

Study on the effect of blogs on young women's online buying behaviour when purchasing fashion items from online stores

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<p>This bachelor’s thesis focuses on answering the main research question “What is the effect of blogs on young Finnish female’s online buying behaviour when purchasing fashion items from online stores?”. The thesis subject is topical due to the ever increasing popularity and influence of social media. This research is needed due to the lack in the amount of research done on the subject matter. The purpose of the thesis is to find out the influence of social media and particularly fashion blogs on consumer buying behaviour. The recommendations are targeted at fashion industry companies who have an existing online presence and wish to better benefit from the possibilities provided by blogs.</p> <p>The theoretical framework was based on the combination of theories involving consumer buying behaviour and social media with a specific focus on blogs. Since very few studies on the effect of blogs on consumer buying behaviour exist at this date, the theoretical framework relied on theories that explain how social media in general can affect buying behaviour. Key theorists included Kotler, Solomon and Evans.</p> <p>The theory provided a strong backbone for the empirical research which was carried in the form of semi-structured face-to-face interviews. As the aim was to reach the most valuable research results possible, the participants were chosen based on their personal knowledge and experience of blogs. The interviewers had a set of open-ended questions which provided in-depth answers to the questions posed.</p> <p>The results showed that consumers who read blogs and actively use them when buying fashion products, often communicate with the blogger and other consumers during and after the purchasing situation. These consumers see blogs as a valuable tool which helps them for example gather information, get unbiased opinions on products and get inspiration for future purchases.</p> <p>In conclusion, in the fashion retail industry of today it is critical that companies acknowledge the phenomena and the power of consumer generated blogs while understanding the ways in which they can benefit from them in order to increase their customer base. The results of the research indicate that reading blogs can have a significant effect on the behaviour of young women when purchasing fashion products from online web stores.</p>	
Key words Social media, blogs, consumer buying behaviour, fashion industry, online stores, social shopping	

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1 Introduction to topic	1
1.2 Relevance of the thesis	2
1.3 Research question	3
1.4 Structure of the thesis.....	4
1.5 Literature review.....	5
2. Social Media.....	7
2.1 Introduction and definition of social media.....	7
2.2 Different forms of social media.....	8
2.3 Communication of social media audience.....	9
2.4 Blogs.....	11
2.4.1 Benefits of blogging to a blogger.....	12
2.4.2 The effect of good bloggers on the fashion industry	13
2.4.3 Example.....	15
3. Consumer buying behaviour.....	16
3.1. Definition and models of buying behaviour	16
3.2 Buying behaviour in social media	18
3.3. Effect of blogs on women’s buying behaviour.....	20
4. Online stores	24
4.1 Attributes of online stores	24
4.2 Internet stores and blogging.....	26
4.3 Summary of the theory.....	27
5. Research Method and Implementation.....	31
5.1 Research Design.....	31
5.2 Research Sample.....	32
5.3 Data Collection.....	33
5.3.1 Interviews.....	33
5.3.2 Interview Questions	36
5.4 Data Analyses	36
5.5 Reliability, validity and Minimizing Risks	37
6. Results and Conclusions.....	40
6.1 Use of Blogs.....	40
6.2 Information collection and communication through blogs.....	46

6.3 Benefits of blogging.....	52
6.4 Conclusions.....	56
7. Summary.....	60
7.1 Recommendations.....	61
7.2 Further study.....	63
Sources	65
Appendices	69
Appendix 1: Definitions.....	69
Appendix 2: Comparing the Information Sources Used in 2010 and 2011 in UK.	70
Appendix 3: Questionnaires.....	71
Appendix 4: Consumer decision making process by Rupp & Smith.....	75
Appendix 5: Coding of the interviews.....	76

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction to topic

In today's world of clothing retail, internet and social media play an important role in helping consumers find the items they are looking for. It is vitally important that companies have a strong presence in the social media platforms, otherwise the target audience can easily change suppliers. Among the biggest influences on young women's buying habits in relation to clothes are blogs.

During the last five years, the spread of social media has further changed buying and selling techniques. With platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, consumers are able to comment on their experiences with products and companies and to share them with their friends. This has led to the growing need for companies to generate positive customer experiences in order to minimize negative word-of-mouth messages, which would easily be spread within the social media platforms to other, potential customers.

Another form of social media that is very popular with younger, fashion conscious women, is blogging. Fashion blogs have grown to be one of the most effective ways of sharing experiences and recommendations over the internet and they are an effective way of marketing products straight to the target customer with low cost. It is not only a place where young women go to find specific products to buy, but also a place to roam around and accidentally find something desirable. It can increase the amount of internet store buying, since it can link the user directly to the place of purchase.

This phenomenon of writing down reports about past buying experiences has had a radical impact on the consumer buying behaviour. It encourages buyers to do more active research on products and to comment on their experiences so that anyone can read them. The impact these changes have had on post-purchasing actions, for example, have been tremendous. Negative feedback is no longer an issue that is dealt with solely between the company and the client, but now consumers are writing about their experiences online, where anyone can find them.

The existence of social media and the changes in options and buying venues has also had a dramatic effect on the buying behaviour model that describes the traditional way of purchasing products. Because of social media, they are able to conduct even deeper analysis of companies and to portray their own experiences and opinions to other users, creating a certain type of viral marketing-effect where the message can be spread to thousands of user with a few clicks of the mouse.

This thesis will focus more in depth with how fashion blogs affect women when they are buying fashion items form online stores. The main focus will be on Finnish women between the ages of 18 to 32 since this is the main target age group of most fashion blogs online.

1.2 Relevance of the thesis

The topic is very relevant to companies since it studies the effect that blogs have on buying behaviour, which is something all retailers should be aware of in order to be able to understand how behaviour patterns of modern buyers can be effected by other peoples' opinions.

Blogging itself is a concept that has been around for some time now, but the use of blogs as an independent marketing tool is a fairly new one. Due to this, pre-existing theory of the concept is limited and the industry continues to constantly move forward in terms of usability, so another research into the topic will be highly needed.

It is important that companies understand the consumers' side of the buying process in order to adapt their business strategy in hopes of reaching an even wider customer base and to create customer loyalty. Without loyalty, the customer base is less stable and more likely to change with little warning, endangering business along with profitability. It is therefore vitally important that companies understand not only the fundamental need to have exposure and presence in social media, but also that it is highly necessary to be portrayed well in consumer-written blogs since it creates awareness within the target consumer base.

It is also crucially important that companies acknowledge the fact that maintaining good customer relations is essentially more important now as it ever was. Consumers

of today can easily spread their opinions around, so therefore it is important that all consumers have good experiences to talk about when going online.

1.3 Research question

The main objective of this research is to find out how blogs affect buying behaviour of young women of Finnish nationality when purchasing fashion products from online stores. Therefore the official main research question is:

What is the effect of blogs on young Finnish female's online buying behaviour when purchasing fashion items from online stores?

This question was chosen due to the personal interest of the researchers with the topic, as both of them have a deep interest in reading blogs and are also active in purchasing fashion items from online stores. The age group that was studied was determined to hold voluntary participants between the ages of 18 and 32. The term "fashion items" remained ambiguous, since the intention of the researchers was to get responses from buyers of different interests. These items include products such as clothing, shoes and various accessories such as bags and jewellery. Focus was also put on buying fashion items specifically from online stores. This specification was done due to the interest in the fact that an increasing amount of fashion products are sold through the internet and whether blogs encourage readers to shop more online.

In order to gather the most amount useful information, two research questions were formulated. They are:

- 1. What effect do blogs have on the traditional buying behaviour model when buying fashion products from online stores?**
- 2. Why do women make buying decisions based on blogs?**

With research question 1, the aim was to find out how much reading a fashion blog would affect the buying behaviour model and to find out especially how much of a difference is there between a buyer who goes looking for a specific product (a behaviour model described by theorists such as Kotler and Evans) and a buyer who is first influenced by a fashion blog. With the here-called "traditional buying behaviour model", we refer to buying behaviour models that were developed before the influence of social media was taken into account, which will be discussed in the theory section.

Of special interest is how much blogs have an effect on the actions before the actual buying occurs, such as information research and evaluation of other alternatives. Do blog readers follow the recommendations of the bloggers' blindly or do they still conduct additional research before purchase?

The effect of blogs on post-buying actions was also a key focus point of the research. In the traditional behaviour models, post-purchasing transactions mostly involve trying out the product and the possible transactions which can include communication with the company. While the behaviour model where the influence of blogs has been taken into account also has these same steps, we predict that they will be more complex and more in the control of the buyer. The communication flow will shift from occurring mainly between the buyer and the company to a communication model which is centred around the buyer and anyone who receives their comments on the blogs.

Research question number 2 aims to discover what motivates customers to use blogs while simultaneously buying products from online stores and what inspires them to trust the recommendations of a person they don't really know. This question would help shed light also on how the readers chose the blogs they are reading and why they continue to go back to the blog when they've finished a purchasing transaction.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The thesis contains four, clearly defined parts. In the first section, the theory that the research is based on will be presented. The theory part will also be divided into different sections: the first part is comprised of theory focused on blogging and social media itself, giving light to the more theoretical part of blogging. The second part of the theory section will discuss different theories that influence buying behaviour, how these theories have evolved in time and how social media influences buyers today. The third part contains a theory put forth by the authors of this thesis where we attempt to form a theory which would be helpful in helping answer the research questions.

The second part of the thesis contains the research methodology, where the research itself will be discussed. Here aspects such as data collection, validity and reliability of the research and data analysis will be explained. The next segment will contain the

results of the interviews. The data collected will be categorized, coded and explained in a manner which helps answer the questions posed in the interview.

The last segment will hold the conclusion of the research and recommendations we would make to companies who are interested in understanding buyer behaviour and how it has changed with the influence of blogs. Appendices include features such as coding of the interviews and brief definitions for the more unfamiliar phrases introduced in the thesis.

1.5 Literature review

Finding current literature for the thesis was a critical imperative due to the fact that the topic researched is a new field of study. It would also become one of the biggest challenges during the creation of the theoretical framework. While a lot of literature about the aspects of consumer buying behaviour and social media separately exists, so far very little study has been done on how these two correlate. It was especially difficult to find any books with theoretical framework on blogging and its effect on the buying behaviour, mainly probably due to the fact that the trend of using blogs as a tool while buying from online stores is a fairly new one and has not been studied a lot.

Because of the spread and advancement of technology today, most of the newer theories and ideas are first published in the internet before they are printed into a physical format. This guarantees the fact that internet is not only always up-to-date and ahead of the published works in terms of new ideas and theories, it also provides more accurate sources for this study. Therefore we discovered that the most valuable and up-to-date information and theories we could find were from internet sources, where newest analyses on trends and shifts in online behaviour can be found. We still faced the problem that previous research into how blogs affect consumer buying behaviour was basically non-existent, and therefore we were challenged with creating our own theory framework.

Since having written and published sources was naturally an important factor in order to maintain credibility, we knew that it was also important that we find recent publications that would shed light on the topic. The key to finding a valuable and useful book source was searching out the newest publications that dealt with buying

behaviour of consumers. Because of the importance and relevance of social media, many of these books would also then briefly discuss how these new platforms affect consumers.

One of the printed sources that proved to be very valuable to us was *Social Media Marketing*, written by Dave Evans and published in 2010. The book provides the thesis with theories on how buying behaviour models have changed after the introduction of social media platforms and ideas on how social media's influence has shifted power positions from the companies to the consumers. Also several other publications by renowned theorists such as Kotler and Solomon were used in order to describe how much the old conventional ideas of buying behaviour models have been shifting since the introduction of social media as an influence.

The amount of additional sources used to gain information about the topic was numerous. For example, several web pages with analysis on the effect social media has had on consumers were used and TNS Gallup, a Finnish research company specialized in studies related to internet usage, was used as a source of statistics and latest studies on consumers' online behaviour. Magazines proved to be a valuable source of information, as many were found with detailed reports on how blogging influences fashion buying today.

2. Social Media

This part of the Bachelors thesis gives a theoretical background to social media. The concept of social media is defined and explained. The different forms of social media are analysed and the communication within social media is elaborated. The social media form of blogs is emphasized with further analysis placed on the benefits of blogging to a blogger, the influence of bloggers on the fashion industry and a case example is made of a blogger Hanneli Mustaparta.

2.1 Introduction and definition of social media

The most coherent definition of social media based on in-depth analysis by Kaplan and Haenlein, states that social media is “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundation of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content”. (Kaplan and Haenlein 2009, 60.) In other words, social media includes web-based and mobile technologies that turn virtual communication into interactive dialogue. These interactive communication techniques have changed the way organizations, communities and individuals communicate.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the term “social” in “Social Web” implies less about the “what” and more about the “how, why, and among whom” that distinguishes the Social Web from earlier, transactional online technologies. The term “social” refers to the ways in which people connect and also provides insight into why they are connecting—perhaps to learn something, share an experience or collaborate in a project. (Evans 2010, 30.)

The internet started out as a giant Bulletin Board System (BBS) that allowed users to exchange software, data, messages and news with each other. The late 1990s was the rise of homepages, whereby the average person could share information about his private life; today’s equivalent would be a weblog or blog. The era of corporate web pages and e-commerce started relatively recently with the launch of Amazon and eBay in 1995. They got a positive response from the internet users and only 6 years later the dot-com bubble burst in 2001. The current trend toward Social Media can therefore be seen as an evolution back to internet’s roots, since it re-transforms the

World Wide Web to that it was initially created for: a platform to facilitate information exchange between users. (Kaplan and Haenlein 2009, 60.)

In 2012 the sharing and exchange of information online through social media comes in a range of platforms; Facebook, Twitter, Wikipedia, YouTube, blogs, Second Life, World of Warcraft and the list goes on. With such a wide variation of social platforms and communication sites to choose from, there is something available for everyone.

The extent to which social media platforms have been taken into use by the internet users is remarkable. The results of a study conducted in September 2011 by an online tracking site Social Bakers presents that; Twitter had 100 million users worldwide, 30 million Google+ users and Facebook alone is estimated to have 1 billion users by the end of year 2012. Therefore as Kaplan and Haenlein states “it is reasonable to say that Social Media represents a revolutionary new trend that should be of interest to companies of all type”. (Kaplan and Haenlein 2009, 59.)

2.2 Different forms of social media

It is important to understand that social media comes in a range of different forms and a classification system should be used to better distinguish the differences between them. Kaplan and Haenlein created a classification scheme for different social media types by applying a set of theories in the field of media research (social presence, media richness) and social processes (self-presentation, self-disclosure) presented in table 1. (Kaplan and Haenlein 2009, 62.)

Kaplan and Haenlein identified six different types of social media: collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia), blogs and micro-blogs (e.g. Twitter), content communities (e.g. YouTube), social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), virtual game worlds (e.g. World of Warcraft), and virtual social worlds (e.g. Second Life) (Kaplan and Haenlein 2009, 61-63). The classification was based on the range of different communication tools available for the users to interact (ex. picture/music-sharing, wall-posting, voice over IP etc.). The lowest interactive social media included collaborative projects and blogs and the highest virtual social worlds and virtual game worlds that aim to imitate real human contact.

Table 1. Classification of Social Media by social presence/media richness and self-presentation/self-disclosure (Kaplan and Haenlein 2009, 62)

		Social presence/ Media richness		
		Low	Medium	High
Self-presentation/ Self-disclosure	High	Blogs	Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook)	Virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life)
	Low	Collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia)	Content communities (e.g., YouTube)	Virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)

As this thesis is focused upon the social media type; blogs, it is thereby important to note that based on this theory, blogs despite their low social presence and different forms of media richness have high self-presentation and self-disclosure. Thereby the communication in blogs is more focused upon the blogger communicating to the blog readers than the other way around. However, change in this communication manner has been developing since 2009 when this theory was established, as in most blogs of 2012 blog readers are able to post comments and better communicate with the blogger and the blog reading community.

2.3 Communication of social media audience

To emphasize the importance of social media it is important to note that one of the most recent published statistics collected 2012 by a global research and advisory firm Forrester Research, showed that 75% of Internet users worldwide used “Social Media” in the second quarter of 2008. This was done in the form of joining social networks, reading blogs and/or contributing reviews to shopping sites. The results present a significant rise from 56% in 2007. (Forrester research 2012.)

However, it's not enough for companies to know the number of social media users globally but more significantly how and where they communicate. To gain further insight into the type of communication style these social media users have, a model called “The Social Technographics Ladder” created by Li and Bernoff from Forrester Inc. should be acknowledged. The model categorises social media audience and places them into categorized groups; creators, conversationalist, critics, collectors, joiners, spectators and in actives (see more in Figure 1).

The data presented in Figure 1 is collected 2010 from a North American Technographics online benchmark survey. It is important to note that the highest per of social media users are considered to be spectators, resulting in 68% of the total social media users. Spectators read blogs, listen to podcasts, watch videos from other users, read online forums and read customer ratings/reviews. They are the more "quiet" social media users that follow and listen to the critics (33% of social media users), conversationalists (31%) and creators (23%).

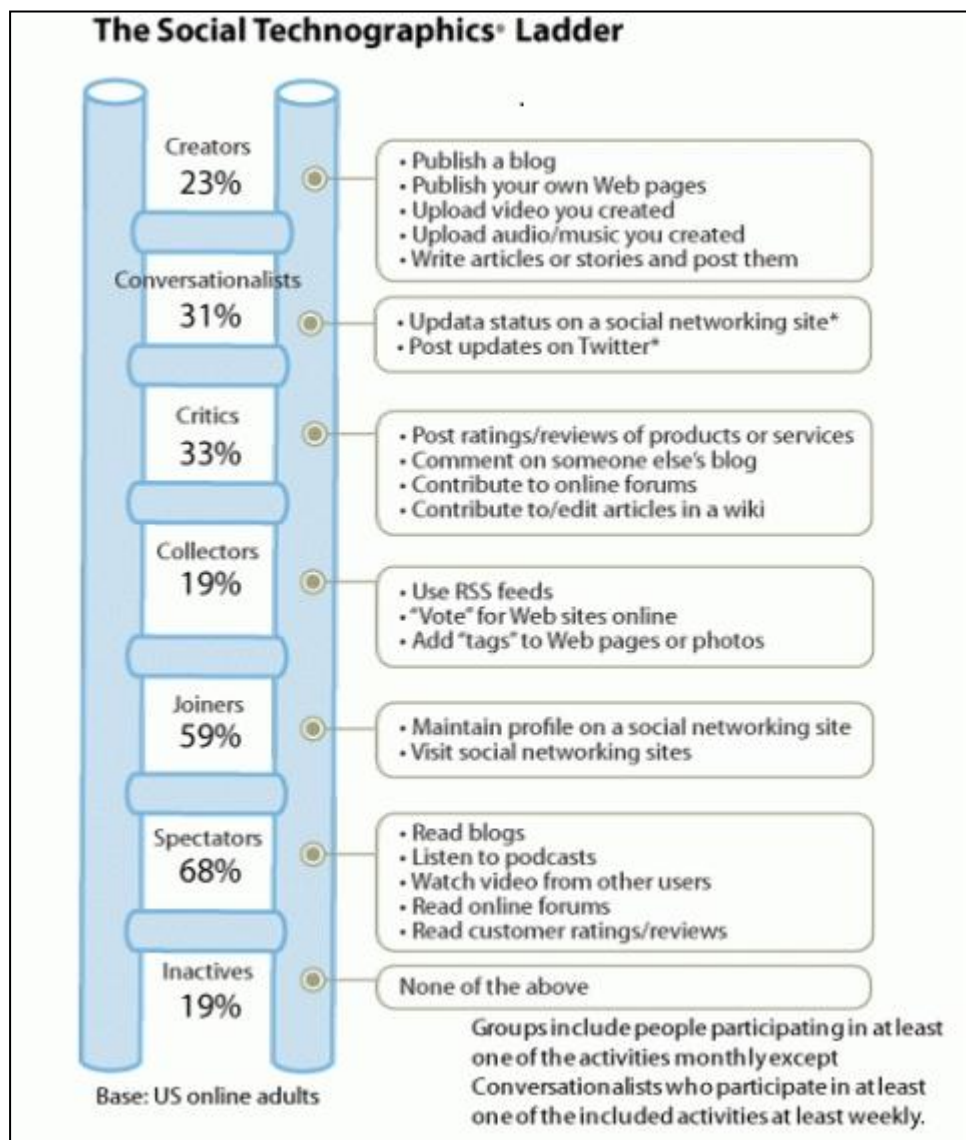


Figure 1. The Social Technographics Ladder (Forrester Research, 2010)

This information is important because it could and should be used by companies to generate higher sales by focusing their marketing efforts to gain the trust and co-

operation of the more "loud" social media users (creators, conversationalist and critics) that can spread a more positive company and brand image that may result in higher sales.

2.4 Blogs

Blogging is one of the oldest and most traditional forms of social media, which started to emerge in the late 1990s. The concept and usage of blogs have changed in line with the development of technology.

Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick, Johnston and Mayer (2006, 387) define web logs or “blogs” as follows: they give an easy method of regularly publishing web pages which are best described as online journals, diaries or news events listings. They may include feedback (trace-back) comments from other sites or contributors to the site. Frequency can be hourly, daily, weekly or less frequently, but daily updates are typical.

Alasilta (2009) in her book ``Blogi tulee t ihin`` gives a more in-depth analysis of the definition of blogging. The results of the research are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Defining blogging (Alasilta 2009, 20)

Defining blogging
Blogging in frames
<p>Blog is not the same as an online diary, even though blogging may include it.</p> <p>Blog is not the same as an online column, the concepts are interrelated.</p> <p>Blog is not just any type of an online page.</p> <p>Blog and Wiki are two different concepts.</p>
What makes a blog
<p>Blog is an online page, where text and/or multimedia may be published.</p> <p>Subjects are published in timeline: the newest is the first.</p> <p>Readers have a possibility to comment on the subjects.</p> <p>Titles help define subjects.</p> <p>A blog may be held by one or several individuals.</p> <p>Usually the more often the blogger writes, the more readers it has.</p>

The table above gives clear definitions to what a blog is and tries to refute some of the most common misconceptions that people have in terms of blogs. When reading about blogs, it is vitally important to understand that blogs are not mere online columns where the author writes and readers comment. While blogs have similar features, they are more interactive and the content is non-regulated or watched over.

The table also gives clear indication to what makes a successful blog. Readers often expect the blogger to post reviews quite often, so good bloggers are often those who constantly watch over their pages and interact with their readers. Having clear titles on posts is also important, since it can help to grab the attention of new potential readers. And since blogs derive their popularity from, among other things, being a place for discussion, it is important that the blog has a place where it can occur and that the blogger maintains a discussion with the reader in order to help build relationship, which in turn can guarantee that the reader continues reading the blog.

2.4.1 Benefits of blogging to a blogger

There are a range of benefits that may come across to a blogger. A blogger tends to write for the passion for a certain subject matter and aim to gain a regular reader base. However, the more passionate bloggers do aim for further benefits than only a handful of readers. The ultimate benefit of blogging is financial fortune and public acknowledgement. This is usually achieved by careful strategic business thinking as Pyhäjärvi states in an interview by Alasilta. (Alasilta 2009, 90.)

The fashion industry has far more well known and famous bloggers than many other industries or subject matters such as food(ex. cooking), politics or travel. Examples of bloggers that blog in the field of fashion, that have achieved international fame and acknowledgement in the fashion industry are people like Perez Hilton, Anna Dello Russo, Pandora, Susie Lau and Vanessa Jackman.

Alasilta further made a list of the benefits that a blogger may reach with their blog, this is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Ten ways of making money off blogging (Alasilta 2009, 90)

The benefits of well acknowledged bloggers include collaborations and projects such as:
1. Context advertising
2. RSS-advertising
3. Banner advertising
4. Collaborative sales
5. Digital products
6. Paid blogging
7. e-mail advertising
8. Selling of blogs
9. Fan products
10. Consultation

As the Table 3 presents, bloggers may get paid by companies to do their blogging, design and develop products under their name and sell them, collaborate in the sales of products made by companies, marketing their blog through different media and thus get a larger reader base, consultation with companies and other bloggers. (Alasilta 2009, 90.)

In addition, more recent benefits to bloggers in the fashion industry since 2009 include; magazine advertising like that of Elle Finland which publishes monthly the "blog of the month" (Elle Finland 2011-2012), publishing of books, like that of "Style" created in collaboration with various "high street" bloggers (Tammi 2012), becoming a muse of a designer like Amanda Harlech for Karl Lagerfeld and John Galliano.

2.4.2 The effect of good bloggers on the fashion industry

Fashion bloggers can earn to hundreds of thousands of dollars per year, fashion industry trade paper Women's Wear Daily reports. And the bulk of the money isn't necessarily coming from brands paying for ads on their sites — it comes from brands paying the bloggers to endorse their products in various ways. A clothing label might

hire a fashion blogger to style a runway show and tweet and blog about the project; or to serve as a model in their ad campaigns and post the images on their blog; or to simply endorse a product the way a celebrity would, by tweeting about it or posting about it on their site. For such endorsements, brands might pay bloggers four to six figures. While many experts say the value of the return on that investment is unclear, some bloggers do have the power to cause an item to sell out by simply tweeting a link to where followers can buy it. (Buzzfeed Shift, 2012.)

As mentioned above, fashion bloggers can more or less directly or indirectly influence the fashion industry. A blog is a form of social media and a communication channel where messages travel globally across. Bloggers may use this channel to advertise their likes and dislikes and influence the way in which certain brands or products are presented and experienced. In addition, blogs may begin new trends to an industry or discuss matters which companies may not want to be publicly discussed such as ethics or environmental factors. (Upstart, 2012.)

These fashion bloggers do vast amounts of product advertisement on their web pages. Naturally when a blog discusses clothing and accessories, they must also be displayed in the blog through photographs and images. Fashion blogs are explanatory where especially the products and their brand names are emphasized. Thereby, fashion blogs can also be seen as a form of indirect product advertisement not only because of the content of the text and images posted by the blogger, but as they include links to company web store where the type of products blogged may also be purchased. (Practical Ecommerce, 2012.)

It is in the interest of companies in the fashion industry to be acknowledged by certain "high profile" bloggers. There are several reasons behind it: branding, product placement, company image and so forth. Gaining the acknowledgement of a blogger may include giving free samples to the blogger, invitations to events such as. fashion week, product launches etc. (BuzzFeed Shift, 2012.)

As fashion bloggers may also create new trends and styles though their blogs and inspire designers for their lines. They may discuss ethical or ecological matters of clothing production such as the sanding of jeans which can cause serious health issues for the workers. This in turn may affect the way in which clothes are manufactured. (Green Business Bureau, 2012.)

2.4.3 Example

One of the most current international bloggers in 2012 is Hanneli Mustaparta, a Norwegian photographer, fashion blogger, stylist and former model. Her interest in fashion and style has driven her to different projects involving fashion. Her eye for style can be seen in her blog www.hanneli.com, and it has inspired women across Europe. Her vast blog popularity has caught the attention of different companies across and has made her in to a celebrity.

One of Hanneli's recent collaborations was with Massimo Dutti, a Spanish high street fashion company. She was hired to do an advertising campaign with her favourite picks from Massimo Dutti's recent clothing and accessory line of Spring 2012. Not only is she advertising Massimo in their international campaigns but also adding videos and links of the company in her own blog. It's a win/win situation for both as Hanneli gains a financial benefit and further acknowledgement from the collaboration, Massimo Dutti gains the acceptance of a celebrity blogger and updates their brand and company image with a fresh and current media person.

In addition Hanneli's popularity has enabled her to attend events like that of H&M for Marni Spring 2012. She was highly photographed in the launching event of Marni for H&M in Los Angeles, wearing Marni's collection. She also picked her favourite style from the collection and displayed it in her blog with links.

Other examples of how much influence Hanneli's blog has on the fashion industry can be seen in the popularity of the articles written by her in international women's magazines like Elle and Vogue. One of her recent statements in the Elle Finland was that she "fans" Tory Burch's famous ballerinas and tunics. (Elle Magazine Finland 2/2012, 30.) Statements like these are part of current branding techniques for companies to gain acknowledgement from famous bloggers and celebrities. They are part of indirect marketing.

3. Consumer buying behaviour

According to the definition provided by Michael Solomon, consumer behaviour is an area of study that covers a lot of ground and involves the study of individual or groups in a process where they select, purchase, use or dispose of products or services to satisfy needs and desires. (Solomon 2011, 33). Consumers can be defined as any individual of any age who takes part in any of the buying stages mentioned above.

3.1. Definition and models of buying behaviour

As stated by Solomon, consumer buying behaviour is a study of buying behaviour that occurs each time a consumer decides to purchase a product. It is an internal thought process (a process often referred to as the buying process) and it begins with the consumer recognizing a need or desire to purchase something. Consumer buying behaviour is more complicated than merely the transaction where consumer buys the product. It also involves the study of factors preceding the buying situation. It considers the thought process which pre-empt the buying, where the consumer recognizes the need and conducts research into different options before making an informed decision. It also includes post-buying actions where the consumer considers the experience before determining whether to use that retailer again in the future. (Solomon 2011, 34-36.)

Most notable theory on buying behaviour was developed by Kotler. It remains to be one of the building blocks of the area of study and later theories have often been largely built on his ideas. According to this theory, buyer behaviour is a fairly linear procedure with a clear start and an ending point, as pictured below. (Kotler 2000, 178-183.)

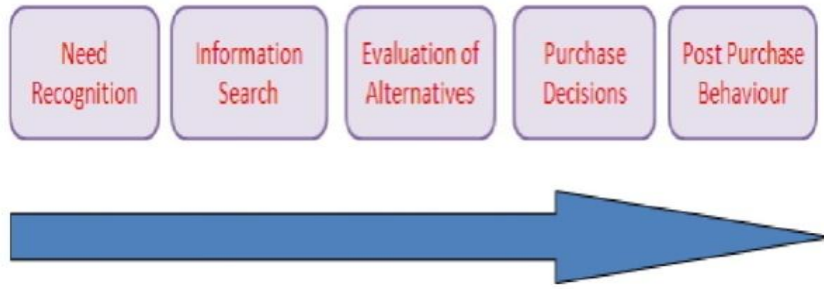


Figure 2. Kotler’s Buyer decision making process (Kotler 2000, 179)

The process begins when the buyer recognizes a need for certain product, leading to information search and choosing which product to buy. After the actual purchasing situation, the buyer goes back to evaluate the experience and to act accordingly.

In contrast, more modern theories on the topic argue that buying behaviour is more of a circular process as opposed to a linear transaction as Kotler assumed. These theories are often called Buying Cycle theories. Below is a consumer buying cycle developed by Solomon which understands the behaviour as a on-going process.

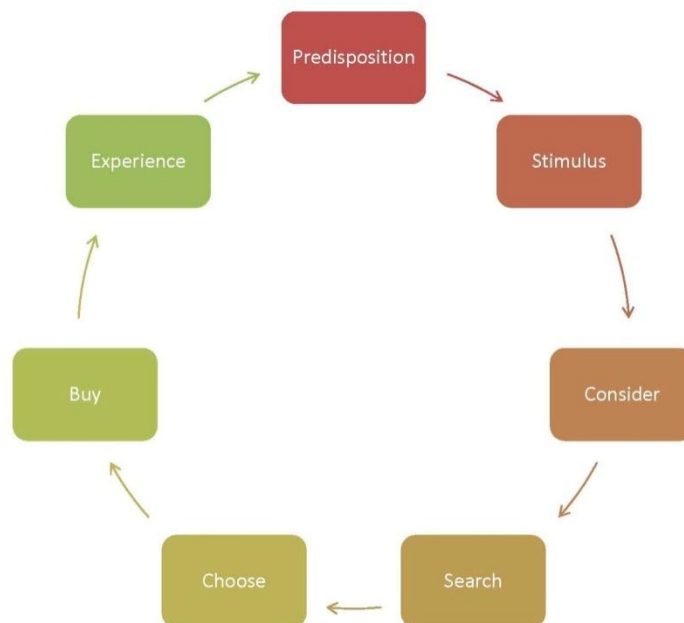


Figure 3. Consumer buying cycle. (Solomon 2011, 34-36)

The process is portrayed above in Figure 3. In the beginning stage, the consumer has no plans of buying any specific product until they perceive a certain stimulus, for example recognizing a need or seeing an attractive advertisement online. In the following stages the buyer considers the necessity of the purchase, before moving on to doing research to find the most suitable product in terms of factors such as price, place (internet versus physical store options) and reviews by other users.

After choosing the most fitting option, the consumer buys the product and experiences the post-buying stages where they weigh in the products attributes with possible inconveniences of the purchasing transaction and the overall experience of buying from that specific retailer.

3.2 Buying behaviour in social media

Ever since the major technological advancements during the last decade, the world of buying and selling has seen a huge shift from where the seller was the dominant party and would “push” the products to the consumer with the help of marketing, to a more consumer-friendly “pull” marketing style, where most power lies with the buyer. Because of the internet, consumers have the option to do major research and comparing different companies in hopes of finding the more suitable option. They have a vast amount of options and no more are they limited to the physical stores nearby. This also means that the way consumers and suppliers interact with each other has changed. (Solomon 2011, 95.)

The existence of social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, MySpace and YouTube has can also have a huge effect on pre-purchase activities. Not only can consumers find valuable and reliable reviews on products by previous users, they can also find bargains for products by accessing their accounts. Due to the heavy increase of users, companies have come to notice the power of social media platforms as a marketing tool and now spend a significant amount of money in placing banner ads on target consumers’ pages. The ads are often specified to fit the consumers’ own personal interest, which makes it clear that privacy issues of private consumers using platforms such as Facebook are a bit shaky. This is one of the main debates that raise a lot of heated discussion, since many oppose the release of private information such as past search engine history to the use of marketers. (Forbes 2011.)

On the other hand, some users can see the benefits of this type of direct marketing, since it offers the user an opportunity to find products that might interest them most without excessive amount of research. The ads also attract consumers by attaching additional value to using the link, such as special discounts, gifts with purchase and free deliveries. (Chaffey et al. 2006, 56-57.)

With the help of social media platforms, consumers are able to pass on their experiences and opinions to other users, creating a viral message that can be received by thousands of viewers within a short amount of time. It is important to note that the tone of these reviews can potentially be disastrous to companies. However, a positive review is good marketing, boosting company image that may result in higher sales.

As Figure 4 below indicates, the influence of social media is larger in the beginning stages of the buying process. The users of social media platforms have the opportunity to read about other consumers previous experiences with the online store or specific product details. This can lead to getting the users attention, raising interest for the mentioned product or an actual desire to go and purchase the item. Also, as the gray arrows indicate, even if the product achieves to gain just the attention of the user, it can later lead to crating an interest and desire to get the item. (Evans 2010, 112-115.)

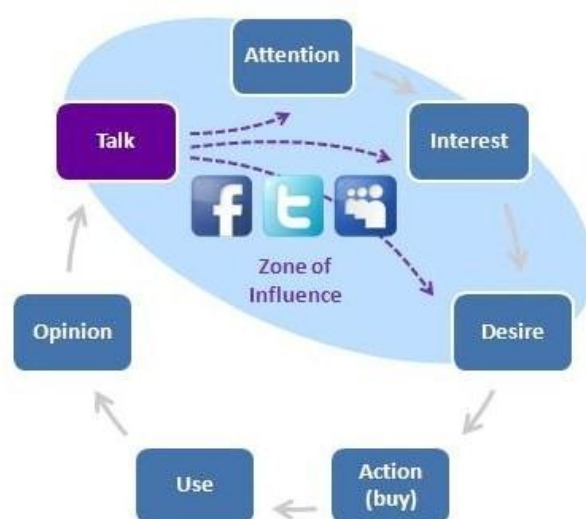


Figure 4. Consumer buying cycle influenced by Social Media (Evans 2010, 112-115)

Since the users of social media are mostly people with no stake in the company and who are just expressing their opinions and experiences with products, the reviews can also be negative. This can lead to avoidance by the readers of the review, affecting product sales, making it a very unwanted situation. Because of the fact that social media messages can spread like a viral marketing message, companies today need to work a lot harder to satisfy their consumers and make sure that they return for another purchase. This type of discussion is referred to as Social Shopping, since the purchasing occurs while communicating with other through the social media.

The idea of using social media as a source of information when considering what to buy from online stores is a growing trend, and not just in Finland. According to a study conducted in the UK, the habit of using these different communication channels for information has and is continuing to increase yearly, especially among users under the age of 30. The figure provided by the research (see Appendix 2) compares the results between years 2010 and 2011 about how many different communication channels are used to gain information about products. (Business2Community, 2011.)

The results clearly indicate that there is a clear shift in traditional outbound marketing model, where marketers determine the contents and the channels of providing information, to a more consumer-dominated, inbound model, where consumers themselves determine what they want to find out and from where. The results also indicate that consumers use a wider scale of sources instead of just one specific source. This clear shift indicates that consumers do hold the purchasing power and they have learnt to compare various information sources as reference before purchase. Companies need to acknowledge this shift in power and adapt in order to survive the market competition.

3.3. Effect of blogs on women's buying behaviour

Buying behaviour that occurs in blogs can differ significantly from the buying behaviour that occurs in other forms of social media. As stated before, blogs can portray several different forms of marketing that appeal to the consumers. Written from an unbiased point of view, consumers tend to put more weight into the opinion of other consumers than they would in other forms of advertisement such as banner ads or PR statements. The marketing efforts that can be found in blogs can have a

huge impact on a consumer and therefore on the buying process in itself. (Solomon 2011, 137-139.)

Women's buying behaviour in blogs

In order to find out what types of factors in blogs affect the behaviour of women in buying situations, it is important to consider both internal influencers and external influencers. The consumers are unconsciously affected by both every time they make buying decisions, and it is therefore vital that both are considered when studying the topic.

As shown below in Figure 5, the consumer buying process is influenced by several different factors. The diagram, a modified version of an image created by Smith and Rupp, portrays what kind of thought process occurs when buying from online stores. The diagram was modified to portray the strategic buying process from the view point of a Finnish consumer who is using a fashion blog as a source of information. The original diagram, which considered the effect of social media on a buyer, was something that was closely related to the topic of the thesis. The figure was slightly altered in order to gain perspective on how blogs in specific can affect the buying behaviour of a consumer. The original figure can be found in Appendix 4. (Rupp & Smith 2005, 120-122.)

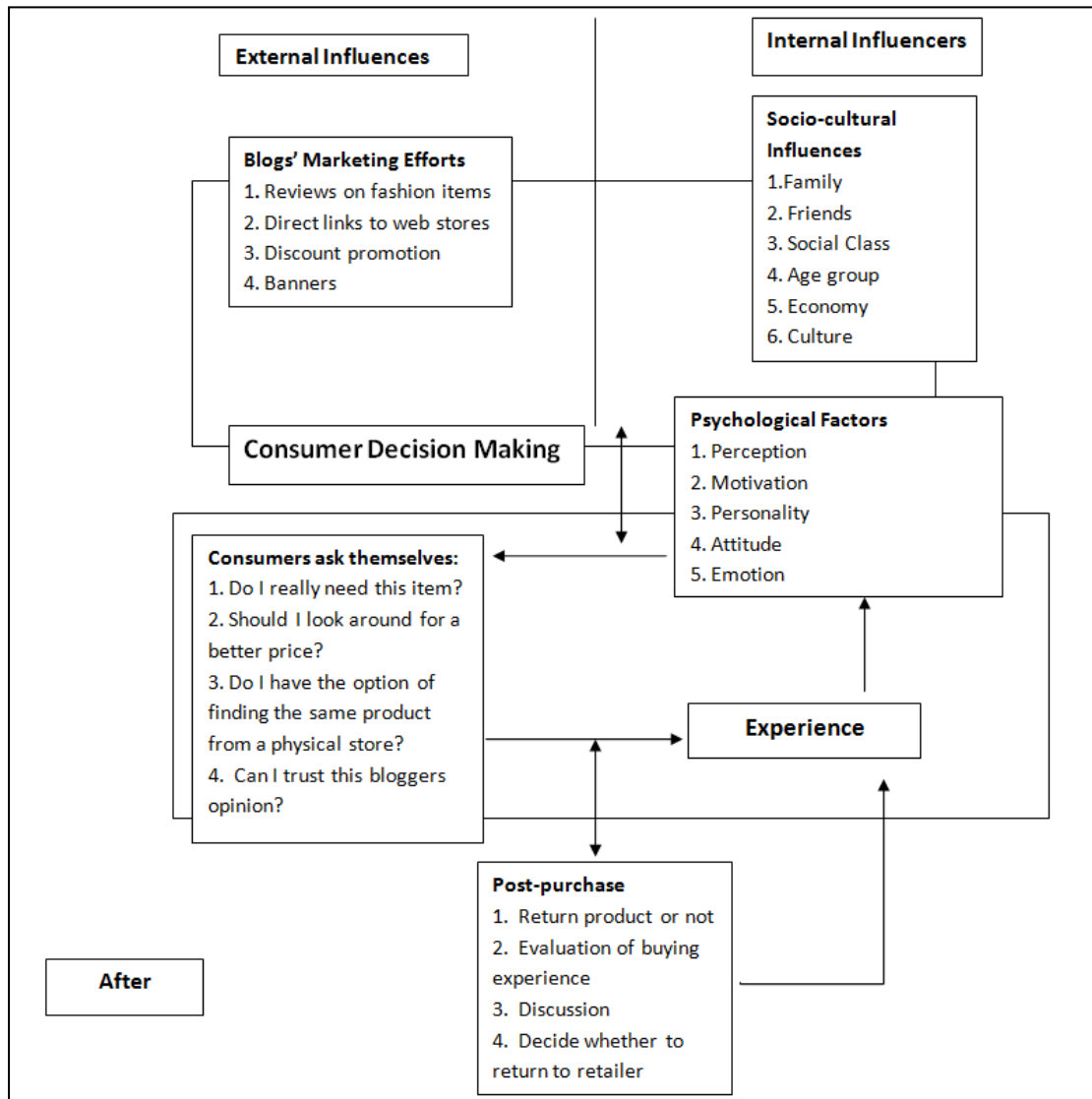


Figure 5. Consumer decision making process (adapted and modified by the authors from Rupp & Smith 2005, 119)

The diagram takes into account not only the internal factors that affect consumer buying, but also how external factors can influence the buying decision making. Since the diagram is modified to fit the research question of how blogs influence consumer behaviour of Finnish buyers, it considers the marketing efforts put forth by bloggers. Since these blogs are essentially formed to act as a tool for the blogger to be able to post reviews and recommendations for their followers and online consumers, it also acts as a form of marketing that can encourage the consumer to try out products they've never used before.

Another advantage the blogs have in terms of being a marketing tool is that they can express the bloggers opinions, promote discounts and give readers direct links to the internet store and still maintain a neutral point of view. Readers don't see blog posts

as an aggressive marketing method and therefore don't react negatively to what is promoted. If a company were to promote its product as bluntly, consumer might ignore the message altogether as is typical in today's world of internet advertising. Therefore fashion blog are a huge advantage to online retail stores in terms of providing inexpensive, attractive marketing for the consumers.

The diagram also mentions factors such as socio-cultural and psychological influences that affect a consumers buying decision. In terms of the socio-cultural factors, things like friends opinions, the economic situation and the age group of the consumer can have a huge impact on whether the consumer decides to trust the blogger's recommendation and buy the product from an online store. For example, the younger generations who have been raised during the times that computers and internet became a standard form of media are more likely to trust the opinions of someone they've never met and to give out sensitive information such as their credit card numbers to online stores. Psychological factors such as personality and whether there is true motivation to buy the product are also things that influence the decision making.

The diagram also takes into consideration the thought process that occurs during the later buying-stage. The buyer will consider factors such as whether there is any real need for the item, whether the item could be found in a physical store where it could be tried on first and how trustworthy is the blogger's opinion. Since buying from an online store can be very risky when purchasing clothing items, consumers need to weigh in the possible risks versus the possible positive outcomes before going further with the purchase.

After the purchase, the evaluation of the experience is very important in terms of determining the consumer's final opinions on both the buying experience and the trustworthiness of the blogger. Evaluation of the online store as a source for products and as a customer service provider are instrumental in the thought process that determines not only whether the customer will return to the store, but also can influence whether they will see the blog as a positive source of information. Due to the widely spread popularity of social media, consumers can then discuss the experience and blog with others and influence how popular they will be in the future.

4. Online stores

In the retail industry of today, having an internet-based outlet for products can be a vital part in defining the amount of success a company has. The fact that internet is one of the most popular media sources used today means that companies using it as a way to sell to customers have the chance of reaching a wider target market than physical stores without such an outlet have. (Harvard Business Review, 2011.)

Companies with an online store have a clear competitive edge since they have access to a wider range of customers and because they provide customers with more options. A company without a web-based store is often seen as untrendy and old-fashioned, which is a dangerous labelling to get when operating on a market that depends on keeping up with times.

Bloggers are also utilizing the benefits of online stores and using them as a way to boost their own reader base. They are not only able to present their readers with direct links to the products they are using, but can also act as marketers to different online stores by for example selling banner space on their blog site. Some bloggers also act in cooperation with different companies by testing free samples in return of reviewing the product and giving them free advertisement on their blog..

4.1 Attributes of online stores

Consumers now have an option of buying products from their homes, without needing to spend time on finding what they need by walking through numerous different stores. The easy accessibility of online stores guarantees consumers not only saved time, but also a wider range of options. For example, customers in Finland have a chance to buy products from other markets where they might find more choices and smaller prices.

This is especially attractive for many bloggers and blog readers who are looking for products that differ from the rather limited offerings provided by physical stores in Finland. Many feel that the Finnish fashion market is dominated by certain brands, which limits the amount of options that are provided. Due to the smallness of the Finnish market, many international brands feel that there is little potential and huge risk in attempting to challenge the foothold of companies such as H&M and Veromoda for market share.

This means that companies often ultimately decide against attempting to break into the Finnish fashion scene by opening physical stores. But due to the ever increasing popularity of internet based stores, these companies have the opportunity to gain a customer base without the risk which would be present if they were to open actual stores in Finland. (ATKearney, 2012.)

Internet store are also more able to compete with physical stores in terms of their pricing strategy. The price of the products can be lower in online stores mainly due to the fact that these companies have managed minimize many of the costs facing physical stores such as distribution costs (largely paid for by the customer) and store management costs (such as rent of the store, salary of the employees). Internet stores are also able to change their pricing on product more easily in terms of the amount of time it takes, since it doesn't involve changing prices for each specific product by hand as it does for physical store sales. (Harvard Business Review, 2011.)

On the other hand, buying products from the internet can also be problematic. By buying online, consumers purchase products such as shirts, jackets and shoes without trying them on and risk them being unsatisfactory. Buying online also demands a certain amount of trust on both sides. Consumers, who often use paying methods such as credit cards, internet banks and companies such as Pay Pal, entrust confidential information and their money to companies. Therefore it is also important that the companies are as transparent with their transactions as possible in order to ensure the consumer's trust. (Heavy Chef Project, 2012.)

Shipping the products to the customer also remains to be one of the biggest problems that companies engaging in internet based buying face. When shipping the products from the retailer to the buyer, neither party has much control over the event since the shipping is done by a third party. This can lead to problems such as delays in shipping time and misplacement of products, which in turn leads to customer dissatisfaction.

Shipping can also be very costly, especially if the product travelling from one continent to another, as can be the case when a Finnish consumer is purchasing a product from the US. Some companies try attracting consumers by offering free delivery if the shipping for products occurs within the same country, but for many

shoppers in Finland the shipping fees remain as one of the biggest annoyances related to online buying.

4.2 Internet stores and blogging

Due to the ever-increasing number of retailer going online, competition for customers is incredibly hard and brand loyalty is nearly extinct. This gives the power to the consumers as they have the option of choosing where to purchase their product from and leaves the companies scrambling for customers. Companies especially dependent on the success of their online shopping sites, such as Asos, Bubbleroom and Nelly.com need well thought-out marketing plans which would help them reach their target customers. These companies are completely internet based and have no physical outlets, and therefore have limited possibilities to encounter their customers. Blogs are an easy way of reaching customers from new areas, and it is a way of doing marketing which is very cost efficient. Therefore it is helpful for both parties to create cooperation which can be beneficial not only for the blogger and the company, but also for the reader.

This is why it is important that these companies understand the amount of influence that bloggers have on their readers. Some companies are already realizing the potential marketing help that bloggers can provide. A common trend in fashion blogging is that the blogger receives some samples from fashion companies that are either meant to be tested by the blogger with the hopes that they will give positive reviews on their site, or as raffle prizes that are meant to be given to the most loyal readers. The latter form of co-operation is seen as a highly attractive way of marketing the brand or site since it is very time and cost efficient, requires little work from the company and usually leaves both the blogger and the readers with a positive image of the company. (IFB, 2010.)

The most popular bloggers are also able to sell banner space for companies. These banners are nearly always related to the fashion and most commonly advertise internet stores which sell fashion products. Depending on how large the reader base for the blogger is, the more the blogger can earn when selling space for advertisers. Successful bloggers are also able to remain ahead of the curve by establishing relationships with online companies. This will be useful because it guarantees the blogger with the opportunity to get samples of new products which aren't being sold

yet, giving them time to review the product and create customer interest on the product ahead of time. (IFB, 2010.)

4.3 Summary of the theory

The question of how blogs affect the consumers' post-purchasing behaviour is an important one in today's technology-dominated marketplace. It is important for companies to discover how much effect blogs have on the different consumer online buying stages including general product and company selection based on the information they have gathered from online. This information can guide a company to see where their marketing efforts should be placed and how much attention should be paid to the way in which the company and their products are portrayed in blogs.

The image, Figure 6 below, is a theoretical framework that helps explain the affects that blogs have on young, female consumers. The image is developed by the authors for this thesis and is influenced by prior theories developed by authors Kotler, Solomon and Evans, who were introduced in the previous sections of this thesis.

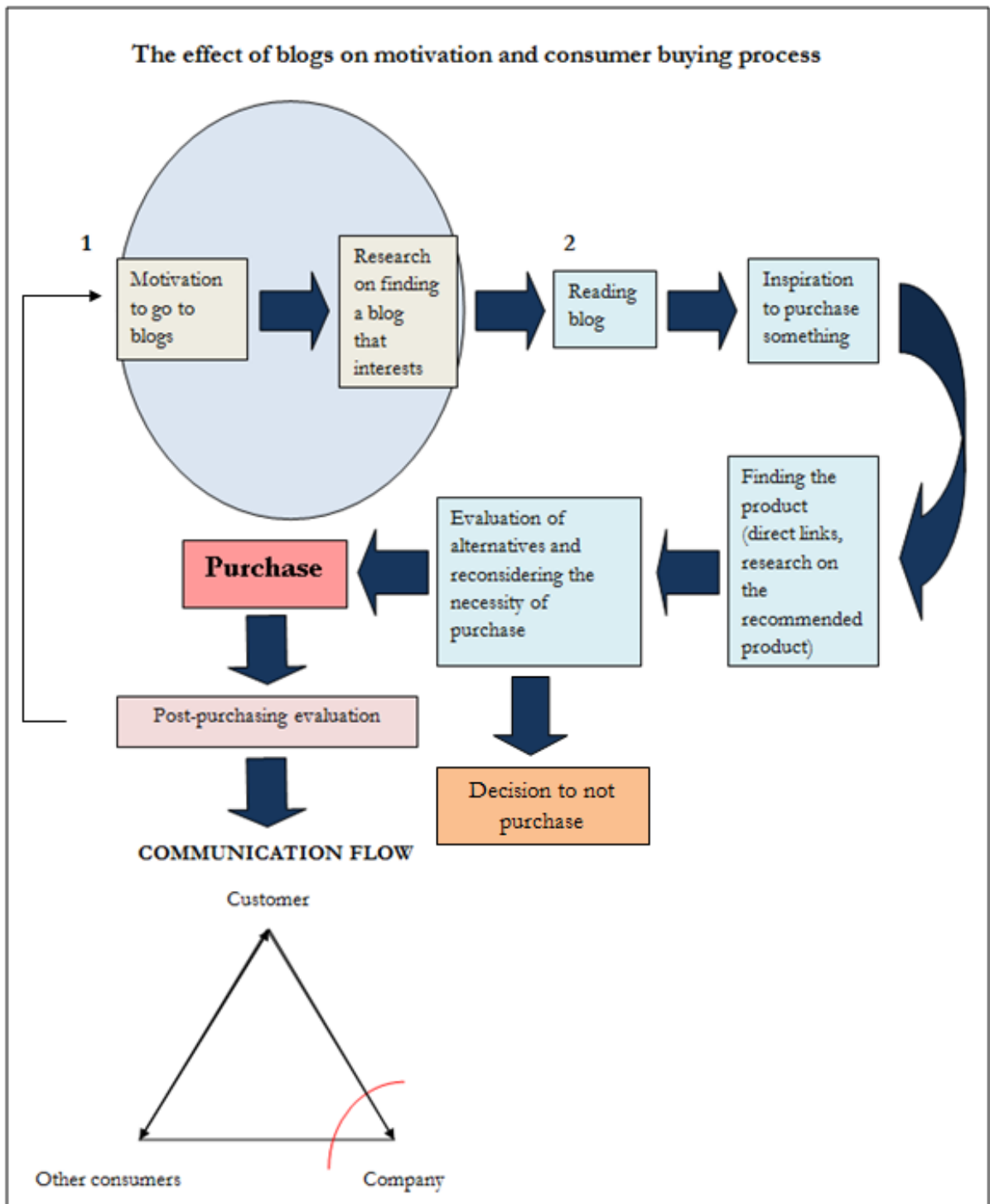


Figure 6. The effect of blogs on motivation and consumer buying process (figure by the authors, adapted from Kotler 2000, Salomon & Evans, 2012)

The consumer buying decision differs from the traditional purchasing model when it is influenced by a blog. The consumer may use several blogs as a tool to find information about the product and or online company of their interest.

If the buyer is not following a specific blog but is motivated to find one with hopes of finding purchasing suggestions (starting point marked as a no.1 in the figure), they first need to search for the most suitable one that corresponds with their interest in terms of style, price point and other similar qualities. After finding the favoured blog, the reader will read the blog with hopes of finding inspiration and specific products to buy, after which they follow the links often provided by the blogger to the product, or if no such links exist, do research of their own to find a similar product from an online store. After this step, most consumers will do comparative research during which they find alternatives that might be more cost efficient, especially if the product is expensive.

On the other hand, if the reader accidentally finds something they might be interested in buying, the process will begin at a different stage. Here the reader will be reading a blog (marked as no. 2 on the image above) and then proceed to the stage of being inspired to find out more about that specific purchase. If their enthusiasm over the product remains, they'll move on to researching the alternatives and evaluating their actual need of the product, helping the buyer decide whether they intend to buy the product or disregard it.

After this, the process moves on to the actual buying stage, followed by the post buying transactions. Here a consumer might decide not to engage in any post-buying communication or to start the whole cycle again by going back to the blogs to peruse other pages. When considering a more traditional approach to post-buying communication, it is notable that it usually occurs between the main players, as in the customer and the seller.

With the influence of blogs, a noticeable shift in communication flow can be predicted, as more information flows to other receivers. Due to the spread of discussions and commentary in blogs, it is clear that customers can trade experiences about products and companies more easily, which has a huge effect on the discussion flow. This can lead to loss of potential customers and since this is what all companies

want to avoid, they should be aware of the potential power that blogs hold and act accordingly.

This model is the basis for the empirical research that will follow. The research participants for this thesis will be asked to answer questions related to issues such as to how much they use blogs for communication prior to the buying situation, how much they use it in post-buying situations, how beneficial they perceive blogs to be as a tool to use during the buying process and their reasons for returning to the blog. The answers to these questions will help us determine how much of an effect blogs have on the behaviour of young women when buying fashion items from online stores. Questions such as why they visit these certain blogs will also be asked in order to find out why consumers read the blogs they read and how they discover them.

5. Research Method and Implementation

This part of the bachelor thesis will describe the details over the conduction of the empirical research. The research method and implementation was initially planned accordingly and further executed in order to answer the research question and fill the research gap in the best way possible.

5.1 Research Design

It is important to emphasize that this thesis is qualitative in nature. The main reason for choosing this type of research is that the thesis subject, where the effect of blogs on buying behaviour was studied, is an area of study which has not been researched before, and therefore does not have preliminary research or data available. By tackling the issue, qualitative research results will give a more in-depth understanding of the subject matter and will provide a better direction on what aspect of the study should and could be better researched in the future.

The aim of the research design is the overall plan to connect the conceptual research problems to the pertinent empirical research. The research design provides information on the framework of the research and the data collection methods used (including factors such as type of questionnaire, sampling plan/size). Furthermore the research design used demonstrates if the research problem is understood if errors and/or irrelevant design choices are to be avoided. (Ghauri, Gronhaug & Kristianslund 1995, 26.)

According to Ghauri, Gronhaug and Kristianlund (1995), research design can be categorized into three groups; exploratory, descriptive and causal. When a research is preliminary in nature and may not have strong empirical support providing validity and reliability, exploratory research is used. It's considered to be lacking in research value due to its vague nature and lack of support and thereby it is mainly used in initial pilot studies as the results are preliminary in nature. In descriptive research the main problem is well understood and results are conclusive. Descriptive research is well structured, follows precision and has a clear procedure. Causal research is highly structured and the results are conclusive. In comparison to descriptive research, the researcher is to draw conclusions to problems relating to the "cause and effect". (Ghauri, Gronhaug & Kristianslund 1995, 26-29.)

A coherent understanding of the research question helped in the process of choosing the right research design. This thesis aims to find the answer to the research question: what is the effect of blogs on women's online buying behaviour. The research design chosen for this thesis is descriptive research design.

The main reasons behind choosing this type of research design are that the questions are open-ended but well structured, direct and coherent in supporting the thesis subject. Despite the fact that the thesis topic is considered a "fresh" one in the sense that equivalent thesis' weren't found by the researchers, the subject matter of online consumer behaviour has support and empirical evidence from studies done in Finland and ones made globally. Thereby exploratory research design is out of the question. In addition descriptive research allows greater space for open analysis and research structure than causal research design which suits well in qualitative research.

5.2 Research Sample

The initial aim was to find a representative sample (subset) which would represent a larger group of individuals that would fit the thesis subject. The sampling method chosen was judgement, also known as purposeful sampling. In it the researcher actively selects the most productive sample to answer to the research question. (Marshall 1996, 523.) The key factors that resulted in the choice of purposeful sampling was the researchers knowledge of the thesis subject based on the theory collected and the evidence from the study itself on the ideal focus group.

The ideal focus group had to fit the main research variables important to the thesis itself and therefore have specific experiences (critical case sample). The variables or the specific experiences included the female gender, age of between 19-32 and active following of blogs that focus on women's fashion. The participants with much experience with the subject matter of blog following was a crucial deciding factor if the participant was fit to meet the research subject standards. Thereby, a selection of best suited women from the researcher's work and leisure groups were asked to participate in the research.

The research sample size was based on the general qualitative research recommendations when interviewing a small group of participants when there is an intention of achieving in-depth results (Marshall 1996, 523). The sample size was ten

participants as this was seen to be large enough to be generalized on to a larger group and allowed space for research error. (Carson, Gilmore et al. 2001, 87.)

The research participants were private individuals and they will remain anonymous for the reason that it is irrelevant to publish their names as it would not affect the results of the study.

5.3 Data Collection

As mentioned before the study was conducted according to qualitative research standards and guidelines. The chosen data collection method was based on the theory collected from various sources and the researcher's previous experience in conducting empirical research. The data collection method was interviews.

5.3.1 Interviews

The data collected was done in the form of face-to-face semi-structured interviews with open ended questions. The ten female interviewees were all residents in the Helsinki city area. The authors of the thesis split the number of total interviewees into half, meaning both authors conducted five interviews. This was done due to the difficulty of getting to fit a time where both interviewers would be able to be present in all interviews. The interviews were conducted in Helsinki between March and April 2012. The interview sessions took place once with each participant and lasted from 28 to 50 minutes which is a reasonable time for in-depth data collection. (Malholtra & Birks 2003, 179-180.)

The semi-structured interviews were open in nature but the interviewer had a set of questions for the interview structure. The chosen interviewing strategy had two main aims. Firstly, the set of questions (see Appendix 3 for questionnaire) served as a cornerstone for the interview and to gather information that can be later compared. Participants were able to answer these questions with a few words and in some cases by choosing the most suitable option of the ones given. The open-ended questions aimed to uncover the effect of fashion related blogs on women's online buying behaviour. Their main aim was to uncover underlying psychology, motivations and attitudes on the subject matter.

Secondly, the open nature of the interview style aimed at creating an overall encouraging atmosphere in the interview situation; encouraging in the sense that it aimed to stress that the topic the respondents were talking about is important and worth discussing. The encouraging aspect was communicated by posing further questions after the leads given by the respondents as well as by the nonverbal signs implicating acceptance and understanding, like nodding the head. During the interview session the role of the non-verbal communication is very important, though the analysis itself is based on verbal data. (Valtonen 2000, 24.)

The interview began with a brief outline (can be seen in interview questionnaire Appendix 3) of the purpose of the research to assure the interviewee that it is important and has some benefit for them. Because getting an informed consent from the person interviewed is an ethical requirement for research, confidentiality of the data and of the respondent was mentioned, and agreement to be interviewed was further agreed upon. In addition the permission to use the tape was also asked and confirmed from the interviewee. Support for this method of consent is from qualitative interview procedure outlines written by Carson et al. (Carson et al. 2001, 75.)

Table 4 below portrays detailed information about the interviews that is important to have written down in order to maintain transparency in the research. The table lists factors such as the age of the interviewee, the date that the interview took place on, the duration of the interview and who conducted the interview. Each interview code corresponds with codes that are used throughout the thesis when referring to specific interview number.

Table 4. Conducted interviews

Code	Age	Date of interview	Duration (mins)	Conducted by
1	31	11.4.2012	45	Sanna
2	26	13.4.2012	40	Sanna
3	19	20.4.2012	42	Sanna
4	29	22.4.2012	32	Sanna
5	24	24.4.2012	40	Sanna
6	28	12.4.2012	38	Heidi
7	26	13.4.2012	43	Heidi
8	23	19.4.2012	40	Heidi
9	20	24.4.2012	45	Heidi
10	25	27.4.2012	35	Heidi

The interviews had a conversational manner which allowed the interviewee to discuss openly their experiences and opinions on the subject. This type of interview was the most beneficial for filling the research gap as the interviewees could freely answer the questions. Furthermore, as the main research questions had been carefully formulated for the interview, the conversation had a clear and coherent structure and was able to stay on the subject matter.

Typical to semi-structured interviews, additional questions were asked during the conversation for further understanding and better elaboration which allowed further depth into the interview. (Yates 2004, 165-167).

As mentioned before, the interviews were done face-to-face. This method of interviewing allowed further depth to the conversation as total focus was placed on one interviewee at a given time. All the ten interviews were done in quiet rooms and an audio-recorder was used to record the conversations. This method of recording allowed the interviewer to concentrate on the discussion at hand. Also it allowed the whole discussion to be accurately recorded, which allows later re-listening and direct quotes to be used. The record is also permanent, accurate and unbiased (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009, 259-350.); these are all important aspects of reliability and validity which will be further discussed in the validity and reliability section of this thesis.

5.3.2 Interview Questions

The interview questions were based upon finding the answer and supporting for the main thesis research question and sub-questions. The theoretical background for the thesis, which was first researched, served as a cornerstone for the development of the interview questions.

As stated by Turner creating effective qualitative research questions for the interview process is one of the most crucial components to interview design (Turner 2010, 754). Thereby it was evidently clear for the researchers that the interview questions had to be clear and coherent in nature.

As the research is qualitative in nature the questions were focused on being open-ended, as neutral as possible, asked one at a time, worded clearly and coherently (Turner 2010, 758). It was important that the research questions would be asked in a logical order to enhance coherence. It was also preferable for the researcher to ask follow-up questions or prompts for clarification and in order to ensure that the interviewees stated the maximal amount of information relevant to the research. All questions were constructed by the researchers to fit the thesis subject of online buying behaviour and blogs.

5.4 Data Analyses

After the interviews had been translated from Finnish to English and transcribed from sound records to paper, the coding of the answers began. Coding was used to help the researcher organize the data received from the interviews and to help see patterns that rose from the responses.

The coding of qualitative information is slightly different from the coding done for quantitative information as it requires the researcher to form informational categories out of the responses received from the participants. These participants are encouraged to be as talkative as they can in order to get as much descriptive and useful information as possible, and therefore also the coding of the answers can be time consuming, but also very helpful and descriptive in giving answers to the research questions posed.

The most important part of a coding process is creating the response groups to which the answers are then divided into. It is vital that the formed groups help answer the question posed. When going over each line of each answer, the relevant data is divided according to which category they would fit into. In this thesis, the code segments are defined as certain phrases that help describe the function of the group.

The style of coding can also vary. In this thesis, the categorized coding was recorded in such a way that reader can immediately see from the master list (in Appendix 5) how and why the answers are grouped in order to help maintain a transparent process.

Each of the responses was handled individually. The process began when the first answer was read through carefully and the answer for the opposed question was highlighted. This process will be repeated with each of the other respondents' answers, one question at a time. When all the responses to the first question were gone through, the answers were grouped into different, suitable categories. After this, the answers were recorded to an Excel table, where both the frequency of the answer and interview identification numbers were presented. After this, a bar chart based on the categories and the number of times that answer was mentioned in the interviews was created.

In order to preserve the integrity and transparency of the study, all of the information found in the coding process was put into the Appendix. The coding and categorization tables were colour coded in order to help the reader understand reasons behind the groupings, so that no confusion about the final results will remain.

5.5 Reliability, validity and Minimizing Risks

Before presenting the findings of the thesis, discussion should be placed upon their quality. The quality of findings is usually assessed by the terms reliability and validity (Valtonen 2000, 29). If the reliability and validity step is not conducted efficiently, the whole credibility of the research can be questioned.

“Reliability refers to the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different

occasions” (Hammersley 1992, 67). Therefore it can be stated that reliability means that the results are something that could be reached again if the research were to be replicated. The measure should be consistent when assessed more than once and the replication should give the same answer however and whenever it is carried out. Reliable qualitative findings are therefore independent of accidental circumstances of the research. (Valtonen 2000, 29.)

Validity is “the extent to which an account accurately represents the phenomena to which it refers” (Hammersley 1990, 57). In other words validity attempts to question whether the answers themselves are accurate and if not, then why? The questions also have to be correctly formed in order to give the accurate answer (Kirk and Miller 1986). Generally speaking, validity refers to the truth of findings and how well-based or sound they are (Valtonen 2000, 29).

Ten interviews are considered to be large enough sample size for a qualitative research in order to be reliable and for the results to show validity (Valtonen 2000, 33). The number of interviewees was limited to a fairly small number in order to maintain a reasonable level of work load. Since the interviews conducted were formed into a quantitative format, the analysis is a process which requires a lot of work that can’t be done merely by computer. This is why the number of interviewees was limited to ten. This interview sample size is quite a small number to base any strong conclusions on, and therefore if the study was replicated, a larger number of people should be asked to participate.

The interviews themselves were split into half by the interviewers, meaning both interviewers did five interviews out of the total ten. The main reason for this was that it was difficult to arrange a time for both of the interviewers to be present for all the interviews in the time limit of a few weeks. This obviously is a concern in terms of validity and reliability, as there could have been interviewer bias. However, the results of the interviews were coherent in nature and there was no clear difference in answers given by the participants of the two interviewers. This can be due to the interview questions that served as the backbone for both interviews, and the agreement between the authors on the manner of how the interviews should be carried out. However, if the study was to be repeated for further analysis or replication, the recommendation is to have more than one interviewer present to minimize any possible bias.

In addition it is important to note that as this thesis study is about young women's online buying behaviour and the interviewers are in Finland, the interviewees were also Finnish. Thereby the interviews were carried out in Finnish language and the results had to be translated into English. In order to keep the interview fluent and for the interviewee to feel comfortable, it was important that the language chosen for the interview is the one which the interviewee feels most comfortable with. Nevertheless, whenever data is translated between languages, error may occur in the translation process.

All ten interviews were audio recorded to ensure reliability and validity. Thereby the interviews can be re-listened and the data re-analyzed if seen necessary. The recorded interviews were written into paper format. The answers given by the participants can be found in Appendix 5 which showcases the coding as well as the analytical process of the interview explicitly. Because of this, the reader of this thesis can assess and compare the results and conclusions drawn from the data coding.

6. Results and Conclusions

This part of the Bachelors' thesis presents the results of the empirical research and the conclusions that can be withdrawn from them. It is important to note that the interview questions aimed at finding out how blogs affect the participants' online buying behaviour. In addition, the aim was to gain further behavioural insight by researching aspects such as; the benefits the participant feels they receiving from blogs, the reasons behind following blogs and what causes them keep returning to the same blogs. This will give the research insight into motivational factors related to using blogs as a tool for buying from online stores.

6.1 Use of Blogs

As discussed in the previous chapter the qualitative data was collected from ten female participants in the form of semi-structured interviews. All the interviewees were active blog followers who often use blogs for finding internet-based stores to purchase clothing and accessories from. The interviewees were asked questions that would present their internet activity in relation to the amount of time they spend on blogs. Additional questions were asked that would reflect the interviewees buying habits to their consumption of blogs.

The first six interview questions dealt with background factors of the interviewees, mapping out the relevant, personal information that would help in further data analysis. The first three questions included; age, level of education and current occupation. The results can be seen in Table 5 below. The responses to the question over the educational level were either that they had completed high school or that they were still in/had completed a degree in a higher education school. Interviewees had completed their higher level education in either Helsinki School of Economics (referred to in the table as HSE) or in University of Applied Sciences (referred to as UAS).

Table 5. Age, highest level of achieved education and current occupation of interviewees.

Interviewee No.	Age	Highest level of education	Occupation
1	31	HE (HSE)	CR manager at Sampo Bank
2	26	HE (UAS)	Customer service, Sampo Bank
3	19	High School	Shop assistant
4	29	HE (UAS)	Student
5	24	HE (UAS)	Customer service, Sampo Bank
6	26	HE (UAS)	In-house buyer
7	23	HE (UAS)	Office worker
8	20	High School	Office worker
9	28	HE (HSE)	Marketing assistant
10	25	HE (HSE)	B2B insurance sales person

As the table indicates, the interviewees' ages were between 19 and 31 years, resulting with the average age of 25,1 years. The interviewees were highly educated, as eight out of ten had or were getting a higher degree and two were still considering their options due to the fact that they had just graduated from high school. The table also lists the interviewees' current occupations.

The Figure 7 below, presents the results for question 4 “How many hours does the participant spend on the internet weekly?” which is compared to the results received from the question 5 which poses the question about the weekly amount of time spent on blogs.

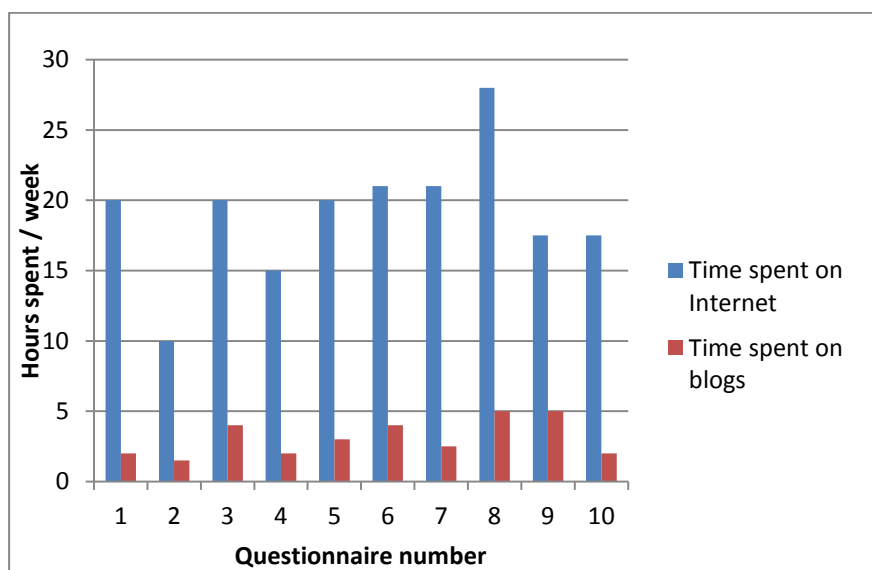


Figure 7. Amount of time spent on the internet/week compared to the amount of time spent on blogs per week.

The results indicate that all of the participants are high users of the internet, with 60% indicating that they on average spend 20 hours or more using the internet. 30% of the repliers state that they spend more than 15 hours but less than 20 in the internet weekly and one of the participants uses the internet under 15 hours, which on weekly basis is still a quite high on average (around 1 hour and 15 minutes/day).

The amount of time spent on blogs clearly reflects the amount of time the participant uses internet overall, meaning that the more the participant spends time online, the more time they will also spend on blogs. An exception is participant 2 as she spends 10 hours in the internet, only 1,5 hours were spent on blogs. On the other hand, participant 8 who spends about 28 hours online per week, also spends the longest time out of all the participants on blogs with the estimation of about 5 hours per week.

When responses received from questions 4 and 5 are placed into a scatter-diagram, it is possible to see whether there is any correlation between the results of how much time the respondents spend in the internet when compared to the amount of time they spend on reading blogs. As the trend line in the diagram indicates, there can be seen a fairly strong correlation between the two factors.

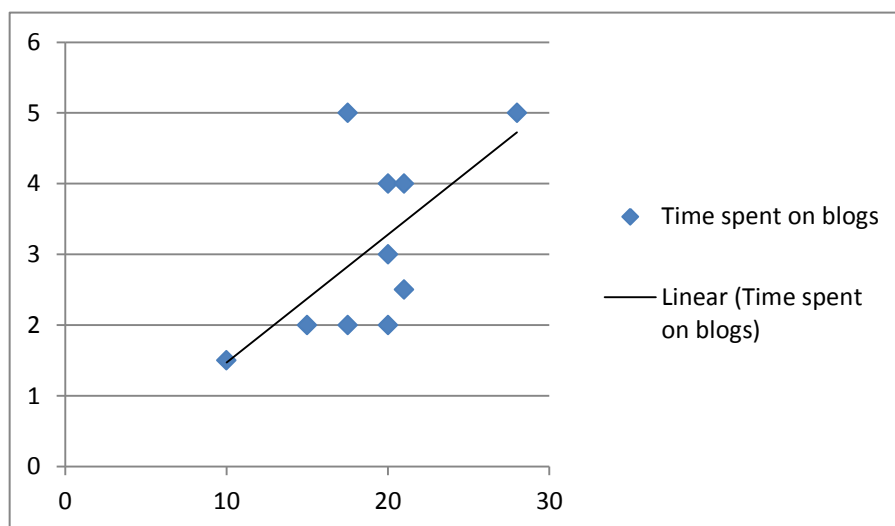


Figure 8. Correlation between time spent on the internet and time spent on blogs.

When these figures are put into the Excel formula which calculates the Pearson's correlation coefficient, it gives the number 0,64. Since the scale is from -1 to 1 where the minus indicates no relationship between the two factors and the positive indicates a clear relationship, it can be concluded that there is a fairly strong

relationship between the amount of time the respondents use in the internet and how much time they spend on blogs. This indicates that as the amount of time spent on the internet increases, the amount of time the respondents spent on blogs increased too.

Question 6 asked the interviewees to recall the blogs that they visit repeatedly. The answer varied greatly and nearly all of the interviewees read different blogs. This is not a surprising result as the number of fashion blogs is tremendous. It is important to note however that all of the respondents said they follow more than one blog.

In question 9, the participants were asked to estimate how many times a month do they purchase fashion products from online stores. This was done in order to find out how active the participants are in buying products from internet stores and to try to see if any correlation can be detected when compared to the amount of time they spend on the internet and in blogs.

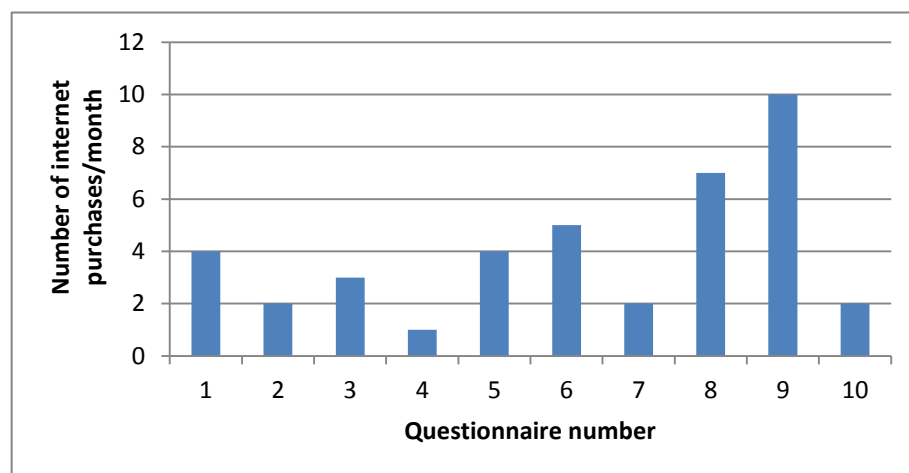


Figure 9. Number of internet purchases per month

As the figure above clearly shows, there was a lot of variation in the respondents' answers. While some participants only buy fashion products once or twice a month (respondents 4 and 2 respectively), the results also indicate that some blog users are very active in purchasing from internet stores. For example, respondent number 9 estimates that they buy products on average ten times a month. It is important to remember that the participants were asked to estimate on average how many times they purchase from online a month, and therefore the actual number of times could vary according to the month.

How did you end-up in that particular blog?

In question 7, the participants were asked to describe how they have come across to the blogs they are following. The question was open-ended since naturally it is possible that they've found different blogs by using different methods. The results were analyzed and grouped into different categories. A detailed coding with clear indication to each respondent's response can be found in Appendix 5. This coding will shed clear light on who answered what, which creates transparency to the research.

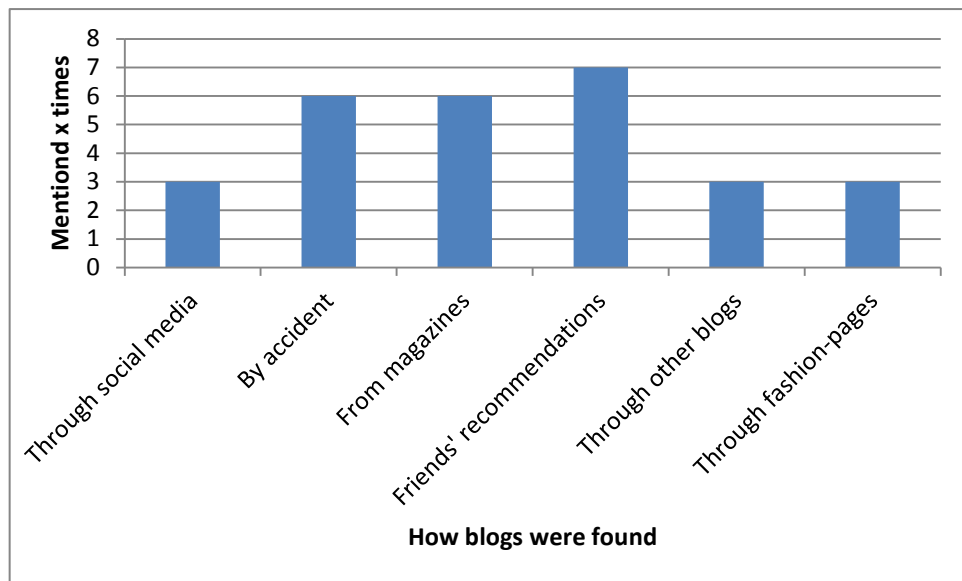


Figure 10. How participants discovered the blogs they are following

The results indicate that most of the participants are affected by the recommendations of their friends. In total, seven out of the ten participants stated that their friends' word-of-mouth recommendations had helped them to find an interesting blog. Six people (interviewee numbers 1,3,6,7,8 and 9) also mentioned that magazines are a great source for finding good blogs, while the same number of participants (numbers 1,4,5,8,9 and 10) stated that just surfing in the internet and coming by to the blogs by accident is also a common way of finding interesting bloggers. Participants also have found blogs through using other social media platforms especially by seeing advertisements and comments their friends have written in blogs by using social media. According to the results, it is possible to reply to blogs using i.e. Facebook and Twitter, making it easy for other users to find the same sites.

What makes a blog attractive to readers?

The aim question 8 was to find out what attracts the participants to follow the specific blogs and what they feel they can gain from reading them regularly. As the figure below indicates, the answers received were a bit more dispersed than they were for the previous question. Again, the groupings were made according to how many times each attribute was mentioned by different respondents.

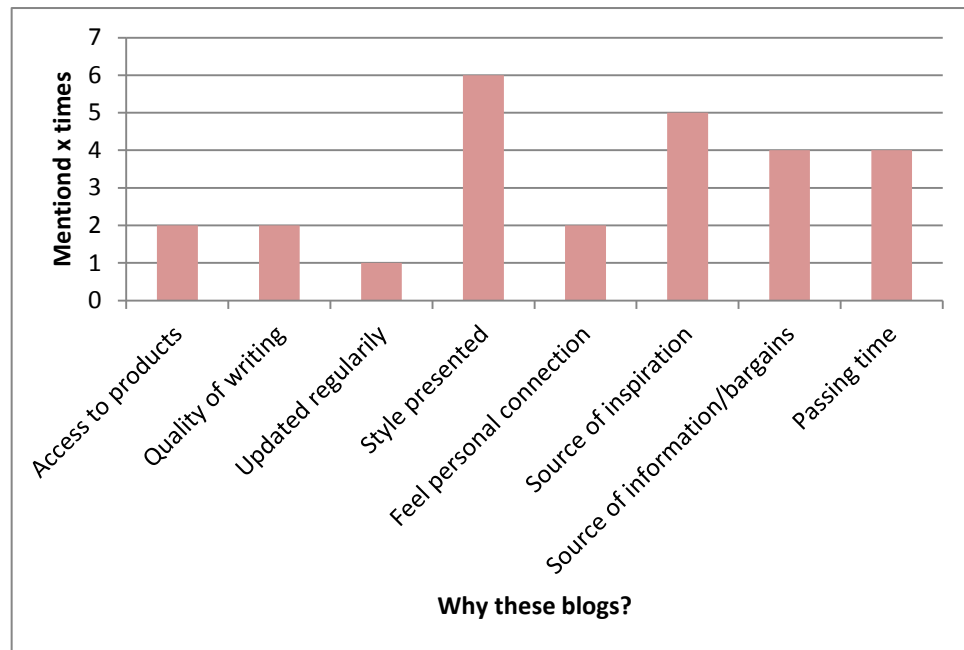


Figure 11. Motivation behind blog selection

The results give insight into why the participants choose to continue reading the blogs they are currently following. Since the topic is focused on fashion, it is natural that one of the main requirements blog followers have in terms of content deals with the bloggers own sense of style. Readers are interested in not only reading text and seeing pictures that inspire them in terms of their own personal style, but they also look for recommendations that can help them build up on special "must-have" fashion items and pieces. Blogs are also seen as a good source of information and bargains, since many bloggers also post direct links to the internet stores they've bought their clothes and accessories from.

On top of these answers which were easy to predict, the participants also mentioned other, more surprising reasons they have for following certain blogs. Two of the respondents' (numbers 1 and 5) mentioned the importance of good, quality writing,

while the bloggers ability to make the blog seem like a personal account of experiences with inclusion of the writers personal feelings was also seen as an important feature in a blog. It was also mentioned, for example by participant number 5, that blogs should be read like a discussion made between friends rather than just a generic description of what has been bought.

6.2 Information collection and communication through blogs

The purpose of question 10 was to find out if the participants use the blog as a tool to find out more information about the product they are considering buying from an online store. This was an interesting question in terms of finding out how blogs affect the buying behaviour that occurs post-purchase. The results of this question help the researchers discover how much blogs actually influence the behaviour and how it has changed the way consumers do initial research prior to purchase. Has the amount of research done increased since the usage of blogs has gone up or has it stayed the same?

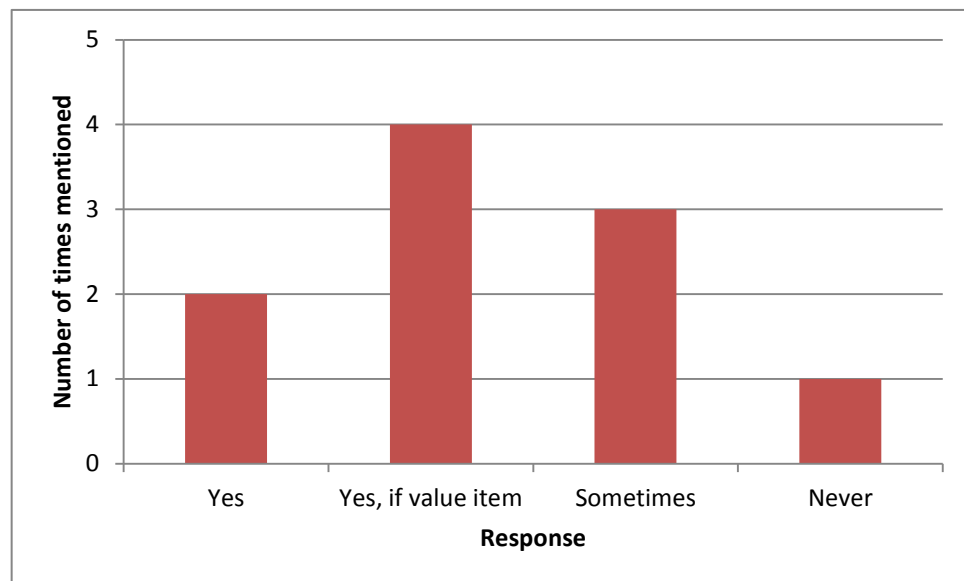


Figure 12. Blogs used as information research tool

Nearly all of the respondents, nine out of ten, indicate that they do use or have used blogs as a way to find out information about the product they were considering buying. Two of them, interviewees 4 and 9, state that they always do this type of information research. The most popular answer was that they use blogs to buy products if it is something they consider to be a value item, so if the value of the product makes them unsure of purchasing without physically seeing the product.

Many felt that blogs give a solution to the one main problem that web-based buying still has, which is that the buyer is reliant on the sellers recommendation since they are unable to physically see the product before actually receiving it. With the use of blogs, the buyer has the opportunity to hear from an unbiased party what they think about the product. It maybe sometimes impossible to find reviews for a particular product, but it is possible to find posts that review for example the same manufacturers other products and conducts. This can already give the buyer a major indication of the i.e. general quality and size scale the company uses, which in turn can help make the decision of whether to buy.

Do you purchase products based on blog recommendations?

Question 11 dealt with whether the blog readers find the bloggers' recommendations useful and if they ever make purchasing decisions based on these recommendations. This question helped to understand whether the readers actually use blogs as a source of information before they go purchasing product from online stores.

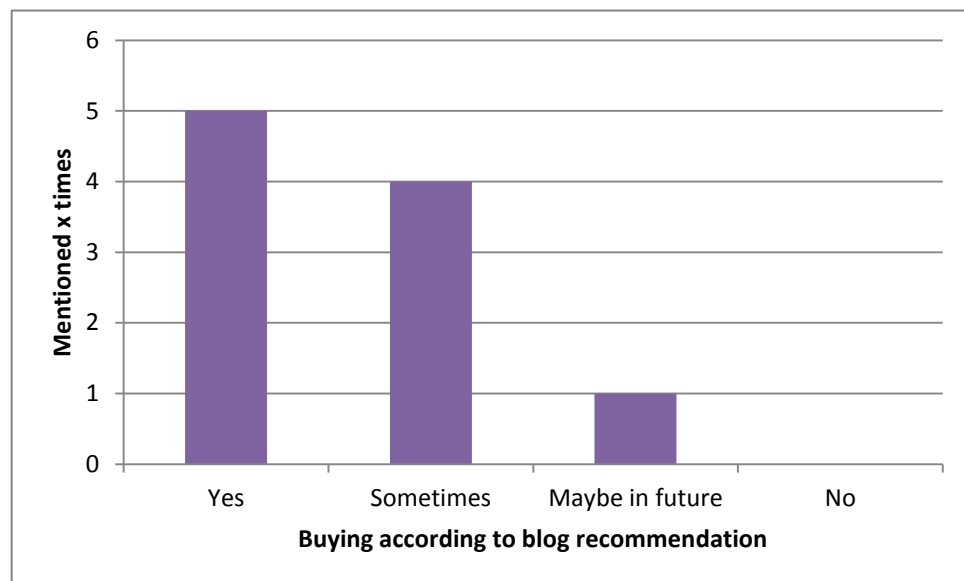


Figure 13. Buying according to bloggers' recommendations

According to the results, all participants have a fairly positive outlook on the bloggers' recommendations and none of them say they have never followed or never would follow these recommendations to a web store. Interviewee number 7 was on the fence about the issue, but indicated they might do so in the future. Five of the participants (numbers 1,4,5,6, and 8) say that they actively and rather often follow

recommendations and buy the same products that are discussed in the blog. Four say they can sometimes be swayed by the writing into buying the same product.

The participants' enthusiasm inspired a follow-up question: why are the participants so eager to listen to the recommendations of the bloggers? The results were coded according to how many times a certain answer was mentioned.

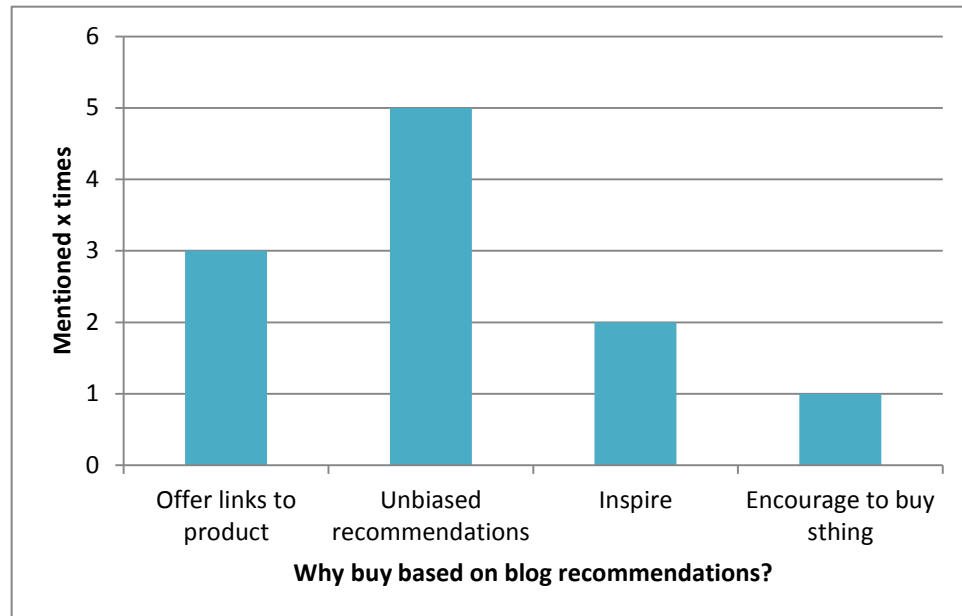


Figure 14. Reasons for buying according to bloggers' recommendations.

The results indicate that the most common reason for following recommendations is because the participants feel that the bloggers' reviews can be trusted to be unbiased and therefore are believed to give good recommendations about what to buy.

Interviewees also appreciate getting good tips from bloggers who often give valuable advice about practical matters concerning online purchasing and who give direct links to the sites where the products can be found. With this "linking system", one can easily find the products that have been introduced by the blogger.

Listening to the bloggers' recommendations was also mentioned by for instance participant 2 as a way of overcoming the fact that buying from online stores can be very hazardous. It requires a certain amount of confidence, since the consumer is basically placing a lot of faith on a company by giving them their credit card numbers or other sensitive information with the hope of getting their money's worth. This hurdle has been seen as one of the most popular reasons why many people are unwilling to try out internet based stores. But with the help of bloggers and their

feedback that can be read by anyone willing, many feel that they are one step closer to getting a clearer view of not only product quality, but also of i.e. the company's business methods, the trustworthiness of their shipping and overall credibility.

Two participants (interviewees 3 and 5) mentioned that they are often inspired by the bloggers and because of this they follow the recommendations. Interviewee number 6 also mentioned that bloggers are good at encouraging readers to go buy the products by their good writing.

Why do readers return to blogs?

In question 12 the respondents were asked to identify reasons for returning to blogs after the purchase. The answers were coded according to how often they were mentioned. Participants could naturally respond with as many reasons as they wanted.

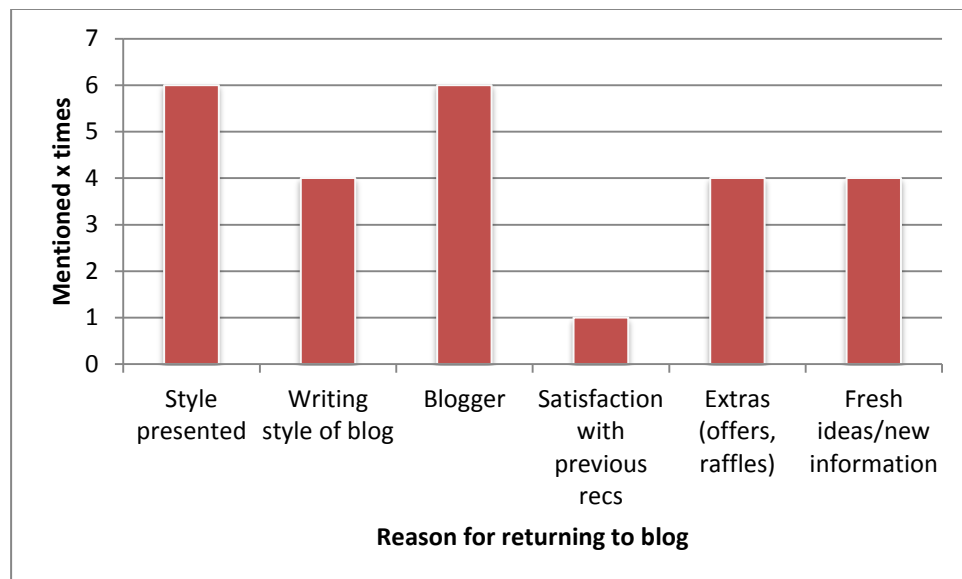


Figure 15. Identified reasons for returning to blog after the purchase

The results highlight six different responses given by the participants. One of the most popular reason for returning to a blogs was said to be the blogger themselves. Another popular reason for returning, with six of the participants (numbers 1,2,4,5,6 and 8) mentioning it, was appreciating reading a blog where the bloggers' personality shines through and where they are able to make readers identify with them by means of their writing. For example, participant 6 mentioned that she enjoys reading text

that portrays the bloggers personality in terms of humour, since reading text that isn't interesting would become dreary in the long run.

Also popular responses mentioned that the style presented and the writing style of the blogger in terms of correct grammar and punctuation were seen as important. Four of responses (numbers 3,6,7 and 8) listed appreciating the extras some of the bloggers' introduce. For example, in a common trend that has been appearing in fashion blogs during the last years, bloggers' arrange raffles where they ask their readers to participate in a draw where they give out prizes such as fashion products and other goods.

Readers are also interested in features such as fresh ideas on fashion and information about things such as new web stores and new production methods. Bloggers are in a unique position, since they are able to gather more information from different sources about things less accessible to readers, since blogging is often related to forming connections with others and there is a high amount of interaction with other bloggers and other fashion industry insiders involved. Surprisingly, only participant 2 mentioned that satisfaction with previous purchases was a reason for returning to a blog.

Socializing and communicating through blogs

In terms of post-purchasing actions, we were also interested in whether readers use blogs to communicate with other readers when buying and this is what question 13 tackled. This has a significant effect on the traditional buying behaviour model, as it adds a completely new step into the model. In the traditional buyer behaviour model, buyers evaluate the successfulness of the purchase and decide whether they would return to the seller for more transactions. If they were unsatisfied, they might send feedback to the company and spread bad word-of-mouth to their friends.

With the use of blogs, the post-buying activities gain more focus as blogs give more power to the buyer. It allows and encourages the consumers to share their experiences, both good and bad, with other users, making them able to spread their opinions virally to anyone reading the blog. This turns feedback from something that is between the customer and the company into a sort of public feedback, which in

best case scenario can act as a marketing tool that encourages other potential customers to buy the product.

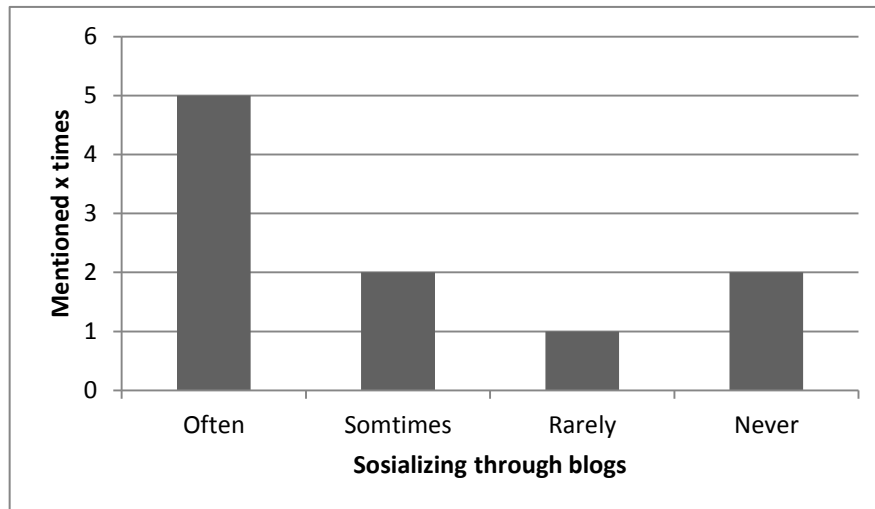


Figure16. How often blogs are used for social purposes during and after buying

Quite surprisingly, half of the participants (numbers 1,2,4,8 and 9) say that they often use blogs for buying-related socializing. They use it to review the product they've bought with the recommendation of the blogger and like to give feedback and their own opinions on the products. Two respondents (numbers 5, and 6) say they comment on blogs if they've had strong feelings about the product, either negative or positive. Participant 3 states they use blogs for socializing extremely seldom, while only two (interviewees 7 and 10) indicate they never respond with the bloggers by commenting.

According to for example participant 9, some readers often use blogs as a way to gather information about the products by asking them specific questions, which further enables them to feel confident enough to make the purchasing transaction. Getting reviews from the bloggers helps the readers become less hesitant about purchasing products, especially if the company they are considering buying from is a new one for them.

Participant 8 further explains her feelings about the need to socialize through the blogs. She feels that blogs are not only a place where the blogger gives out information to the readers, but that they should also be a place where readers share information and experiences. This helps to create conversation among the readers

and also with the blogger, which is always a good thing when trying to map out the usefulness of buying a product basically blind.

6.3 Benefits of blogging

Another important aim of the research was to find out what inspires consumers to not only use blogs as a source of research while buying products, but also to find out what inspires them to return to the blogs after purchasing and continuing to make use of the recommendations given out by different writers.

Table 6. Response categories as presented in Figure 11.

Response category	Response
1	Communication with others
2	Gives ideas/inspiration on style
3	Information about new sites/products
4	Way to spend time
5	Information about discounts/sales

In the table above, the responses given by the participants are divided into five different categories with a number attached. These numbers correspond to the ones in Figure 11 which displays the frequency of how many times each response was given by a participant.

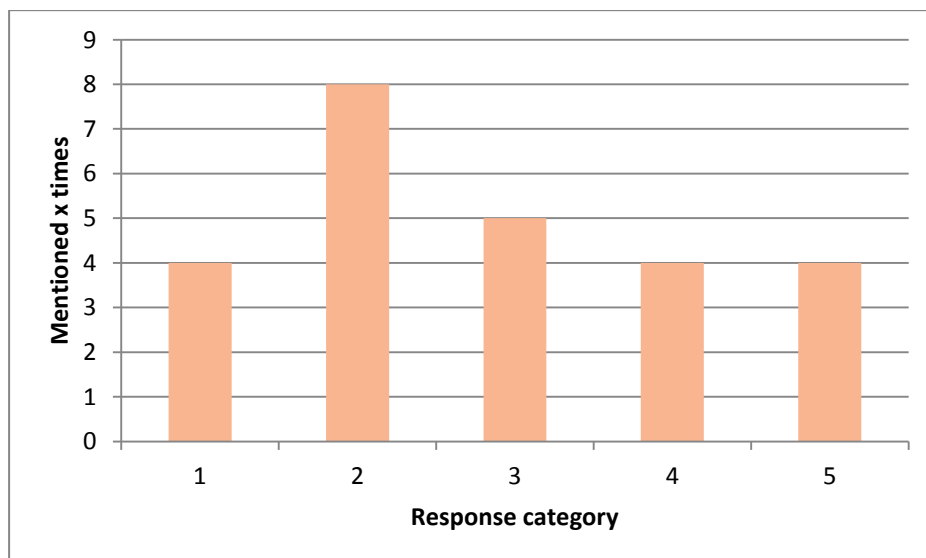


Figure 17. Perceived benefits of blogging

As the results clearly indicate, the participants feel that the most important benefit they feel that blogs provide is that they give new ideas and inspiration to the readers own style. Nearly all of the ten participants felt that this was a major reason for them to use blogs.

According to the responses, many of the participants also value the fact that they can get a lot of information about new sites and new types of products by following blogs. They can receive direct links and fresh opinions about products just coming out, since often bloggers, especially well-known ones, have the advantage of receiving samples directly from distributors before the products are even released. This shows that companies have come to value and recognize the influence that bloggers can have in terms of reaching their target customers, and have found an efficient way of marketing their products. The readers have a lot of trust on the bloggers they follow, so if they are recommended something, there is a high chance they will also try the product.

Four of the participants (interviewees 4,5,6 and 8)also mentioned blog-reading as an entertaining way of spending time, while the same number of respondents also appreciate the fact that they get direct links to web stores that are currently having sales and discounts on their products. Communication was also mentioned by several of the participants to be one of the most important benefits. Four people (interviewees 1,2,4 and 5)mentioned that they enjoy the fact that blogs offer a way of communicating with other people who are as interested in fashion as they are. Blogs also offer them a way of passing their own reviews on products and creating conversation with others.

How beneficial are blogs to buyers?

On question 15, the participants were asked to evaluate how important they think blogs are in relation to buying from online stores. In addition to giving a descriptive answer, the interviewees were also asked to rate the perceived importance of blogs in a buying situation for clarity's sake. They were asked to rate the blogs with a number between 1 and 5, where 1 would indicate that they saw blogs as totally not useful in buying situations, and where 5 would indicate they saw blogs as a very useful tool when buying products.

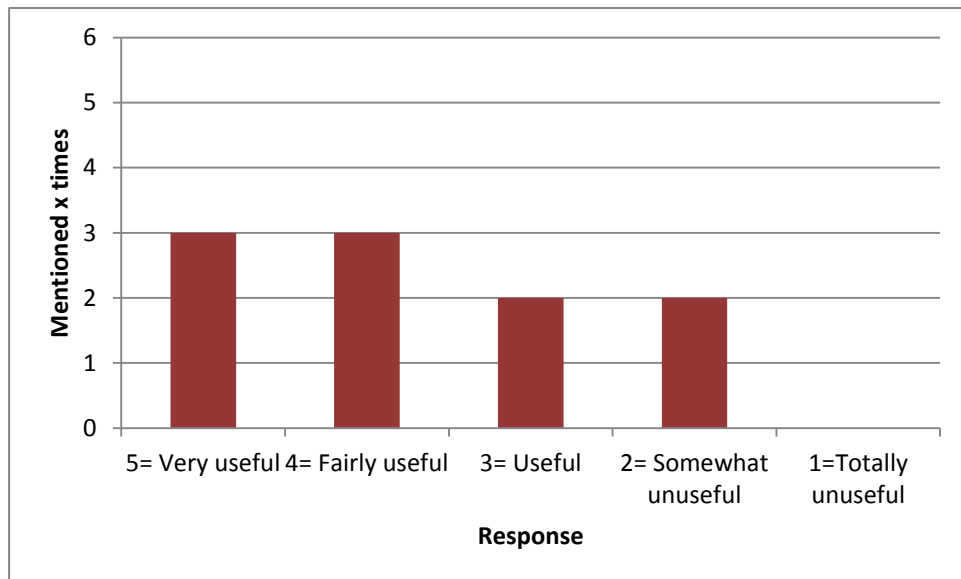


Figure 18. Usefulness of blogs in purchasing situation

As the results in the figure above indicate, the participants all saw some benefits to using blogs in the shopping situation. Participants 2, 7 and 8 believed blogs to be a very useful tool to use when they are shopping for fashion product form online stores. Three of the responses given by interviewees 4, 5 and 6 indicated that they saw blogs as a fairly useful tool that helps when for example buying values products which cost more than they would be willing to pay for at random. Two of the respondents, interviewees 1 and 3, felt that blogs can be useful in buying situation, but not maybe a necessary part of it. Rest of the respondents felt blogs are needed, but only to a certain extent. It's a good source of information, but not always needed in the buying situation.

None of the interviewees saw blogs as a useless tool, but since the people interviewed were all active users of blogs, this answer could be expected. It would have been surprising if any of them had seen blogs as a useless tool.

Effect of site's other marketing attempts on blog readers

Another interesting aspect for us was how much the blog readers feel they are influenced by the other type of marketing means that appear on the blog sites (question 16). This included means such as banners that appear on the sites automatically, pop-up windows and any other kinds of marketing not presented by the blogger. This type of marketing exists everywhere on the internet and is seen as a

huge nuisance by internet users. On the other hand, users have begun to automatically disregard these types of marketing means, making them fairly useless for the company in terms of promotion.

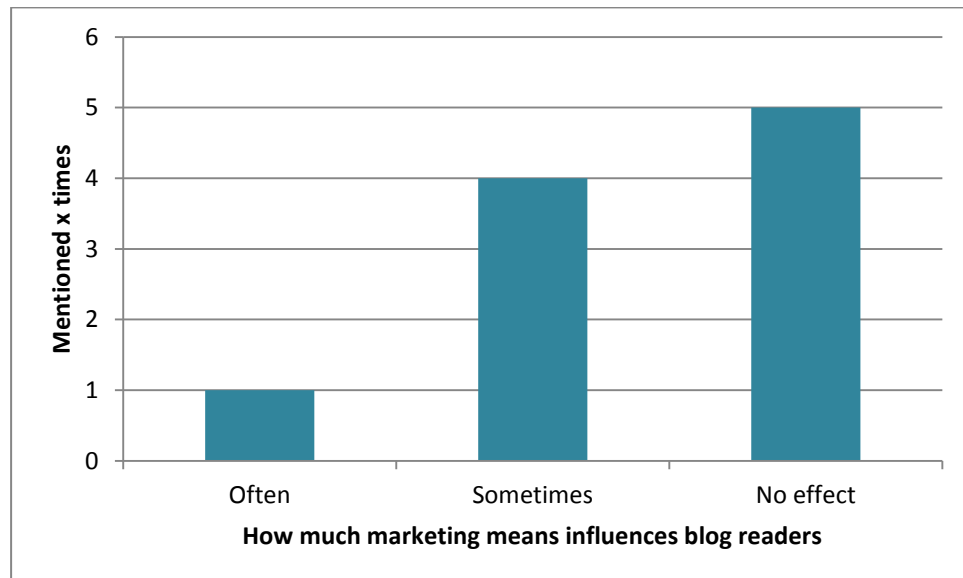


Figure 19. Perceived influence of marketing means used on blogs

The results, as portrayed in the figure above, indicate that a majority of the participants claim that they remain unaffected by the marketing means that can be seen on the bloggers' sites. Many commented that they find that marketing communication such as banners are easy to disregard and ignore because they're used to doing that everywhere in the internet, and that it has almost become a habit to not pay attention to these ads. Participant 9 stated that the blog itself is a far better marketing tool compared to the more traditional internet marketing means, as the readers have more trust in the blogger than they do in the ads. Readers don't trust the ads, as they are afraid of being led to sites that inappropriate or give viruses to the computer.

Four respondents (interviewees 3,6,7 and 10) admitted that they are sometimes affected by the marketing communications, especially if the topic of the advertisement is something they are interested in. Some of these participants said they might not click on the link due to the fact that it can be unsafe, but they might do their own research on the advertised product or company. Only participant 8 clearly indicated that she is affected by the other marketing communications that can be seen on blogs.

6.4 Conclusions

The ten young women who were interviewed for the research were able to give insight into the original research question which was aimed to study the effects of fashion blogs on buying behaviour. The answers given during the interviews helped to support the theory developed for the research.

In the beginning stages of the buying process, consumers who are using blogs as inspiration tend to conduct a lot of research and therefore are not only relying on the reviews given out by the bloggers. Majority of the interviewees indicated that they use blogs as an inspiration, so rather than following the recommendations to find the exactly same product, the consumer goes online to find something that corresponds with the style of the reviewed product while still matching it to suit her own taste or price category. This increases the amount of time spent in web stores, since instead of buying something at random, the consumer pays more attention to finding the specific product they want. This might be more time consuming, but ultimately more beneficial in the long run, since conducting the research to find a specific product indicates that the desire for the product is strong, eliminating so-called impulse purchases.

On the other hand, many of the interviewees said that blogs also encourage them to buy when there was no prior need for the product, thereby creating a need that can be satisfied by following a direct link to the product, which is often provided by the blogger. This minimizes the amount of research done by this type of buying, as they accept the blogger's recommendation and purchase the product without looking for alternatives. It can also increase the amount of visitors in internet stores who have no intention of buying, but are following links given out by bloggers. Here, the potential customer has no need for a specific product, but might be inspired by the products displayed in the store, which can lead to purchasing that would not have occurred otherwise. However, it is important to note that several of the consumers who were interviewed for the research indicated that they only conduct this type of detailed research if the product is an expensive one.

The blogs also increase the amount of communication consumers conduct that occurs before the actual purchasing situation. Word-of-mouth has always been an efficient way of spreading opinions about products to other people, but with the use

of blogs the phenomena of passing on the message is highlighted in its efficiency. By writing a review online, bloggers have the attention of potentially a limitless amount of readers, giving them a large audience that might follow their recommendations, both the negative and the positive. Furthermore, since readers also have a possibility to interact with others by writing about their own opinions, discussions about past experiences can further convince other potential buyers to either buy the product or ignore it.

This type of fast-paced spreading of message can potentially be very damaging to a company if a blogger with a large following has a bad experience with their product or post-sales services. Therefore it is vitally important that companies with internet stores understand that maintaining a good relationship with their internet customers is as important as it is when they're serving the customers who visit their physical stores.

Research responses also suggest that readers use blogs as a way of validating their purchasing decisions. They go online to find reviews posted by bloggers about the product they might be interested in buying and by using the communication tools of the blogs, they ask opinions from the blogger and other readers, hoping to get help to their decision making.

In terms of post-buying activities, the results of the research indicate that blogs can have a significant impact on how young women behave after their purchase. The interviews conducted revealed that consumers sometimes go back to the blog after the purchase in order to leave a comment about the product purchased. Several of the interviewees say they do this as a way of creating conversation in the case of having something negative to say about the product. However, some of the respondents said that they often go back to the blog to comment also on their successful experiences because they feel that they owe it to the blogger to tell how the original recommendations have helped them.

This type of post-buying communication that occurs between the buyer and blogger/other readers is quite different from the communication flow that occurs during the more traditional buying process where blogs are not affecting the behaviour. While word-of-mouth type of communication is not a new phenomenon, blogs have significantly changed the flow of communication from being something

that occurs between the customer and the retailer to something that occurs mainly between the buyer and other potential buyers.

This can be seen both as a negative and a positive shift in terms of the company. If the consumer is satisfied with the product, blogs can be a tool the customer uses to pass on a message about the good experience to unlimited amount people. Without blogs, consumers might talk about the product, but mainly only with their friends, limiting the number of potential customers to a very small number. Also, often consumers who have good experiences and who don't read blogs aren't bothered about writing to the company regarding their opinions. Therefore by writing about the experiences on blogs, companies can get an idea of what they've done right and what they need to improve on, getting the customer point of view.

On the other hand, if the experience of the customer was negative, the wide spread messages can only be harmful for the company. Where customers who are not using blogs to air out their opinions might contact the company for compensation, blog readers and bloggers might publish their opinions for all to see.

Blogs also increase the amount of post-buying communication where more discussion about experiences is often encouraged by the bloggers. It is very important that companies understand why consumers are affected by the messages of the blogger. If they don't realize the importance of maintaining good relationships with their internet customer base, it is possible that they are creating future problems since it is more than probable that one day these issues will be dealt and discussed by a blogger, and at that point there is little they can do to affect the opinions of the reader and their potential customers.

In terms of why these young women use blogs as a tool when buying fashion products, the results indicate that consumers enjoy not only having a reliable source telling them their opinions on the products and having a source of information, but also that they enjoy reading texts by someone they relate to. Many of the interviewees said they feel like they form a type of relationship with the blogger they follow and are more likely to buy the products they talk about because of this. Naturally, also the style of the blogger is what draws the reader to a specific blog, but according to the people interviewed, it's the bloggers themselves who keep the readers coming back and trusting their reviews.

The respondents also value the fact that blogs often make internet based shopping a lot easier and often a lot more affordable. Due to the fact that bloggers often report about all the interesting items that are on sale, they provide direct links to the specific items they are talking about and provide the consumers with tips on good and safe places to shop from.

7. Summary

In the fashion retail industry of today it is critical that companies acknowledge the phenomena and the power of consumer generated blogs while understanding the ways in which they can benefit from them in order to increase their customer base. The main aim of this research was to find out whether blogs have influence over buying-stages such as the consumers' buying process and the communication that occurs after the buying experience. The results of the research indicate that reading blogs can have a significant effect on the behaviour of young women when purchasing fashion products from online web stores.

When looking back at the results that were gained from the study, it is important to consider whether they help give answers to the original research questions. In terms of the first research question which posed the question of how the buying behaviour of young women is affected by fashion blogs in the online environment, the results clearly indicate that consumers are very likely to enjoy communicating with other blog readers about the products, which they might be less likely to do if they did not have the blog as a communication platform.

Results clearly indicate that blogs do have an effect on the behaviour of young women when they are purchasing fashion products from online stores. For some consumers blogs act as encouragement to do more research on the products they are thinking of buying, while for others they act as a tool with which to find products they feel they want to buy, thereby creating a need that didn't exist prior to the visit to the blog.

When considering the second research question which posed the question of why women make purchasing decisions based on blogs, the results indicate that by following the bloggers' recommendations, the buyers feel that they get benefits such as unbiased opinions on product and its quality, information about the trustworthiness of the internet store itself and new ideas on what to buy. One major factor that seems to attract readers to blogs is that it makes shopping online easier and a bit safer. For some the biggest benefit is that it cuts down the amount of time they have to spend online looking for the products and for others draw is that they find a source of inspiration that helps them navigate through the thousands and thousands of existing online stores to find their own style.

7.1 Recommendations

This thesis answers the question of what is the effect of blogs on young Finnish female's online buying behaviour when purchasing items from online stores. For this thesis to have the highest value, the recommendations are targeted for companies that use blogs as a communication and marketing channel, as well as companies that have yet to establish foothold in social media and are considering engaging blogs as a communication and marketing channel. The main reason why recommendations are made for companies is due to the nature of the information gathered, which would help companies establish and maintain a long lasting relationship with buyers by using bloggers and blogs as a tool to market and communicate to online customers.

Customers and consumers have become ever demanding due to the accessibility of information which is shared through different social media platforms. The vast and easily accessible products and brands from online stores require companies to compete on a challenging market space. It is vitally important for companies to thereby keep a competitive edge by creating higher customer values which are not imitable. These are factors that require long term determination and coherent communication across the company on all levels. For a company to create trust and customer loyalty they must fulfil their promises, over exceeding their customers' expectations and react quickly to situations and comments made in the online environment. Reacting to customers complaints and comments made online is an important part of relationship building and maintaining company image.

With social media playing a larger role in customer engagement and relationship building, simple advertisements on social platforms have become vague and predictable. Companies must excite customers with fresh marketing techniques to cause cravings and needs, that's where blogs come in. Blogs allow product placing in a fresh contemporary manner. Blogs have a steady reader base, which for company can be a valuable source of potential customers, no need for investment into additional customer base search is required. Simply, a blog must be chosen that is in line with the company's products, values and brand image. With the number of bloggers increasing, a vast amount of blogs can be chosen from.

It is important to note that according to this thesis study 9 out of 10 blog readers indicate that they do use or have used blogs as a way to find out information about

the product they were considering buying. This alone should raise a company's interest into establishing foothold and appearance in blogs.

Creating a relationship with the blogger should be of interest for the company to successfully establish themselves in blogs. The blogger can indirectly bring trust upon the company. This is because the blog followers have a lot of trust on the bloggers they follow, if they are recommended something, there is a high chance they will also try the product and visit the company web store. Bloggers are considered to have an unbiased perspective on the products, and their recommendations and comments can be better trusted than those of a company. Furthermore the bloggers post pictures while wearing the fashion items and answers to concerns about product quality, size, shipment and other issues that may be difficult to receive from the company without feeling the answers given are biased.

Another way of advertising, creating product knowledge and product placement is to give free product samples to the bloggers themselves to use. It is a relatively cheap investment considering the number of followers and the public product appearance that follows. It is important to note that bloggers also post links to company web sites where the products may be purchased. An agreement with the blogger can be made, where it is compulsory for them to do so, if free samples are being sent. However, it is important to make sure that the nature of the blog is in line with the company's brand and ideology, in order to keep a steady and clear company message.

Bloggers also arrange raffles where they ask their readers to participate in a draw where they give out prizes such as fashion products and other goods. If the blogger after testing the product is satisfied, a small quantity of that product can be sent to the blogger to hold a raffle where readers have a chance to win the items. Creating excitement around the products and being visible online will cause higher company awareness which can be seen in the number of web store visitors and higher sales.

Blog readers point out that online advertisements on blogs such as, banners that appear on the sites automatically, pop-up windows and any other kind of marketing not put forth by the blogger themselves are disregarded and ignored because of general online behaviour. Simply too many sites have the banners and pop-ups and basically the reader tends to ignore them due to habit. In addition, many blog readers state that they do not trust the pop-ups and banners for the fear of internet scams

and computer viruses. Therefore it can be said that this type of advertisement is fairly useless for the company in terms of promotion on blogs, and the advice is that promotion investment should be rather placed on creating relationship with the blogger themselves.

It is important to note that several companies operating in the fashion industry have come to value and recognize the influence that bloggers can have in terms of reaching their target customers, and have found an efficient way of marketing their products. With these recommendations of investing into relationship building with a blogger and indirectly engaging the company's target customer base, company trust and customer loyalty can be built, resulting in higher sales and profitable long-term customer relationships.

7.2 Further study

Since this thesis topic of studying the effects of blogs on young women's buying behaviour is not yet a much researched subject area, there were no actual researches prior to this one that could have been used as a base for this thesis topic. Therefore, to get validation and further empirical support upon the research made in this thesis, the same research should be done on a wider scale with more participants. This however, would require a longer period of time for data collection and analysis. More interviews should be conducted in order to get more valid data.

In addition, research could be made on what factors influence a fashion blogger to blog about certain products and brands over others. Finding an answer to this question could help companies find ways of using this information to create bonds with bloggers and in this way benefit from blogs in terms of cheap marketing assistance.

As this thesis also demonstrates, consumer buying behaviour is evolving due to the accessibility and easiness of the internet and online stores. Further study could be made on what consumers are specifically looking for online, what influence their buying decisions and why particularly blogs have "hit that spot" in current online trends. Based on the study results, analysis could be placed on predicting the next "big trend".

Further research could also be made on the effects of culture on buying behaviour in blogs. As this research study was based on young Finnish women, there is a question on how globally the results can be interpreted. Internationally popular bloggers have a global follower base. It would be useful for companies to find out if there is a purchasing pattern between the followers from different cultural origin. Once this is found, research could be further made on how companies can benefit from the different marketing and sales techniques via blogs to the different customers to maximise sales and product awareness.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Definitions

Consumer buying cycle

An evolved form of consumer buying process. It is circular in shape to describe the ever on-going motion of the process.

E-commerce (or Electronic Commerce)

The buying and selling of products and services between companies and/or private people online.

On-line store

A store which operates through the internet. Consumers buy products through the company's web pages and receive the purchases through mail without visiting a physical store

Social Media Platform

A type of software or technology that enables users to generate content for all to see. Includes pages such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Blogs.

Social Shopping

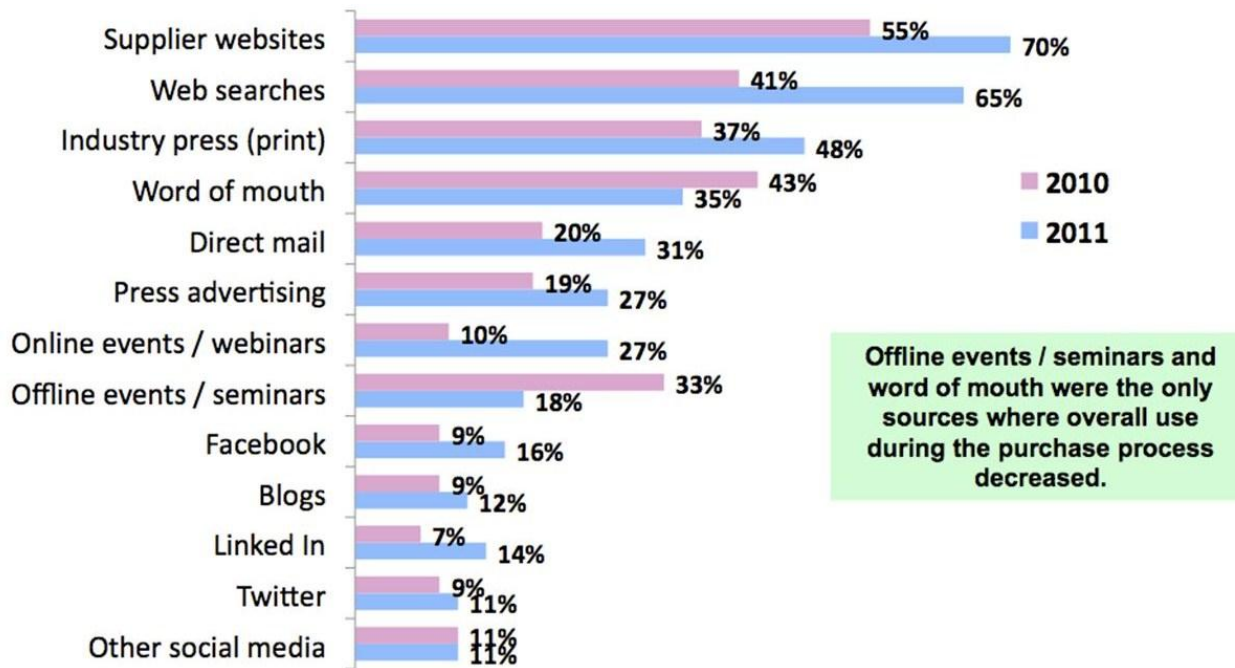
Purchasing product online while at the same time communicating about the product/service with other users via social media platforms.

Web 2.0

Web 2.0 is a term that was first used in 2004 to describe a new way in which software developers and end-users started to utilize the World Wide Web; that is, as a platform whereby content and applicants are no longer created and published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion (Kaplan and Haenlein 2009, 60-61)

Appendix 2: Comparing the Information Sources Used in 2010 and 2011 in UK.

(Business2Community, 2011)



Appendix 3: Questionnaires

Questionnaire in English

The data collected from this interview will be used and analyzed for a thesis by the Haaga-Helia International Business students Penttala and Saarela. Participation in this questionnaire is voluntary and the information collected will be managed anonymously. If you wish, the researchers will take contact to you once research results are reached.

This questionnaire aims to research the effect of fashion blogs on online consumer buying behaviour of women. The definition of fashion blogs in this context is; blogs that discuss any type of clothing, shoes and accessories.

Questionnaire:

General questions:

1. Age:
2. Education
 - a) Basic education (grades 1-9)
 - b) High School (lukio/ammattikoulu)
 - c) Higher Education (University/ AMK)
 - d) other: _____
3. Current occupation: _____

4. How much time do you spend online a week?
5. How much time do you spend on blogs a week?
6. What blogs do you follow? (name of blog)
7. How did you end-up in that particular blog? (webpage, social media, magazine etc.)
8. Why do you follow this/these particular blog(s)?
9. How often do you purchase from online in a month?
10. Before you purchase an item, do you find information about it in blogs?
11. Do you purchase items from online based on blogs? (reviews etc.)
12. What attracts you to return to a blog? (interesting topics/discounts/offers)
13. Do you communicate/socialize through blogs? (post reviews etc.)
14. What benefits do you feel you are receiving through following blogs?
15. How much do you feel like you need a blog when purchasing something from online?
(references from other people/company/feedback)
16. How much do you think adds or other marketing methods in blogs affect you?

17. Do you do post-purchase communication via blogs after your online purchase? (evaluate purchased product/selling process)

18. Anything else you would like to comment/tell about in relation to blogs and purchasing?

We thank you for your participation! If you wish you may give your contact information (e-mail) to which we can send the research results to.

Contact information of participant (e.mail): _____

Questionnaire in Finnish

Tästä haastattelusta kerätty materiaali tullaan analysoimaan ja käyttämään lopputyössä jonka ovat laatineet Haaaga-Helia ammattikorkeakoulun oppilaat Penttala ja Saarela International Business-tutkintoaan varten. Osallistuminen haastatteluun on täysin vapaaehtoista ja kaikki kerättävä materiaali tullaan käsittelemään nimettömästi. Mikäli tahdotte, voimme tutkimuksen valmistuttua ottaa teihin yhteyttä tuloksiin liittyen.

Tämän haastattelun tarkoitus on tutkia muoti blogien vaikutusta naisten ostokäyttäytymiseen verkkokaupoissa. Muoti blogin määntelmä tässä asiayhteydessä on: blogi joka käsittelee mitä tahansa muotiin, kenkiin tai asusteisiin liittyvää materiaalia.

Kysymykset

1. Ikä:
2. Korkein saavutettu koulutustaso:
 - a) Peruskoulu
 - b) Lukio / Ammattikoulu
 - c) Toisen asteen koulutus (Yliopisto, AMK jne.)
 - d) Jokin muu, mikä: _____
3. Tämän hetkinen ammatti?
4. Kuinka paljon aikaa vietät viikossa Internetissä?
5. Kuinka paljon aikaa vietät blogeissa per viikko?
6. Mitä blogeja seuraat? (minkä nimisiä)
7. Kuinka päädyit edellä mainituille sivuille? (esim. sosiaalisen median, mainosten kautta)
8. Mikä takia seuraat juuri tätä/näitä blogeja?
9. Kuinka usein (per kuukausi) ostat verkkokaupasta?
10. Etsitkö tuotteista tietoa blogi-sivuilta ennen ostos-päätöstä?

11. Ostako tuotteita blogien suositusten takia?

12. Mikä saa sinut palaamaan blogi-sivuille?

13. Kommunikoitko blogien avulla muiden muodista innostuneiden kanssa?

14. Mitä etuja uskot saavasi sen avulla että seuraat blogeja?

15. Kuinka suuri apu blogeista on sinulle osto-tapahtumassa? (suosituksia, kommentteja jne.?)

Arvioikaa blogeista saamaanne tukea ostotilanteessa antamalla numero 1-5, jossa 1 = ei ollenkaan apua ja 5 = erittäin tärkeä)

16. Kuinka paljon blogeissa esiintyvät mainokset/banneit/ muut markkinointi tavat vaikuttavat sinuun?

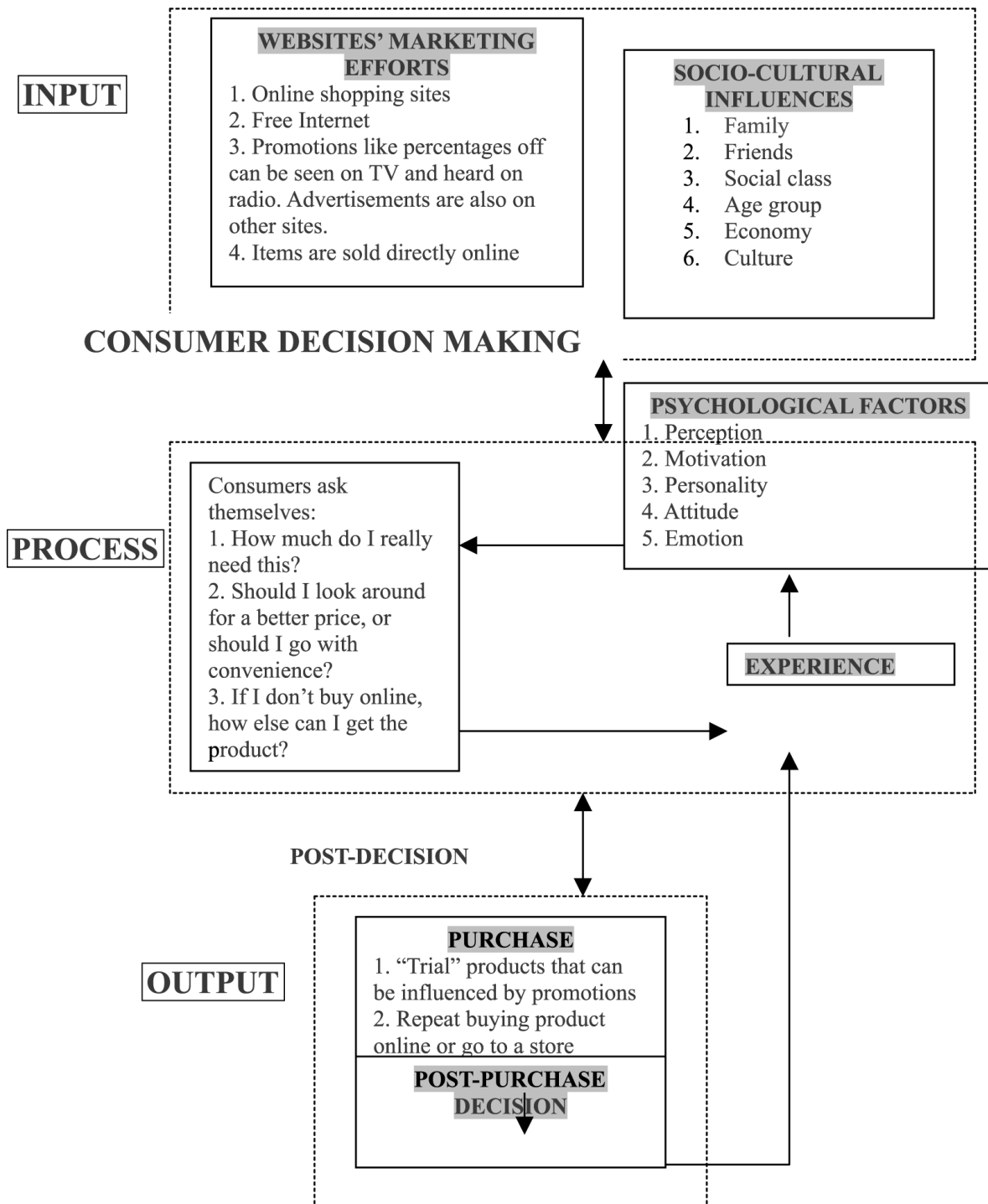
17. Muita kommentteja blogeihin liittyen?

Kiitämme teitä osallistumisesta! Mikäli haluatte jättää meille yhteystietonne, voimme lähettää teille tutkimuksemme tulokset.

Sähköpostiosoite:

Appendix 4: Consumer decision making process by Rupp & Smith

EXTERNAL INFLUENCES



(Rupp & Smith 2005, 119.)

Appendix 5: Coding of the interviews

Question 7: How did you end-up in these particular blogs?

Results

	Found in questionnaire no.	Mentioned x times
Through social media	1,3,9	3
By accident	1,4,5,8,9,10	6
From magazines	1,3,6,7,8,9	6
Friends' recommendations	1,2,6,7,8,9,10	7
Through other blogs/bloggers	2,5,8	3
Through fashion-pages	6,7,9	3

Answers given:

- I find out about interesting blogs mainly through my friends, either **by word-of mouth** or **they might have mentioned what they're reading in Facebook**. We share a lot of common interests in terms of fashion, so I trust their opinions enough to follow their site recommendations. A few times I've started following a blog by **accidentally by surfing** the net or by **reading about it in a magazine**. Ilta-Sanomat for example recommends a few clothing blogs that I've found interesting.
- I have some that I've followed for years. I think I found those **by recommendations from friends**... but now-a-days I usually **follow the suggestions made by bloggers** themselves. I think it's really useful, because you already know the taste of the bloggers you're already following, so it is probable that you will also like the taste of the bloggers they are recommending. This is especially nice way of finding international bloggers to follow, it would take a lot longer to find bloggers with similar taste to yours if you didn't.
- The blogs I follow are usually recommended to me by my friends over **social media sites such as Facebook**. Some I've also found **by reading fashion magazines such as Elle and Marie Claire**. They sometimes interview bloggers to find out what type of clothes are "in" this season and about the type of clothes they like, and if I like their style, I might visit their site.
- Mainly by **surfing the internet**, often I would end up at a page that I found through Google and notice that it was interesting.

5. Usually by chance. I also often follow blog recommendations given by the bloggers themselves. It's quite fun to roam around from web site to web site, and the feeling of discovering a blog that corresponds to your interests is exciting.

6. From searching online, reading magazines and listening/talking to friends.

7. Indiedays became familiar to me though my work at a fashion house. I actually talked to the main blogger of Indiedays when the web pages were still being established. The conversation was so convincing that it got me inspired to follow it. Also I've read many good references for it through different fashion magazines like Elle, Olivia etc.

Hel Looks is a street style blog of people in Helsinki. I heard about it from some close friends of mine who got their photos taken for it. Since I've started following it, I've come across several familiar faces and it's a lot of fun.

P.S. I love you, I found from a link from Olivia magazines online blog list.

Lookbook became familiar to me from Hel Looks, there was a post about this great fashion blog filled with people across the world with amazing styles.

8. I ended in PurseBlog by accident, as I was researching for Louis Vuitton purses and I came by it in my Google search. Purse Pixie was recommended to me by a good friend of mine who has the same obsession with purses. I came by to Bagshopper in Olivia magazine and then later I saw links to it from some online webpage's. We Style came across in a link from another fashion focused webpage.

9. Through many different methods; webpage's (mainly fashion oriented), social media, fashion magazines ex. Elle, Olivia, Trendi etc. I was introduced to green blogs by my vegan friend Susan. I have also found many of the blogs I'm reading by pure chance.

10. By searching the net, so Google-searches and talking to my friends and also fashion magazines.

Question 8: Why do you follow this/these particular blog(s)?

	Found in questionnaire no.	Mentioned x times
Access to products	1, 10	2
Quality of writing	1,5	2
Updated regularly	1	1
Style presented	1,2,3,5,6,10	6
Feel personal connection	2,5	2
Source of inspiration	3,4,7,8,10	5
Source of information/bargains	4,7,8,9	4
Passing time	3,7,8,10	4

1. Like I said, I like the fact that they're Finnish, that I can also find the clothes because they're most often bought in Finnish stores. I also think it's important that the writing in the blog is good and that the updates happen often enough, so more that for example once a month. Of course it is also important that the clothes that they are presenting fit into my fashion taste.
2. They showcase clothes and shoes that are to my taste. Since I've followed some of these blogs for a long time, it feels like I kind of know the writer, making it more easy to trust their recommendations and to communicate with them.
3. I love fashion and love going through clothing sites to find inspiration for my own style. Blogs are fun to read because they offer new ideas and are often written by people who are just normal, like us, making them relatable. It's also a fun way to spend a day.
4. Reading blogs is a great way of finding out what is going on in terms of current style in different parts of the world. I also like reading them because I love looking at all the different types of shoes people have bought and getting inspired in terms of what I'd like to buy for myself.
5. Besides presenting styles that I am interested in, I think it's important that blogs are written well. I like it when the blogs dwell into the likes of the blogger. It makes it seem like the blogger is writing to you as a friend and it makes it seem more personal. It would be really boring to read a blog with just pictures of nice clothes.
6. Well I read a lot of blogs. I mainly read blogs by Swedish bloggers but also by the "most famous" blogs by blogger "celebrities" like Susie Bubble. Also some more international Finnish blogs are nice. I like it when they showcase the styles I'm interested in.
7. There are several reasons; I get inspiration for my own wardrobe and style, look for new products and online web stores (Finland really has too few actual stores where you find

something nobody else has), see if I spot familiar faces (Hel Looks), a way of past-time and see if I spot good offers.

8. I follow these blogs because they are a fun past time, I get inspiration for my own style and I tend to come by web stores I otherwise wouldn't have found.
9. I've always been big on knowing the current trends. Blogs allow me to be more current and "at the moment" than for instance magazines that come usually once a month. I think green, ecological fashion blogs are extremely interesting and I'm slowly starting to change my buying habits. I also need to know these things for my work, as I'm in the marketing sector of a retail company that is heavily focused on style.
10. I follow these blogs because they are sweet , nothing too serious and a nice way to spend time. I get ideas for my own wardrobe. All the blogs are Finnish, so there's a good chance I can even find the same product in the local stores. The style that the girls(bloggers) have is similar to mine, so preppy modern.

Question 10: Before you purchase an item, do you find information about it in blogs?

	Found in questionnaire no.	Mentioned x times
Yes	4,9	2
Yes, if value item	1,5,6,8	4
Sometimes	3,7,10	3
Never	2	1

1. I do if the product is expensive and something I really need. For example, I attended my cousins wedding a few weeks back, and I of course had to buy a new dress for the occasion. I found this really pretty dress from Bubbleroom.fi, but it was a bit on the expensive side. I wasn't sure about the fit because the sizes were in the British system, so I went to look for advice about the fit from blogs. I happened to find a blogger who had bought a similar dress from the same manufacturer, and after I asked her opinion about how those sizes correspond to the Finnish sizes, I felt comfortable with making the purchase.
2. I often follow blog recommendations to the web stores, so I would say yes, I follow blogs to web stores often. But I don't really do any special kind of research on the products I'm going to buy.

3. I look for inspiration in blogs. I might find something I like and then go look for the same type of products from different online stores. I also often look for information about things I'm about to buy.
4. Yes, especially if I'm buying shoes. They tend to be a bit more on the expensive side, so I always try to find out about the product before the actual buying. I try to find reviews that would tell me things such as how they feel, how the fit is and quality of the make.
5. I often do a brief scan on the things I'm considering to buy, especially if it's more on the pricey-side
6. Yes, I might. I like cool brands and looks. I definitely prefer buying things from online and from abroad. Blogs give inspiration and sometimes you get really nice product offers and discounts by following a blog. I think doing research is especially important if the product is higher in price to be sure you're not wasting money.
7. Depending, if it's a store I have purchased from before and am familiar with (ex.HM) I don't bother. If the store is new to me and especially if it's not local, I tend to look for references from other people and bloggers.
8. It depends, if the product is more expensive (more than 30euros) I tend to try to find information on it. Especially if it's an online store I haven't used before, it's good to find out peoples experiences on it.
9. Yes. Many times I've seen the style on someone else and know it's just what I want. The fun thing about blogs also is that the products are listed, so you know what brand it is and where to buy it. Bloggers also comment on the items, ex. quality, country of origin, materials used etc. so that can be useful too, as you get the idea of how the fabric sits and feels, and how ecological the purchase may be.
10. I sometimes do. The bloggers I follow have similar style as me, so I can get brand and product info before I purchase if I see something I like. If buying from abroad I am more likely to find information about it before I order it.

Question 11 a: Do you purchase items from online based on blogs?

	Found in questionnaire no.	Mentioned x times
Yes, often	1,2,4,8,9	5
Sometimes	3,5,6,10	4
Might in the future	7	1
No		0

Question 11b: Why do you buy products based on bloggers' recommendation?

	Found in questionnaire no.	Mentioned x times
Offer links to product	1,9,10	3
Unbiased recommendations	2,4,8,9,10	5
Inspires to buy something	3,5	2
Encourage to buy something	6	1

1. **I have, and I do this quite often.** Several of the blogs that I've been reading lately **offer links straight to the web store**, which might not be such a good thing because it makes me more tempted to buy more stuff.
2. **Yes.** I used to be afraid of buying clothing without being able to first try them out, but after I started following blogs I noticed that **I could first find out what others have said** about the clothing I'm thinking about buying, and if the recommendation is positive, I can be less worried about buying. And with this I mean more in terms of reading reviews on things like the quality of the fabric and what color it actually is since the color in the web store doesn't always correspond with the actual color when you get the product.
3. **Not only based on blogs.** They might **raise my interest in the product** and I might go look for it in a store, but this doesn't happen that often.
4. **Yes, and this happens quite often.** With shoes, I think it's important to make informed buying decisions, and blogs are a good source of information for this. **You get an unbiased opinion about the product**, so buying without actually trying the shoe on beforehand isn't as scary as it could be.

5. **I do, but only if** I see something I really like. Reading a positive review **can inspire me to buy the same product**, something I wouldn't have done if I had not seen that specific review.
6. **I don't purchase from online solely based on a blog.** A blog I read might **convince me further to actually place an order.**
7. **I haven't yet but knowing myself there is a good chance I will in the future.** If a blogger that I like boost about a web page, of how great it is, I'm likely to go and see it for myself. Also there have been times when I've bought something and I read a blog I spot things there I have myself. Just yesterday I was reading P.S. I love you and Lintu(blogger) had bought exactly the same Zara platforms and white cocktail preppy dress as me, it was a strange experience.
8. **Yes, I sometimes do.** If the product and web store has **gotten good reviews from other people** and it's something I want to have, it's very likely I will buy it. This also works the other way around; if the product has gotten bad reviews and comments from the bloggers and/or other users it's likely that I won't buy it, or will place much higher consideration on whether or not I want it.
9. **Yes.** Especially if the blogger has found some nice products and can **provide a direct link to the web stores.** It is also useful as long as the company has an online website that does shipping to Finland. It's also important that the **bloggers provide the reader with a honest and unbiased** view of the product so the trust between the two remains.
10. **I can do.** If the blogger has posted something I like with **a good review** and it's something I'd want, I have in the past searched for it and bought it. It's also very useful when the bloggers **offer direct links to the products.**

Question 12: What attracts you to return to a blog?

	Found in questionnaire no.	Mentioned x times
Style presented	1,3,5,8,9,10	6
Writing style/appearance of blog	1,3,4,7	4
Blogger	1,2,4,5,6,8	6
Satisfaction with previous recs	2	1
Extras (offers, raffles)	3,6,7,8	4
Fresh ideas/new information	7,8,9,10	4

1. If I feel like the blog offers opinions that I can agree with in terms of fashion, I will probably return to the blog. Like I mentioned earlier, it is also important for me that the blog is well written, that the blogger corresponds with their readers and that the layout of the blog is nice to look at.
2. I return to a blog if I've been happy with the recommendations and if I am still interested in what the blogger is saying.
3. The blog itself needs to look interesting, the appearance of it is important to me. The style of the blogger has to correspond with my style and I like it when they try to keep the reader interested by i.e. arranging raffles.
4. I like it if the blogger manages to write in a way that catches my attention, for example with humorous writing style or imaginative commentary.
5. For me, the content of the blog is most important. The type of clothes the blog presents is as important as the bloggers writing style. Like I mentioned, I feel it's important that the writing is done in a way that makes the reader feel like the blogger is talking to them directly, in an almost friendship type of relationship.
6. I "get the hang" of the blogger and somehow relate to them, so I end-up following their posts and comments. The bloggers I follow are kind of quirky, but I like that. The clothes, shoes and bags are definitely beautiful and makes me sometimes "crave" for things I didn't know I'd want, this can be dangerous too. Some sites have nice offers ex. Indieday has usually a lot of them.
7. Fresh ideas and concepts, good writing skills, interesting styles, getting information of new stores and places to visit in Helsinki, information on-line stores that do shipping to Finland and then there are the discounts and offers.
8. Witty comments, topics that are of my interest, products and past time. There are some blogs that also have really nice references to other blogs and web stores. Also many times they tend to have discounts and special offers also placed on the advertisements that tend to take me to the company online store.
9. The fashion itself, learning about new companies and production methods (ex. how plastic waste is turned into Marni necklaces).

10. **Mainly the having similar style as the bloggers.** I might also get the courage to try something new if it looks good on the blogger. I also find general lifestyle and interior design ideas that are appealing. I am not so keen to discounts and offers.

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Question 13: Do you communicate/socialize through blogs?

	In questionnaire no.	Mentioned x times
Often	1,2,4,8,9	5
Sometimes	5,6	2
Rarely	3	1
Never	7, 10	2

1. **I do communicate quite a lot through the blogs.** I might post reviews on the clothes that were discussed there and I also ask a lot of questions from the blogger, for example to enquire where the products could be found if the information isn't already posted on the site.
2. **Yes.** I respond often to the blogger, and if there is a conversation going on about something I'm interested in I will take part in it. I've always been interested in fashion, but my friends aren't really, so it's nice to have a place to have a conversation about something like this.
3. **Very rarely.** Only maybe if I really feel like I have to comment on something, like if I strongly disagree with something that is being said.
4. **I do and quite often too.** I think blogging is a good way of spreading information between people who are interested about the same things, so I feel it's good to give back so others can benefit from your knowledge as well.
5. **I sometimes write comments back to the blogger,** because I think it's fair that they get a response to their writing. I also do post reviews if I happen to have bought something that they are discussing.
6. **Yes, every once in a while.** Mainly if I want to ask something from the blogger. I might ask something about the products they've posted about or places they have been to.
7. **No, I'm a passive responder.** I do like to read others comments etc. So far, I haven't been so attentive on commenting
8. **Yes, I like to give feedback and comments.** I am also a very active user of different social media platforms ex.Facebook and its become a sort of habit to give my personal opinion. I find it important to give reviews and comments. As I like to read others comments and place value to them, I know there are other people who read mine and take them into consideration too.

9. Yes. I like to ask about details of the clothes, give comments and feedback on the outfit etc.
10. Not really, I am more of the quiet follower.

Question 14: What benefits do you feel you are receiving through following blogs?

Response category	Response	Found in questionnaire no.	Mentioned x times
1	Communication with others	1,2,4,5	4
2	Gives ideas/inspiration on style	1,3,4,5,7,8,9,10	8
3	Information about new sites/products	2,5,7,8,9	5
4	Way to spend time	4,5,6,8	4
5	Information about discounts/sales	3,5,6,7	4

1. What I really like about blogs is the fact that you can communicate with the blogger, because it makes it feel like it's a conversation between two people about something that they're both interested in, fashion. I also love the fact that blogs give me ideas about what to buy and ideas on how I could combine clothes that I already have in different ways.
2. I think there are a lot of benefits to following blogs. Not only have I found so many recommendations about new clothing stores (physical and internet based), I've also found friends online who I can talk to about my latest purchases.
3. I feel that blogs give me new ideas about how to manage my style and ways of combining things in my already existing wardrobe. I've also found many good tips on current discounts going on in web stores.
4. Wider knowledge about products I might not hear about if I didn't read blogs, unbiased opinions on products I might be considering to buy and a nice way of spending time.
5. I think you get a lot of benefits from blogging. You get good tips on the style of clothing you are interested in, on possible sales in web stores and sometimes even direct links to web store selling the products they are displaying on their blog. It's also a form of entertainment, so I feel that I also get enjoyment out of reading blogs and interacting with people who enjoy the same things I do.

6. Following people with different lifestyles is fun, so it's a nice past-time. I get to find fancy clothes I might not be able to afford or might actually find things I really want and do buy. I have also found some nice offers I've used.
7. New information about on-line and physical stores, tips on places (stores) to visit and see, ideas for my own wardrobe and style and discounts/special offers that I'd otherwise miss.
8. Ideas to my own style, information on new trends, it's also a fun way to pass time, relaxing and fun. I also like that I learn about new web stores and other blogs on the side.
9. I read blogs for two main reasons: for my own style/interest in fashion and for work. The actual real benefits is knowing new/fresh brands, learning about more ethical and ecological production methods and experiencing the wonders of the internet.
10. Style and design ideas for my own wardrobe.

Question 15: How much do you feel like you need a blog when purchasing something from online? (Also give a number between 1 and 5, where 1 = totally unuseful and 5=very useful)

	In questionnaire no.	Mentioned x times
5= Very useful	2, 7,8	3
4= Fairly useful	4,5,6	3
3= Useful	1, 3	2
2=Somewhat useful	9, 10	2
1=Totally unuseful		0

1. I think it is safer to buy products that somebody you already at least on some level trust has recommended. It might not be essential, but I think using blogs for this reason is very beneficial to the buyer. I would give it a 3.
2. For me it's essential. Maybe it's just something I'm now used to, but I don't know if I could go to a new web store that I hadn't read about from a blog without being somewhat distrustful about. I would give it a 5.
3. It's a good source of information and ideas. They help me reinvent my style and suggest new web stores I can go to. I would give it a 3.
4. I think blogs are something that are very useful in shopping situation, especially if I'm buying something that costs a bit more, like sometimes happens when buying shoes.

Blogs might not be essential, but still a **pretty important** tool that helps me feel more safe about the purchase. I would give it a 4.

5. I think it's a **good tool in helping you decide** if what you are thinking of buying is worth it. They can give you an idea on how trustworthy the site you are thinking of buying from is, how good the quality of products coming from the company usually are and can even give you a review on how the product itself is if you are lucky enough to find someone who's bought it. I would give it a 4.
6. The bloggers I follow have their quirky style so I might also get some "kick" in my own wardrobe with playful accessories or mixing of styles. I have come across some funky brands I didn't know existed but are really popular in many other countries. I find web stores and also other blogs. So **I need blogs pretty much**. I would give it a 4.
7. I get ideas from blogs for my own style and this could be a way of how I "need a blog" when purchasing from online. So I **guess you could say I need blogs a lot** when I'm purchasing products from online stores. I would give it a 5.
8. Quite a bit, it's part of buying from online. I **can't imagine shopping without it**. Especially if the product has a higher value (as mentioned before-over 30euros) I tend to find information on the web store and from other product users. I would give it a 5.
9. **I can to some extent**. I might see something I'm interested in buying for myself or for someone I know. I can get information about ethical and ecological brands or stores. I would give it a 2.
10. **To some extent**. I either like something or not. I have my own style and am a bit hard on trying new things. Blogs may encourage me to break my routine shopping. I do like to read references on especially new web stores and why not ones that have existed for a while. It's nice to hear about peoples experiences. Especially if I order from abroad I am more attentive on finding information about the products and the web store itself. I would give it a 2.

Question 16: How much do you think adds or other marketing methods in blogs affect you?

	In questionnaire no.	Mentioned x times
Often	8	1
Sometimes	3,6,7,10	4
No effect	1,2,4,5,9	5

1. **They don't have an effect on me**, I have learned to ignore while I'm on the internet.

2. **Not really.** Like in most internet pages, it's pretty easy to disregard them since you're pretty used to ignoring them elsewhere too.
3. **Not much, maybe when the advertisements correspond to the content of the page,** so for example if I see an ad on a clothing store, I might go to the store's web pages if the ad is attractive enough.
4. **The ads on the sites don't really affect me, I usually just ignore them.**
5. **None really.** I think the blog in itself works better at marketing the products than the banners or other advertisements on the site do. I think people don't really trust the ads on internet anymore and they're afraid of being lead to bad sites, so to have someone not affiliated with the company selling the items tell you the products are worth buying, is priceless.
6. I think the blog that I'm reading at the time affect me the most. If the blogger is wearing something cool I like, I might go search for the brand or product for myself, unfortunately many times I have to turn it down as its too pricy for my wallet. **Sometimes I do see some ads on the side that are promising and might enter the store.**
7. **They can do, especially if the blogger is boosting about a product, discount etc. I might go check it out and see what it's about.** Also if the blog has good ads on the side, I might somehow mysteriously drift and click to visit that company website.
8. **I'd like to say they don't, but they do.** I tend to drift to the company web pages if the advertisement looks promising, if it's something I am looking for, there's a good offer or I just want to surf the net.
9. **I have a very distinct style and thereby I can see immediately if I know something will work on me. Usually the advertisements companies use on the blogs webpage's are more for the masses.** The bloggers themselves do great promotion and marketing for the brands and clothes they carry and introduce in their blogs. I have to say the bloggers themselves are more effective.
10. **I may open the links to the web pages if it's something I like.** Also if the blogger has posted links and attachments I am more likely to open them. They somehow feel more genuine than a company's own advertisement.