followers, the more a blogger is perceived as trustworthy and as an expert.

5.4.3 Bloggers Expertise and Consumer Buying Intentions
The study concluded that bloggers that show expertise in a particular field are more credible as the consumers regard the information as more useful. Offering information in a specific field of one’s qualification and ability promotes trust among the consumers and hence the likely hood of positively affecting their purchase intent. Providing accurate information is important for bloggers who wish to grow the number of their followers, inaccurate information can lead to wrong decision on the part of consumers, this may cause mistrust from the particular consumers and others who might get to learn from the affected consumer.
5.5 Recommendations

5.5.1 Recommendations for Improvement

5.5.1.1 Bloggers Perception and Consumer Buying Intentions
The finding of this research has showed that bloggers perception strongly affects consumers purchase intention, bloggers should therefore invest in acquiring more authentic information that is consisted and focused. Marketing managers sometimes rely much on celebrity endorsements to increase their sales and overlook the role of bloggers in influencing consumers buying intent. This study recommends that organizations should be keen on following recommendations of popular bloggers who may have a lot of influence over their customers. Marketing managers should invest in finding and working with bloggers who possess the qualities highlighted in this study.

5.5.1.2 Bloggers Popularity and Consumer Buying Intentions
Bloggers should adopt strategies that will help increase the number of visitors and followers to their blogs. Building relationships through social media platforms such as Facebook, twitter and Instagram can help in enhancing bloggers network. To maintain and increase the number of followers the blogger should display professionalism at all times and refrain from offensive language. Good quality work and more frequent updates on the blog will help in attracting more visitors and followers.

5.5.1.3 Bloggers Expertise and Consumer Buying Intentions
Bloggers should focus on area of their strength in terms of knowledge and competence. They should invest in research by read relevant magazines, other blogs, newsletters, eBooks and information sources to enable them provide accurate and insightful information. This will also enable them respond to those challenging questions that consumers may raise.

5.5.2 Recommendations for Further Studies
This study employed the quantitative research methodology which could limits the accuracy and application of the result. The researcher therefore recommends further research which could also include qualitative methodology such as personal interview or focus groups discussions. In addition, this research took into consideration only three aspects of blogger recommendations, perception, popularity and expertise, future study can be extended to cover other factors such as emotional appeal and bloggers uniqueness.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES

Appendix I: Questionnaire Cover Letter
RE: Survey Questionnaire

Dear Respondent,

I am a post graduate student of the Global Executive Master in Business Administration program at the United States International University. **THE EFFECTS OF BLOGGER RECOMMENDATIONS ON CUSTOMER BUYING INTENTIONS: A CASE STUDY OF USIU-AFRICA STUDENTS**

You are part of the selected sample of respondents whose views I seek on the above mentioned matter. Your honest answers will be completely anonymous, but your views in combination with those of others are extremely important in this research. All the information you provide will be treated with strict confidentiality and used for the purpose of completing this study only. Please answer the questions as accurately as possible.

**Please tick the appropriate answer for each question and answer ALL the questions.**

**I guarantee that all information will be handled with Strict Confidentiality.**

Thank you for your cooperation
Appendix II: Questionnaire

Kindly take some time to fill this questionnaire

SECTION I: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. What is your Gender?
   a) Male [ ]
   b) Female [ ]

2. What is your age?
   a) Below 20 Years [ ]
   b) 20-25 Years [ ]
   c) 26-30 Years [ ]
   d) 31-35 Years [ ]
   e) Above 40 Years [ ]

3. How long have you been a student at USIU-Africa?
   a) Less than 1 Year [ ]
   b) 1-2 Years [ ]
   c) Above 2 Year [ ]

4. Kindly indicate your level of study
   a) Undergraduate students
   b) Graduate students
   c) Doctoral students

SECTION II: BLOGGERS PERCEPTION AND CONSUMER BUYING INTENTIONS

Below are several statements on the effects of blogger perception on customer buying intention. Please indicate the extent to which agree with each of the statement. Use a scale of 1-5 where; 1= No Extent, 2= Little Extent, 3=Moderately Extent, 4= Great Extent, 5= Very Great Extent
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<td>To what extent do the following qualities of blogger credibility affect your buying intention</td>
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<td>5. Knowledgeable</td>
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<td>6. Influential</td>
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<td>7. Passionate</td>
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<td>8. Transparent</td>
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<td>9. Reliable</td>
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<td>10. Authentic</td>
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<td>11. Insightful</td>
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<td>12. Informative</td>
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<td>13. Consistent</td>
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<td>15. Focused</td>
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<td>16. Accurate</td>
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<td>17. Timeliness</td>
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<td>18. Popularity</td>
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<td><strong>Trustworthiness of the Blogger</strong></td>
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<td>19. I follow bloggers recommendations because they are reliable</td>
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<td>20. I follow bloggers recommendations because they are sincere</td>
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<td>21. I follow bloggers recommendations because they are trustworthy</td>
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<td>22. I am influenced by my favourite blogger’s opinion</td>
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<td>23. Trust is a key factor in attracting blog visitors.</td>
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<td>24. Trust in a blogger’s is important for me when I read blogs</td>
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<td>25. I am likely to purchase a product if I trust the blogger</td>
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26. To what extent does the perception of a blogger affect customers buying intention?
   a) Very great extent [  ]
   b) Great extent [  ]
   c) Moderate extent [  ]
   d) Little extent [  ]
   e) No extent [  ]
SECTION III: BLOGGERS POPULARITY AND CONSUMER BUYING INTENTIONS

Below are several statements on the effect of bloggers popularity on customers buying intentions. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the statement. Use a scale of 1-5 where; 1= No Extent, 2= Little Extent, 3=Moderately Extent, 4= Great Extent 5= Very Great Extent.

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<td>27. I frequently visit popular blogs.</td>
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<td>28. Blogs with regular visitors are an important source of information</td>
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<td>29. I develop a strong bond and close interpersonal relationships with</td>
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<td>the blog or blogger, by frequently visiting, reading, and</td>
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<td>exchanging information</td>
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<td>30. In my view bloggers recommendations have wide acceptance by peer</td>
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<td>group members.</td>
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<td>31. Bloggers are important influencers to me as a reader</td>
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<td>32. The number of visitors a blog has affects my buying intentions</td>
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<td><strong>Number of Followers</strong></td>
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<td>33. The number of comments a blog has affects my buying intentions</td>
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<td>34. The number of likes a blog has received affects my buying intentions</td>
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<td>35. A more popular blogger has a more positive influence on purchase</td>
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<td>intention compared with a less popular blogger</td>
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<td>36. The higher the number of followers, the more a blogger is perceived</td>
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<td>as credible.</td>
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<td>37. The higher the number of followers, the more a blogger is</td>
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<td>perceived as trustworthy.</td>
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<td>38. A higher credibility causes a greater impact of the perceived</td>
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<td>persuasive intent</td>
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<td>39. The higher the number of followers, the more a blogger is</td>
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<td>perceived as an expert.</td>
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<td>40. To what extent does the popularity of a blogger affect the buying</td>
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<td>b) Great extent</td>
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c) Moderate extent [  ]
d) Little extent [  ]
e) No extent [  ]

**SECTION IV: BLOGGERS EXPERTISE AND CONSUMER BUYING INTENTIONS**

Below are several statements on the effect of bloggers expertise on consumers buying intentions. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each statement. Use a scale of 1-5 where; 1= No Extent, 2= Little Extent, 3=Moderately Extent, 4= Great Extent, 5= Very Great Extent.

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<td>Knowledge</td>
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<td>41. I think providing accurate information is important when I read blogs</td>
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<td>42. I think having an ability in a special area is the key factor of being an expert</td>
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<td>43. I trust bloggers who are experts</td>
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<td>44. I think bloggers that show expertise in a particular field are more credible</td>
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<td>45. I read blogs that offer me knowledge in certain areas</td>
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<td>46. I like to read blogs that teach me useful information</td>
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<td>47. I follow bloggers recommendations because they are experts are expert</td>
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<td>48. I follow bloggers recommendations because they are experienced</td>
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<td>49. I follow bloggers recommendations because they are knowledgeable</td>
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<td>50. I follow bloggers recommendations because they are qualified</td>
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<td>51. I follow bloggers recommendations because they are skilled</td>
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<td>Competence</td>
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<td>52. Competence is directly linked with credibility</td>
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<td>53. Competency enhances the accuracy of information provided by a blogger</td>
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<td>54. Bloggers have become opinion leaders</td>
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55. To what extent does the expertise of the blogger affect the customers buying intentions?
   a) Very great extent [  ]
   b) Great extent [  ]
   c) Moderate extent [  ]
   d) Little extent [  ]
   e) No extent [  ]

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Thank you for your participation