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The Power of Bloggers on Purchasing Decisions in Finland

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<p>The purpose of this study was to discover if the blogging industry does have an effect on consumer behaviour and purchasing decisions. As the marketing has changed drastically from a one-way media to an open interactive field. A major part of the consumer interaction is happening online and one of the platforms are blogging platforms. In the online media the interaction does not happen only with the companies but also with complete strangers that share their opinions about the product.</p> <p>The data for the research was collected first from academic sources. Based on the information discovered from the academic sources descriptive quantitative survey was conducted in order to gather information from the right audience. The research also covers exploratory research from secondary sources.</p> <p>The result of the study was that people's purchasing decisions are affected by several factors constantly. One of the biggest influencers is the social factors. Blogging is part of the social factor and based on the research it seems that bloggers do have an effect on people. They are referred to as opinion leaders and therefore they have the power to distribute ideas that people appreciate. Bloggers can create buying behaviour by advertising products on their blogs, however it seems that the buying behaviour they create is not brand loyal.</p> <p>The principal conclusion was that the bloggers have an effect on people's ideas and behaviour, and therefore they motivate buying behaviour. People appreciate the message that is coming from outside of the company and therefore it is found more trustworthy than the company's message. The message needs to be independent from the company message in order for it to be appreciated.</p>	
Keywords	Blogging, Consumer Behaviour, Online Media, Online Interaction

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1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This research will look into the new age of online media; the time of interaction. Online based marketing is becoming more interactive on daily bases. As new technologies have been introduced it has transformed the whole landscape of marketing. Previously messages were delivered to the consumers from companies and people who wanted more information needed to be in a straight contact with the company or their family and friends. Whereas today people can discuss their experiences more openly on the online platforms; people are able to talk to strangers on daily basis. And people are able to share opinions constantly.

Before the companies used a push tactic to force the information to the consumers, this was done by company adverts placed on locations where they would be reached by the target group. The online media has opened several possibilities and threats for the previous way of working. The online media has changed the marketing completely and has allowed people to communicate with anyone who has an access to internet; people can communicate with other consumers as well as the companies from online.

Social media offers a lot of possibilities to interact with people from all over the world. Blogs are one of the most popular and one of the oldest platform form of social media. Blogs are pages maintained by individuals or companies that constantly post writings, pictures, videos etc. related to their interests. One of the most popular being fashion blogs were people show the products they have bought and share their opinions about them.

Blogs can share information that can either make or break the company. As good review coming from a person that you admire can make you buy that product and in the other hand a bad review can create a lot of negative thoughts towards a product that you never yet even had considered.

1.2 Research Question

What is the power of bloggers on purchasing decisions of the consumers? Blogs are a growing medium and people are talking about blogs constantly. Many people have ad-

vised that blogs have had an influence on their purchasing decisions, which brought up the research question. Is there a connection; do the blogs affect purchasing decisions, and if, how much? Do they create actual buying behaviour and brand loyalty or do they just create conversation?

1.3 Significance of the Study

Blogging has become one of the biggest trends. Almost everyone knows people who read or write blogs constantly. Many people around the author have quoted that they have seen a product on a blog and then bought it. This grabbed the attention of the author and therefore this research was conducted. After realising that the content of most blogs is really commercial the author wanted to research if the blogs do actually affect the consumers purchasing decisions and to what length. In many blogs people are talking about certain products and they are even sharing the brands of the products and they make reviews of them. As the bloggers mention the brands in their publications the research will also cover the question if blogs create brand loyalty for people that are affected by blogging.

1.4 Limitations

The starting point is the fact that no direct studies have been done in order to see if there is a connection between blogs and buying behaviour. Mostly the material found was not academic and therefore the literature review focuses on the common theories about consumer behaviour, factors affecting buying decisions, online media and how blogging actually works. After the literature review the research will cover the secondary sources of information as well as results from the survey conducted and see if there are connections with the theory.

2 Literature Review

The literature review will cover academic references that have been written related to the subject. The following chapter takes a closer look on how social media and especially blogging affect consumer behaviour. First social media and blogging are introduced. After that it will look into the factors affecting consumer behaviour and purchasing decision making process. Then it will also look into brand loyalty. Finally, it will discuss the power that online media and blogs can have on consumer behaviour.

2.1 Marketing

Marketing is a vital part of a company's success. Marketing is the way the companies communicate to the people in order for them to purchase their product or service. It is vital for the survival and growth of the company, as people cannot buy things that they do not know exist. The goal of marketing is to convince people that a product will satisfy the needs they have. (Hundekar, S.G., Appannaiah, H.R., Reddy, P.N. 2010)

Marketing is complex and there are many different parts. One of the aspects of the marketing is the online media, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

2.2 The Age of Online Media/Web 2.0

Internet has changed the world of marketing drastically ever since the first web page was launched in 1991; more than billion people are connected to internet daily (Chaffey et al. 2009:3). In order to succeed in today's media organisations will need to know how to manage their image online (Chaffey, et al. 2009:3). As David Scott (2009:21) states the online content will bring new possibilities for businesses; new coverage for marketing and public relations that did not exist offline. More and more people are connected online constantly through smart phones and tablets, that enables people to be connected around the clock. These technologies provide a possibility for people to search information anywhere at any time. (National instruments, 2013)

Since 2004 a concept of web 2.0 has been used commonly. Chaffey et al. (2009:12) define web 2.0 as "a collection of web services that facilitate interaction of web users with sites to create user generated content and encourage behaviours such as community or social network participation, mashups, content rating, use of widget and tagging." In other words it is a concept that allows people to interact, communicate and participate online, people have the chance to express their opinion freely to the public and they are able to even build relationships online. The web 2.0 encourages people to create their own content such as blogs. (Chaffey, et al. 2009:12-13)

2.3 Social Media

Companies use social media as a tool to build relationships with people. It helps companies to improve their customer service as well as to raise the awareness of their product. It offers the possibility to connect with the potential buyers. People who browse online now days are looking for real people to connect with. When people enter a company's social media site they are not looking for the basic information that they could find from the company's website and other traditional sources; they are looking to have their questions answered, complaints and comments to be addressed and especially they want to know that their voice has been heard. The conversations with real people online are supposed to be leading to a purchasing decision. (Barger, 2012:3-4)

2.4 Blogging

Since the concept of web 2.0 was established the user generated material on the web grew at a fast pace; blogs are one of the earliest as well as the most popular platforms (Chau, M., Xu, J. 2012:1189). The first blog platform was created already in 1999, which proves that the blogs were one of the oldest social media tools. (Chaffey, et al. 2009:4, Chaney, 2009:55-56)

An individual blog is a special website that is created and maintained by an individual who is passionate about something and wants to share that knowledge with other people in the world. There are also blogs that are not only maintained by one person but by a group of people or even by companies and corporations. (Scott, D. 2009:46)

The definition of blogging in itself is not that simple and there are many definitions. One of them being Paul Chaney's (2009:55-56) definition that defines blogging as an easy-to-use web based content management system that allows people to publish, maintain and update content. Blogs are usually maintained by individuals who are posting regularly regarding their interests. They are not considered regular websites as they have the combination of technology and personality. The main reason blogs exist is that they stimulate conversation and they give the possibility for the reader to communicate with the blogger.

David Crockett (2006 cited in Chaney, 2009:56) even defines blogs as: "Simply living and breathing Internet sites, upscale chat rooms, and constantly growing newsletters. They invite interaction and get people involved. They create energy and synergy. They live and breathe and grow and take a life of their own."

The network that is created by the writers and readers of the blog is usually referred to as the blogosphere. The blogosphere has grown to be a vital part of the media therefore companies should know it and take it into consideration in their communication efforts. The blogosphere has enabled the possibility to receive feedback straight from the consumers. (Liang, et al. 2009 cited in Chau, M., XU, J. 2012:1189-1190)

Positive information that is shared in a blog by a person that is independent from the company creates credibility for the company and/or the product, and vice versa negative information could be really crucial for the company's and/or the product's image. (Chaffey, et al. 2009, 39)

2.4.1 Cycle of Blogging

Brown and Hayes (2008:158-159) have studied the cycle of blogging. According to them people who read blogs are exposed to the opinions that the bloggers share: they create positive and negative influences. Strong influences might affect the reader to blog in response and that response might influence someone else to respond. In other words one blog post can create a chain reaction. The blogs therefore work in a provocative cycle that is shown in the figure 1. Due to the lack of responses most of the blogs do fail in less than six months, as the blogger usually gives up.

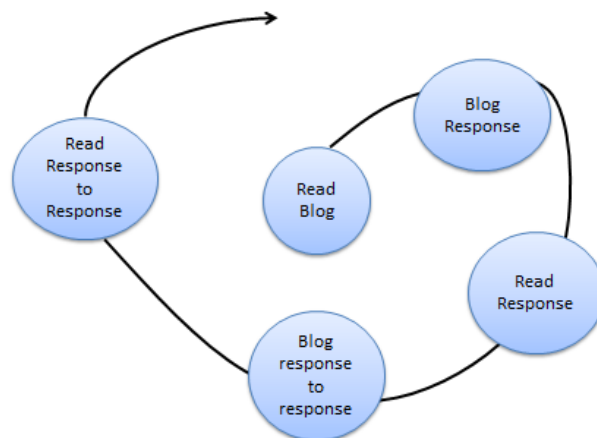


Figure 1. The Virtuous Cycle of Blogging (Brown, D., Hayes, N., 2008:159)

According to an American blogger Robert Scoble (as cited in Brown, D., Hayes, N., 2008:148-165) bloggers need to update their blog often even daily. In order to have a

successful blog the content needs to be interesting to others, as that is how the blogger grows to influence people. Bloggers usually are not people who look for connection with others but people who want to share their opinions, thoughts and ideas because that is their interest. In other words blogs are usually created to express opinions. Other people connect with bloggers because they believe what they say. (Brown, D., Hayes, N., 2008:153)

2.5 Factors Affecting Consumer Behaviour

Consumers are all different and they are all affected by different factors. Consumers are different in age, income, education level etc. It is vital for businesses to understand consumer behaviour as it is a key for success. Based on the understanding companies can create effective marketing plans. (Himsnshu, P. 2007: 48)

The way that the consumers behave is based on several factors as Philip Kotler (et al. 2008:244-45) has divided the factors influencing consumer behaviour as shown in the figure 2. He has divided the factors in four different categories; cultural, social, personal and psychological.

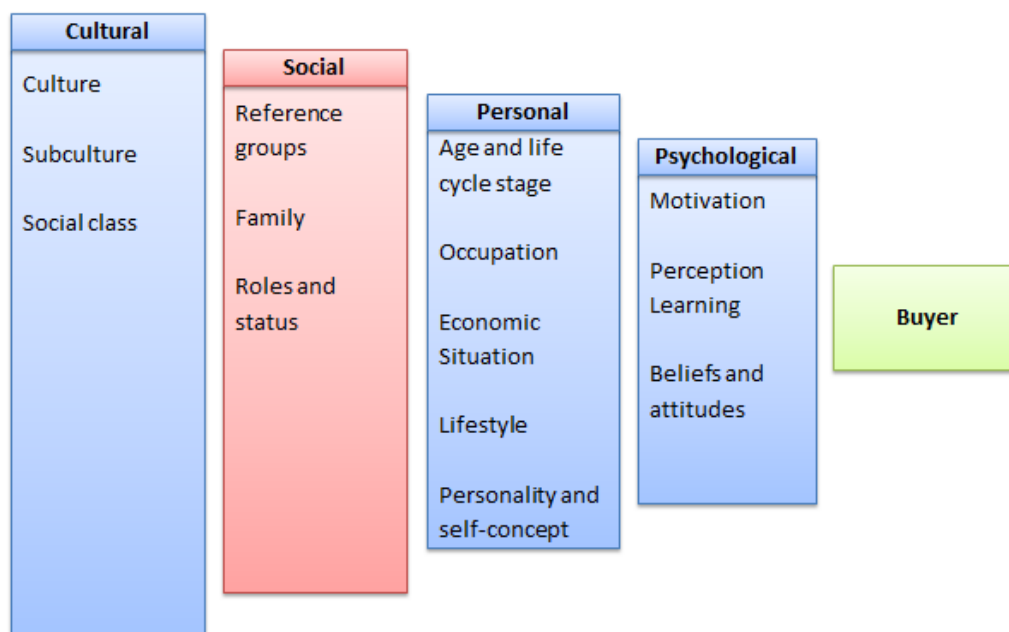


Figure 2. Factors Influencing Consumer Behaviour (Kotler, et al. 2008:240)

Howard and Seth (sited Himsnshu, P. 2007:47-48) define the inputs that the people receive from the environment can be defined in three categories. First one being sig-

nificate factors that are the physical or real qualities of the product. Second ones are symbolic factors that are ideas created by the supplier such as advertising. Third one being the social factors that are images and ideas attached to the product by society. These all are inputs to the consumer behaviour, based on that the consumer will also create outputs that are divided into two categories. First one being perceptual which are factors that define how the person perceives the information about the product. Second one is learning factors that the person has learned and in the end lead to the decision.

2.5.1 Social

Social factors that affect consumer behaviour includes reference groups, family and roles and status. (Kotler, et al. 2008:240) People can have different personalities concerning the social groups they belong in and the groups have a different weight on their decisions. (Jansson-Boyd, Cathrine V. 2010)

People belong to several social groups which is by either consciously or unconsciously. The groups a person belongs to is usually determined on the base of how they see themselves and people around them. Social groups that the person usually acknowledges are ones that raise their own self-esteem. As people want to have the feeling of belonging to certain groups those groups can define the person's behaviour. Purchasing right kind of products can make the people feel that they are part of a certain group. Therefore social impact does have a big effect on consumer behaviour as it might even define who they are and where they belong. These social groups provide feedback on products and services constantly and the person will evaluate if they will change their opinion based on the things they have already learnt. (Jansson-Boyd, Cathrine V. 2010)

Blogging is defined as a social interaction factor in the consumer behaviours as it is part of social networking. Social factors affect consumer behaviour strongly; there are several groups that affect the consumer behaviour directly or indirectly. These groups affect consumer behaviour because the people feel that they belong to these groups or they want to be part of these groups. (Kotler, et al. 2008:244-245)

The social groups create a form of a lifestyle as it defines who they are and who they want to be.

2.5.2 Lifestyle

On the other hand blogging could also fall into the category of personal factors. As Kotler (et al. 2008:252) defines lifestyle factor being one of the ways people choose to live according to activities, interests and opinions. The lifestyle factor consists of the whole pattern of acting and interacting with others. The lifestyle can be measured by psychographics by these measures it is possible to create lifestyle classifications. The way psychographics are divided can be seen from the figure 3 below. The lifestyle classifications can be seen in the figure below. Lifestyle classifications are divided into four categories; activities, interests, opinions and demographics. (Kotler, et al. 2008:252)

Activities	Interests	Opinions	Demographics
Work	Family	Themselves	Age
Hobbies	Home	Social Issues	Education
Social Events	Job	Business	Income
Holidays	Community	Economics	Occupation
Entertainment	Recreation	Education	Family Size
Club Membership	Fashion	Products	Dwelling
Community	Food	Future	Geography
Shopping	Media	Culture	City or Town size
Sports	Achievements		Stage in the lifecycle

Figure 3. Psychographic Dimension (Kotler, et al. 2008:253)

Blogs that people read are usually related to their activities, interests and opinions. They read the blog because they have an interest to what the blogger has to say. (Brown, D., Hayes, N., 2008:153) And these interests are created by the lifestyle the person has; if a person is interested in fitness the person mostly likely reads fitness and sport blogs rather than a cake baking blog. Therefore what blogs people read are defined by the lifestyle of the person.

2.5.3 Needs

Abraham Maslow (1970:56-58) has developed theory of hierarchy of needs. The hierarchy of needs is displayed in figure 4. Different levels of the hierarchy represent differ-

ent qualities; these qualities are part of human nature. The importance of these needs begins from the bottom of the chart. The lowest level consists of the so called “animal needs” that are needs that a person cannot survive without. The higher need is in the hierarchy the less crucial it is for survival. The higher needs are not urgent but they do produce happiness for the person; therefore the higher levels have more value for the person. Social needs are in the middle of the chart and therefore considered the third most important need for survival. They are considered as psychological needs as after having the basic needs fulfilled the person needs the sense of belonging in order to reach higher levels of the hierarchy. In other words it can be said that the social needs are considered really important.

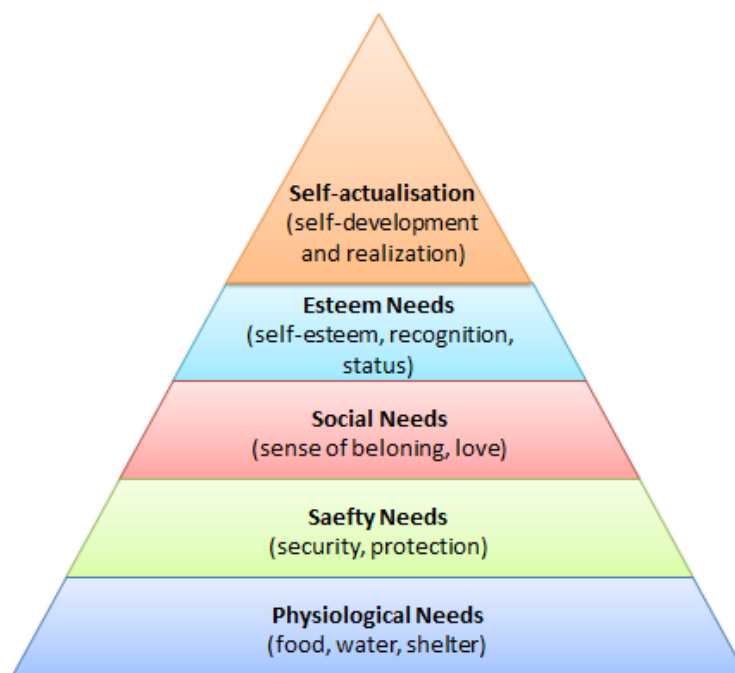


Figure 4. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1970 cited in Kotler, et al. 2008, 256)

According to William Simcoe (2009:11) the buying decision of the consumer is caused by the goals, wants and beliefs of a person. Goals are things that a person wishes to achieve with the buying behaviour; the goals are the motivation behind the buying decision. These goals raise the wants of that person which defines what the consumer actually wants to buy; wants are the defined needs. Beliefs are the convictions in the person's mind that are either true or not; these are beliefs that have been created by the experiences of the person.

Chaffey, et al. (2009:63) identified that online media has a major impact in consumer buying behaviour. According to a research carried out by BrandNewWorld II (2007 cited in Chaffey, et al. 2009:63) people tend to research the products online which makes the buying process more complex.

Brown and Hayes (2008:179) identified word-of-mouth as the strongest influencer on consumer behaviour; consumers tend to share the negative experiences more than the positive experiences. The biggest influence comes from the people that the person trusts. (Brown, D. and Hayes, N. 2008:165) Therefore, it is not a surprise that according to Patterson et al. (2008:138) social networks have one of the biggest influences on people. The feeling of acceptance and rejection, approval and disapproval are feelings that may assist or destroy the thoughts of a person more than other sources.

Understanding the behaviour of consumers and their needs helps at identifying their people's purchasing decision making process.

2.6 Purchasing Decision Making Process

According to Philip Kotler et al. (2008:265-269) the buyer passes five stages demonstrated in figure 5 while making purchasing decisions. First the person needs to realise that they have a need and in order to fulfil the need the person starts to search for information. By searching the information the person will find several alternatives that would fulfil that need and therefore the person will evaluate the alternatives. After the evaluation the person is ready to make a purchasing decision. The post purchase behaviour is the process of comparing expectations with the actual experience; at this point the person will be either satisfied or dissatisfied. This can be considered as one of the most valuable steps of making purchasing decisions as this will determine whether or not the person will buy this company's products in the future. This will also affect the future steps of information search and evaluation of alternatives; as now the person already has more experience to begin with.

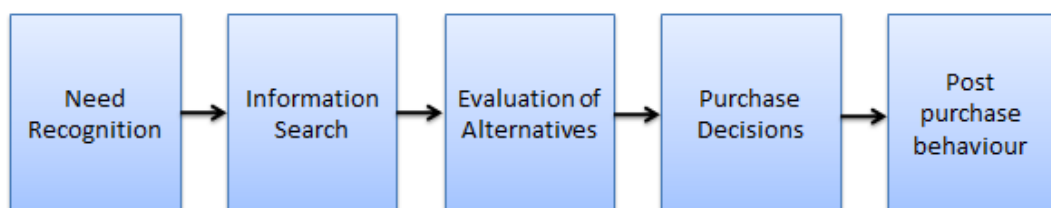


Figure 5. Buyer Decision Process (Kotler, et al. 2008:265)

Now days there are many information sources available and the consumers are more informed. Internet is usually considered as an important part of the information search of the consumers, which has made the purchasing process more contemplated and complex. There are several sources for the information; the biggest source being the commercial source that usually shares the messages straight from the marketer. Internet is counted as a commercial source of information and it is considered to be used in all stages of information search. (Chaffey, et al. 2009:69, Kotler, et al. 2008:265-269)

People also gather information from personal sources such as people that are close to the person; family, friends etc. There are also public sources of information that consist of mass media and consumer-rating organisations as well as experiential sources that are reviews and user experiences. (Kotler, et al. 2008:265-269)

In a buying decision theory by Solomon, Bamossy and Askegaard (2002:237-238) the buying decision behaviour is often considered as a rational process where a consumer takes time to think of the purchase. In reality if a person thought about the buying decision rationally it would be too time consuming. Therefore, some of the buying behaviour is completely impulsive. It is not as black and white, though as the decision process can be a mixture of both. They divide the consumer decision process into two types; habitual-decision making and extended problem-solving. They also state that there is a mixture of the two which is called Limited problem-solving. The definitions are as follows:

Habitual-decision making: This is when the person makes decisions with a small effort or no effort at all; people make these decisions automatically. These are things that the person buys often, such as groceries.

Extended problem-solving: This is when the person goes through all the stages of the decision making process shown in the figure 5. The person is trying to gather as much information as possible from internal and external sources of information. These decisions are in relation to a process when a person would be buying a more valuable item, research is then often required to as a lot of money will be spent.

Limited problem-solving: This is a simple process. The person making the decision is not motivated to research the product before making the decision; they usually just decide on one of the alternatives. These would be decisions of things people do not need on daily basis; person has realised that he is in a need of a product and will choose one of the brand alternatives.

2.7 Online Media Provides Interactivity

John Deighton (1996, cited in Chaffey, et al. 2009:31) has identified the key characteristics of the digital media. In the online media people want to be in contact with companies and they are searching for information and experiences. When the people browse online and enter a company's website the company has the full attention of that person. (Deighton, J. 1996, cited in Chaffey, et al. 2009:31) As David Scott (2009:4) argues when a potential buyer searches information online there is no need for the company to grab the attention as the attention is already there. Instead of fancy ads people are looking for specific information related to the company and their product, this information should be provided conveniently.

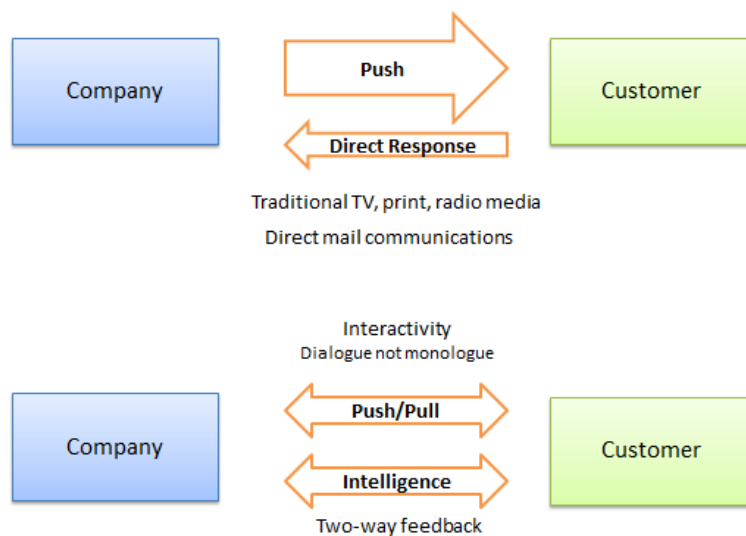


Figure 6. Summary of communication models for traditional media (above) and new media (below) (Chaffey, et al. 2009:32)

As displayed in figure 6 above, the traditional media uses a push tactic where the message is directly from the companies to the customers, in other words there is very little interaction with the person and the company. In the online media the tactic is the mixture of the push and pull tactic. Pull tactic is when the person initiates the contact. Here

it is important for the company to be visible in search engines and other online content. Online media is a tool that should be used for two-way communication rather than for pushing the information to the people. (Chaffey, et al. 2009:31) As Hoffman and Novak (1997, cited in Chaffey, et al. 2009:31) said, digital media can be considered as a new model and they identify it as follows: “consumers can interact with medium, firms can provide content to the medium and, in the most radical departure from traditional marketing environments, and consumers can provide commercially-oriented content to the media. In other words it is possible to say that digital media has revolutionised the way media works.”

2.8 How People Act Online

People who search for information about products online make the decisions based on their knowledge about the web as well as the attitude to risk and trust. The figure 7 demonstrates how people fall into four different categories depending on if they gather information or not and if they look for advice or not.

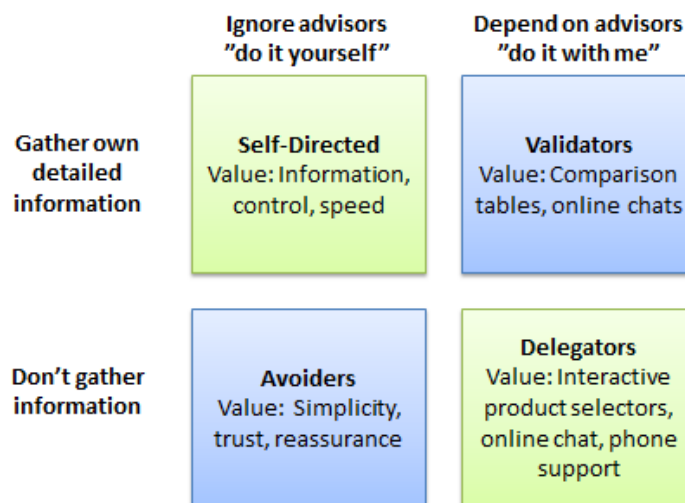


Figure 7. Segmentation based on information need and trust (Forrester, 2006 cited in Chaffey, et al. 2009:86)

Starting from the top left corner there are people that want to find the information their selves, they do not take the word of others as they want to be in control of the information search. They do a thorough research by themselves to gather all the information in detail. On the top right corner there are people that gather a lot of information but they gather it through other people's research, such as online chats; they

trust in the word of others. This is the group where the people reading blogs would most likely belong to. People who are considered as validators could be the people who respond to the blog posts based on their gathered information or the once that read several blog posts with the intention of comparison. In bottom right corner there are people that value interaction and they do not gather information on their own; they value conversation and interaction. Readers of a blog would then fall into the category of delegators as they seek for the information provided by someone who has done the information search for them. On the bottom left corner there are people who do not gather information they avoid it; they value simplicity, reassurance and trust.

There are different types of online behaviour on the internet according to Lewis and Lewis (2006 cited in Chaffey, et al. 2009:75). There are directed information searchers who are only looking for information and do not even intent to buy products online. They are just seeking information on a certain product, market or other things. Then there are undirected information searchers who are browsing through the internet not looking for anything specific, they usually follow a link and are likely to click banner advertisements. There are directed buyers who are looking to purchase a certain product online. There are also bargain hunters who are looking for sales promotions online. Lastly there are entertainment searchers who are looking for interaction online either with the web or individuals.

2.9 Brand Loyalty

As we have looked at the consumer behaviour and factors that influence purchasing decisions it is also vital to look into the brand loyalty.

Brand is an old concept and it has been defined by The Oxford American Dictionary (1980, cited in Economist Books, 2003) as follows: “*A trade mark, goods of particular make: a mark of identification made with hot iron, iron used for this: a piece of burning or charred wood, (verb): to mark with a hot iron or to label with a trade mark.*”

These days the definition is usually interpreted in the commercial sense. Brand is not considered as the product but the impression the product makes to people. In other words it is how the product is perceived and remembered. (Economist Books, 2003:14) Vincent Laurence (2012:28) states that branding could be comparable to memory games that kids play. The game is to make people connect the brand and its value.

Brand can create customer loyalty, which means that after positive impression of a brand people are more likely to buy the same brand again. (Economist Books, 2003:48) People do not base all their purchasing decisions on the actual product and its features but they might have developed an emotional connection with the brand of the product; they might buy the product just because it is a certain brand. People buy the product because it is common with their needs and feelings. (Midelton, S. 2003) Before the focus of the products was in the physical factor of the product, but now days that is taken as a given. These days the focus is on the emotional aspect; feelings about the brand, brand community and the brand of the company. (Leventhal, R. 2006)

2.10 The Power of Bloggers

There are millions of independent voices online that shout and whisper their opinions; that are instant and unsolicited. These messages can have a negative or a positive tone, and there are no restrictions of publishing them. (Scott, 2009:48-52) According to Barger (2012:8) audiences do dominate the conversations in the social media; the voices of real people usually are perceived as more reliable than messages that come directly from companies. Therefore, he states that the companies have lost the control over the conversations concerning their brand.

According to Christopher Barger (2012:2) audiences consider blogger's opinions as a credible source of news; the information is held as credible as the company's information or other major publications. Blogs communicate directly with the audience; they might share their own opinions or share other people's ideas. (Scott, 2009:24, Chau, M., Xu, J. 2012, 1189)

Within the social groups there are opinion leaders that are people who have special skills, knowledge, personality or other characteristics that other people adore. (Kotler, et al. 2008:244, Simcoe, W. 2009:22) In order to be an opinion leader the people need to have trust towards that person. Therefore, it is important that the person who gains the status of an opinion leader do not exploit their power but rather help the people with their knowledge. (Patterson, et al. 2008:153)

In fact, according to an academic journal written by Song, et al. (2007:971), bloggers are identified as opinion leaders. They define the opinion leaders as people who bring new information, ideas and opinions to the readers by which they influence the opin-

ions and decisions of others using word of mouth. In other words bloggers can be identified as opinion leaders in the internet.

As an example Coca-Cola created a virtual brand community for their product in Spain. This provided social and experimental values for the people and people were constantly registering new accounts or accessing their existing one. With this community the moderators, opinion leaders and members grew the sales by about 15%. (Sicilia & Palazon, 2008. Sited in Bing-Shieng, Y. 2014:572) Shown by these statistics online presence and opinion leaders do have a huge impact on businesses.

In order to influence people there must be an interaction and connection; social media has enabled the possibility to interact with people globally. The word of mouth marketing (people to people) is booming due to the influence of the social media; people wish to communicate with real people on intimate basis. The blogs usually influence other people by building a community with the blog. (Brown, D. and Hayes, N. 2008:148-165)

Bloggers have a social influence which means that they can directly or indirectly influence the thoughts, behaviour and actions of people. Blogs provide that social interaction compared to regular websites; blogs are conversational and provide the social interaction factor. The people who have the power to influence these thoughts, behaviour and actions are people that are identified as opinion leaders. The internet has brought a new aspect of defining opinion leaders as it is easier and convenient for people to share their thoughts to the world through blogs and other mediums. Usually the top listed blogs are the ones that are identified as opinion leader as they have gathered a massive group of followers. Therefore the information these top bloggers share spread fast to the masses. (Song. Et al. 2007:971)

The fact that how much influence a blog has usually depends on the segment of blogs; in some segments the blogs have more influence than other segments. Some companies have realised the power that the bloggers have and have started to pay or hire bloggers to send the company's message to the people. (Brown, D. and Hayes, N. 2008:159)

In many sources blogs are perceived as big influencers in social media. However Brown and Hayes (2008:148-155) say that the amount of influencers in the blogosphere is limited and the majority of the blogs do not have an influence on the behav-

our and thought of the readers. They do identify a decline in the influence of analysts and journalists and a rise in the influence of blogs. They argue that most bloggers do have authority or expertise to influence readers.

3 Methodology

This research aims to discover if blogs are affecting the purchasing decisions of people. As there is a lack of academic material on the subject it is vital to gather from other sources. Exploratory and descriptive methods were used to collect the data for the research.

Exploratory methods included secondary sources of information and the common discussion heard from people. As the study is based on online media it was vital to look into the secondary sources in order to gather information related to the subject straight from the source.

As a descriptive data collection method a quantitative survey (Appendix 1) was conducted based on the theories discussed in the literature review in order to discover the connection with the theory. As surveys gather representative samples about people's beliefs, behaviour and experiences. (Lee Abbott, M. 2013:205) Self-administered survey form was chosen as it was easy to distribute to big audience. The survey was published on an online platform and distributed to numerous conversational platforms and social media. The survey was distributed to several different groups that vary in age, sex, geographic, etc. Online platform Survey monkey was chosen as the tool as it was a clear program and the link was easy to distribute, as well it reached audiences that actually use internet and social media.

The survey received all together 100 replies. The majority of people who answered the survey were women (80%). More than half(55%) of the people who answered the survey were in the age group of 20-29 and the second biggest group were people aged 40-45 (19%). On top of the two major groups 11 % of the people were 30-39 years old, 8% were under 20 and 7 % were over 50 year olds.

The following chapter will display the results of the research.

4 Research and Survey

4.1 Who are the Bloggers?

There are personal bloggers that share facts of their everyday life and express their emotions and opinions. There are also bloggers that are maintained by corporations that are created to connect with their suppliers. (Liang, et al. 2009 cited in Chau, M. and XU, J. 2012:1190) Technorati (2011) conducted an annual study that states that bloggers can be divided into different categories as follows:

Hobbyist: This is the biggest group of bloggers. These bloggers blog for fun and do not report any income from blogging. These are bloggers that want to express their opinions and speak their minds; they usually spend less than three hours a week on blogging. (Technorati, 2012)

Professional, Part- and Full-timers: Independent bloggers that generate some income from blogging. The full time bloggers consider blogging as their full-time profession and the part time bloggers generate some income in addition to their full-time profession. (Technorati, 2012)

Corporate: These are bloggers that keep blogs as part of their full-time profession and the blog I written for their employer. (Technorati, 2012)

Entrepreneurs: Some of the bloggers are characterised as entrepreneurs that are blogging for a company or an organisation that they own. Mostly these blogs are used to gain recognition and new clients for the businesses. (Technorati, 2012)

According to Brown and Hayes (2008:152-159) the bloggers usually are not “normal people” as they are usually defined as quirky people that are socially awkward but in a blog they are considered entertaining and thought-provoking. They also state, that the impression that people who blog do not have a full time jobs or blogging is their profession. Bloggers are usually anonymous and their no way of telling who the actual blogger is (Brown, D. and Hayes, N. 2008: 168) That is how it was in the days when blogging started, now days it is a more familiar term. Big masses of people are involved in blogging every day, either they read the, write them or hear about them.

A lot of blogs are created constantly; 33, 90 Million blogs are created monthly. In other words everyone everywhere can start a blog in a second. (The Richest, 2014) The biggest bloggers now days are people that the readers admire and that reflects the readers' interests.

4.2 Money Made by the Bloggers

Heini Maksimainen (Helsingin Sanomat, 2014) in her article has defined the bloggers based on the money they are making, and she is specifically referring to bloggers in Finland. She divides different bloggers as follows:

Hobbyist: These are bloggers that write the blog for their own fun and the blog is in the side of a job or studies. These bloggers do not usually generate income for their blogs but they do get some product samples from companies.

Part-Time: These bloggers get money from the portal where their blog is and from other companies as well. Usually these blogs do not generate a lot of money but is just an extra income on top of the normal salary. Major part of the bloggers belong to this group, altogether counting the product samples and the money the blog generates the average a blogger can make is 1 000 euros per month.

Salary Based Professional: These blogs have so many followers that the portal pay them 2 000 – 3 000 euros per month. And the bloggers also make income based on the relationships and cooperation they have with companies. All together a professional blogger can earn 6 000 euros per month.

Independent Professional: These are bloggers that own the website; they do not use a portal. These bloggers get their money from advertisements as well as from cooperation with companies. These people make money from hundreds to even thousand euros per month.

As mentioned in the article of Heini Maksimainen also Technorati (2013) survey stated that majority (64%) of the bloggers do make money with their blogs but usually they are not huge amounts, and not to be considered like a salary. In the past people have referred their friend's and family's recommendations while making purchasing decisions. Now days those recommendations come from bloggers and bloggers are perceived as good friends. As before when a friend or a family member recommended certain com-

panies and products, now days those recommendations are coming also from the bloggers. (Helsingin Sanomat, 2014)

The following part will analyse the results from the survey conducted and make it evident if there are connections to the theory.

4.3 Most important reason for use of Internet

One of the questions on the survey was asking what the most important reason for people's internet usage is. The highest was for entertainment and to pass time (45%). The second most important reason was communication with people (35%) and third most important information seeking (30%). The least important reason was to look for interesting products (6.19%). Based on these result it seems that people do not go online to search for products.

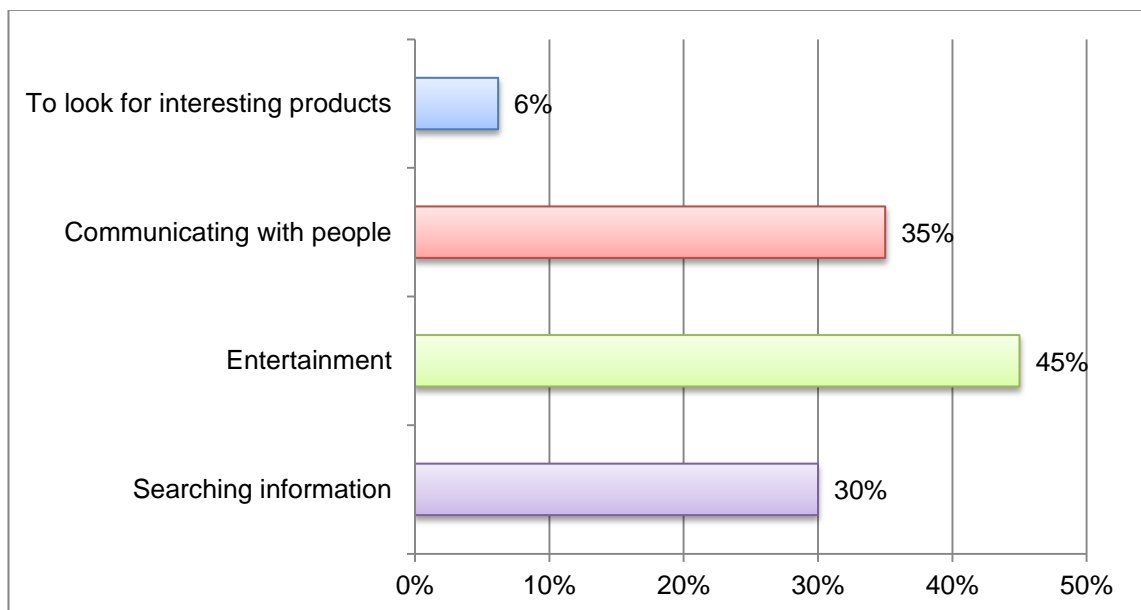


Figure 8. The most important reason for use of Internet (the Author, 2014)

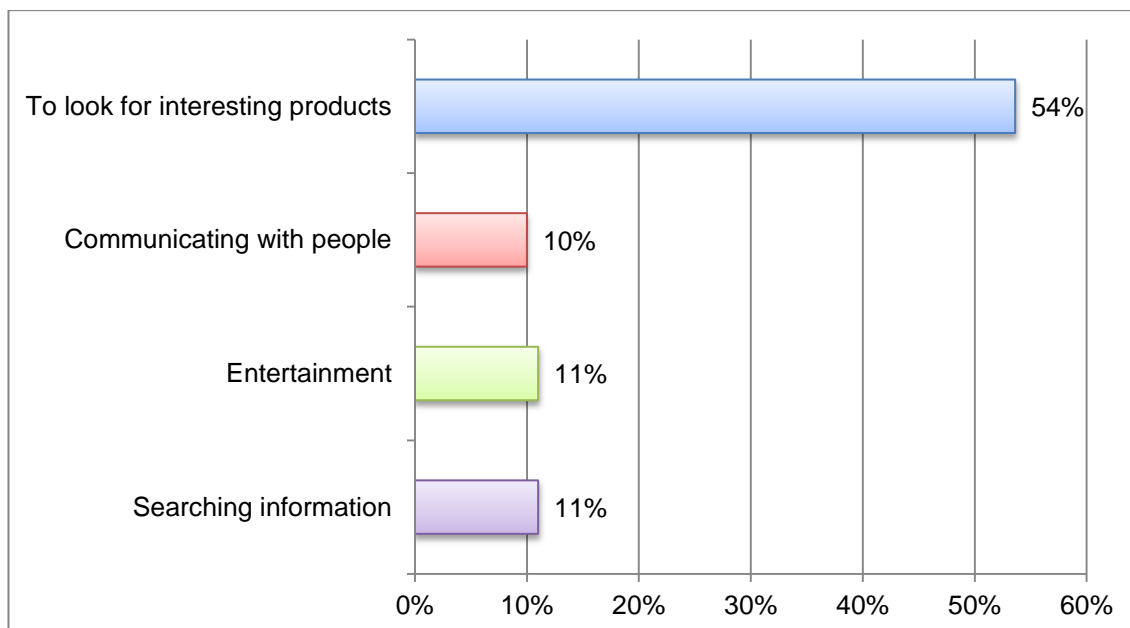


Figure 9. The least important reason for use of internet (the Author, 2014)

The least important reason for internet usage (53, 61%) was searching for interesting products. According to Forrester (2006, cited in Chaffey, et al. 2009) suggests a theory that people do go online and research the products. John Deighton (1996, cited in Chaffey, et al. 2009:31) also advised that in the online media people want to be in contact with the companies. As per the survey it seems that only a small portion (6, 19%) believed it to be important. Therefore it could be assumed that these people who search information do exist, but they are not a massive group.

As mentioned earlier in the literature review the main reason for blogs to exist is that they stimulate conversation and they have the possibility of communicating with the blogger. Bloggers usually do share their interest and the people who follow them share similar interests. (Chaney, P. 299:55-56) Therefore it could be assumed that blogs could be categorised as entertainment for people, also based on conversations with my friends who read blogs they say that they usually do it to pass time. On the other hand as blogs offer the possibility of communication with the blogger it would be safe to assume that blogs do combine the two most important reasons people use internet.

4.4 How Often People Read Blogs

It is clear that the blogs are popular as biggest part of the people read blogs daily (26%) and only one tenth (10%) say that they do not ever read blogs. This proves that the blogs do get a lot of attention daily. As stated in an article (Helsingin Sanomat,

2014) that reviewed who the bloggers are in order to keep the people coming back to the blog daily the blogger needs to provide constant content to their blog.

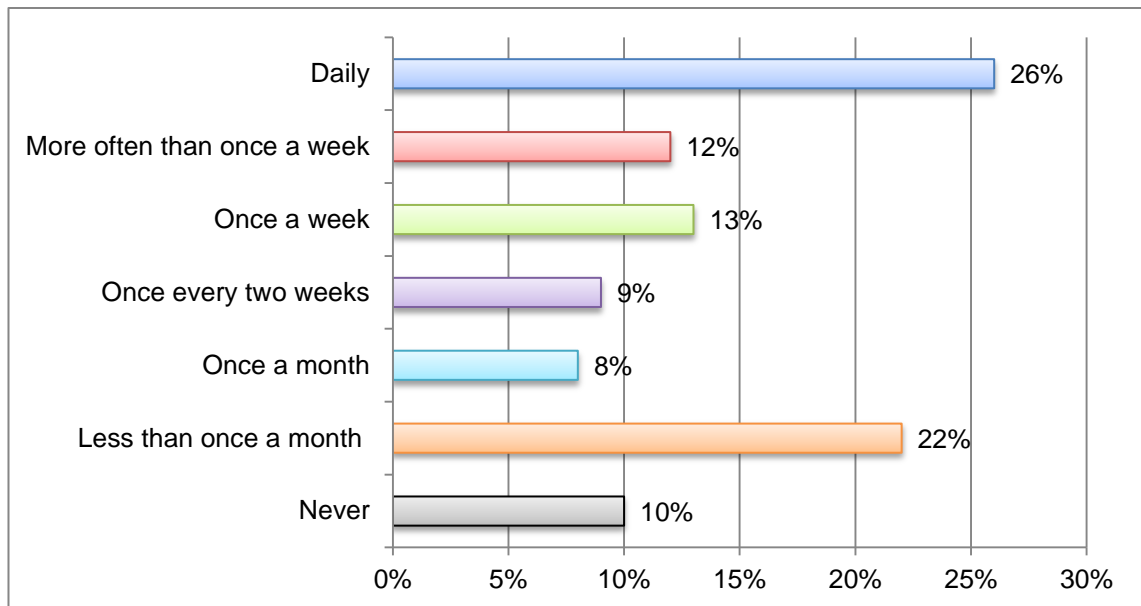


Figure 10. How often people read blogs (the Author, 2014)

As per Technorati (2013) blogs are a media that is in the attention of many people these days; there is a constant interaction from the blogger as they do communicate their posts on daily basis and a lot of people follow these posts daily.

There are several influencers online but the most active once are bloggers, as per the survey conducted by Technorati (2013) 86 % of the influencers' blog. About half of the bloggers even run several blogs. Therefore it is obvious that there are countless possibilities for companies in blogs as these people have an influence on people's behaviour.

4.5 Channels People Use to Search Information Online

In order to see if people use blogs as a way to search information online the survey asked what channels people use. Almost all people (98%) answered that they use Google and other search engines for information search and the second choice for people was price comparison sites (46%). As per the previous question of things that affect people's purchasing decisions, price was the second most important reason. Therefore it was expected that price comparison sites would be a common channel. Blogs were rated as the third most important (29%) channel for information. In other word about a third of people do use blogs as information search channel.

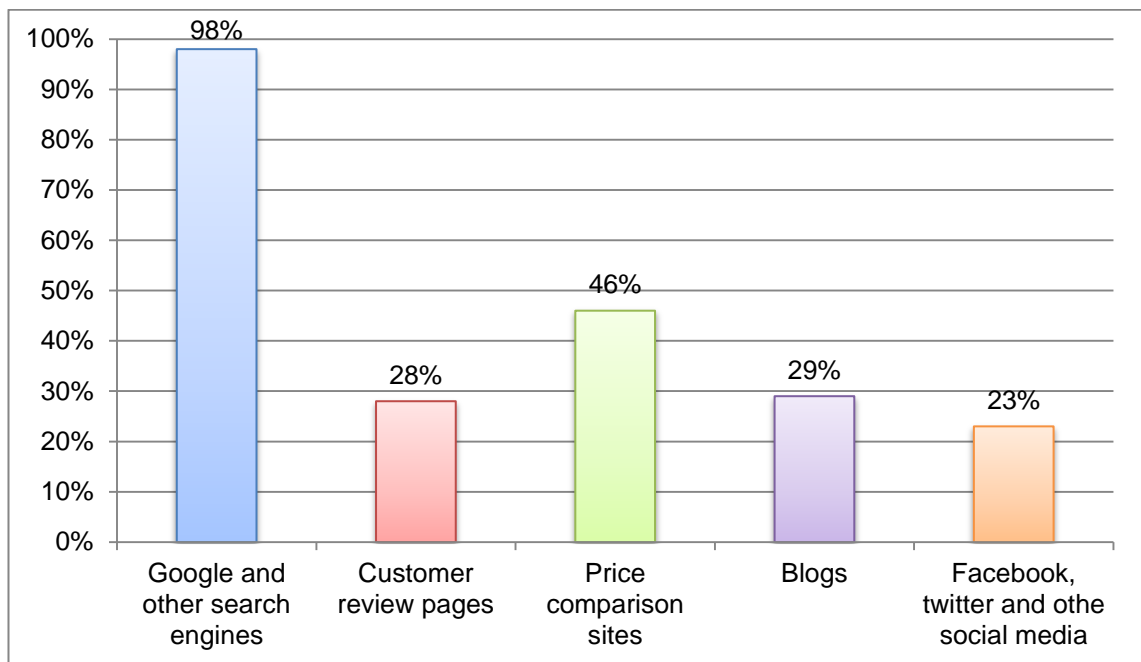


Figure 11. What channels people use to search information online (the Author, 2014)

In a report conducted by Technorati (2013) blogs were considered as the fifth-most trustworthy source of information. In the report they also recognise Google and Facebook the most common and trustworthy channels. Bloggers do communicate through other social media as well; they often use Facebook and twitter for sharing posts. They are mostly social through those channels and that is how they get the status of influencer. Vice versa blogs are the third biggest online service where from people share posts, right after YouTube and Facebook. When searching the word blog in Google many different blogs appear, therefore it can be said that blogs can be reached through the bigger online media as well.

4.6 Factors Affecting Consumer Behaviour

One of the questions in the survey was regarding the factors that affect people's purchasing decisions. Mostly people thought that the most important reasons for purchasing decisions are previous experiences (49%) and price (44%). From the survey group 10% found the opinions of next of kin (e.g. family, friends) as the biggest influencer on their purchasing decisions and close 7% said that reviews written by others are the most important influencer. The least people (3%) were influenced by the company advert.

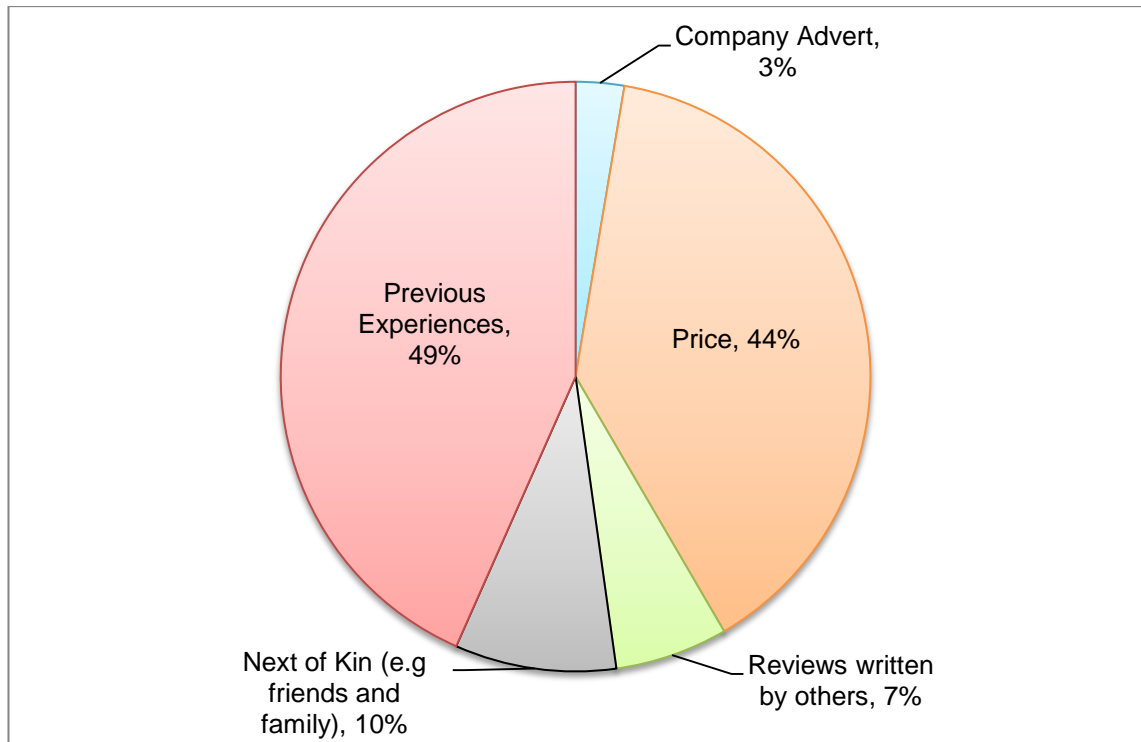


Figure 12. What influences your purchasing decisions the most? (The Author, 2014)

These results clarify the fact of how the marketing has changed due to online media. It is no longer about the company adverts pushed to the consumer as people have other ways to find information about the products now days. (Chaffey, et al. 2009) It seems that the people do not trust just the company message anymore and therefore rely on other sources of information. Family and friends and reviews written by others are found as more credible source of information than the company itself.

4.7 Do People Research Products Online Before Purchasing

One of the questions in the survey was if people do research products online before making the purchasing decision.

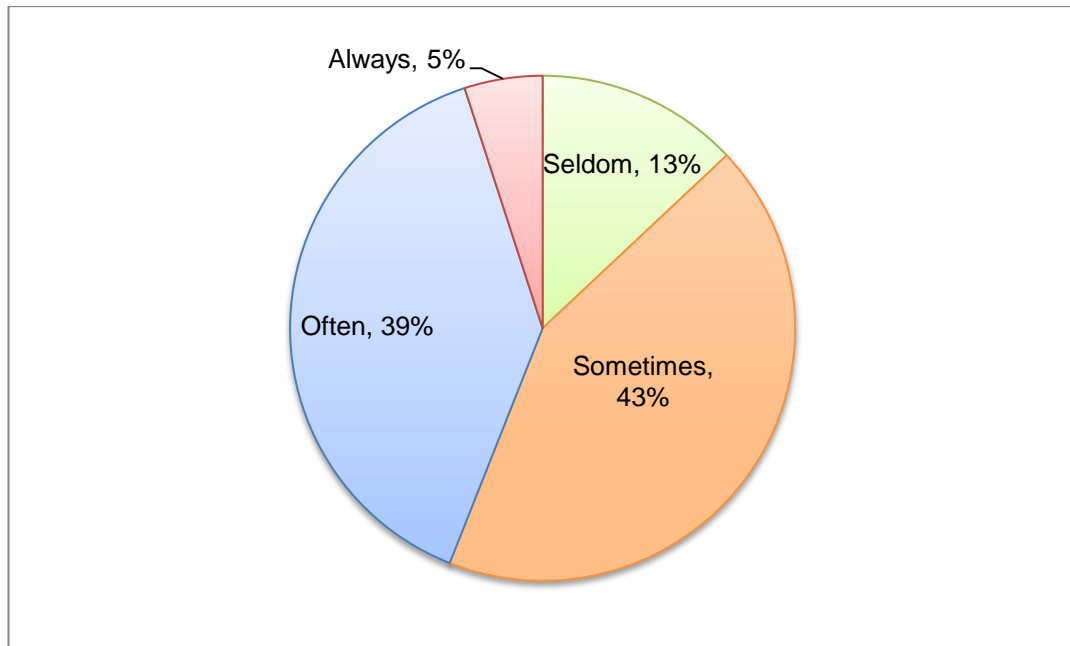


Figure 13. How often do you research products online before purchasing (The Author, 2014)

Earlier in the research it became evident that the least important use for internet was searching for interesting products. But when it comes to buying products it seems that people do research them online before buying. Big part of the group (39%) say that they search the product often online before purchasing it. The most common answer (43%) was sometimes, and no one answered that they never research products online. So this proves that everyone does in the end search products online, some more than others. But researching products is not the primary reason for the use of internet. As a conclusion even though internet is rarely used for researching products all people do it at least sometimes. It is obvious that people do not just trust the company message as already confirmed earlier, people want to research the product and find more information before purchasing.

However it seems like blogs are a possibility that companies have not acknowledged as the opportunity it is as per report by Technorati(2013) on average only 5% of the digital media spend go to blogs. If the companies would acknowledge the opportunities there would be bigger opportunities for bloggers to make money on their blogs. In the following part the research will look into the fact if blogs do create buying behaviour.

4.8 Blogs Effect on Purchasing Decisions

Based on the survey conducted it seemed that people do not buy products that often because they saw it on a blog. Majority of people (60%) buy products that they see on blogs sometimes and 36% of people said that they never buy products that they see on a blog. In the other hand the fact that only 36% people said that they never buy it indicates that 64% of the people do buy products because of blogs. They might not buy often but they do buy.

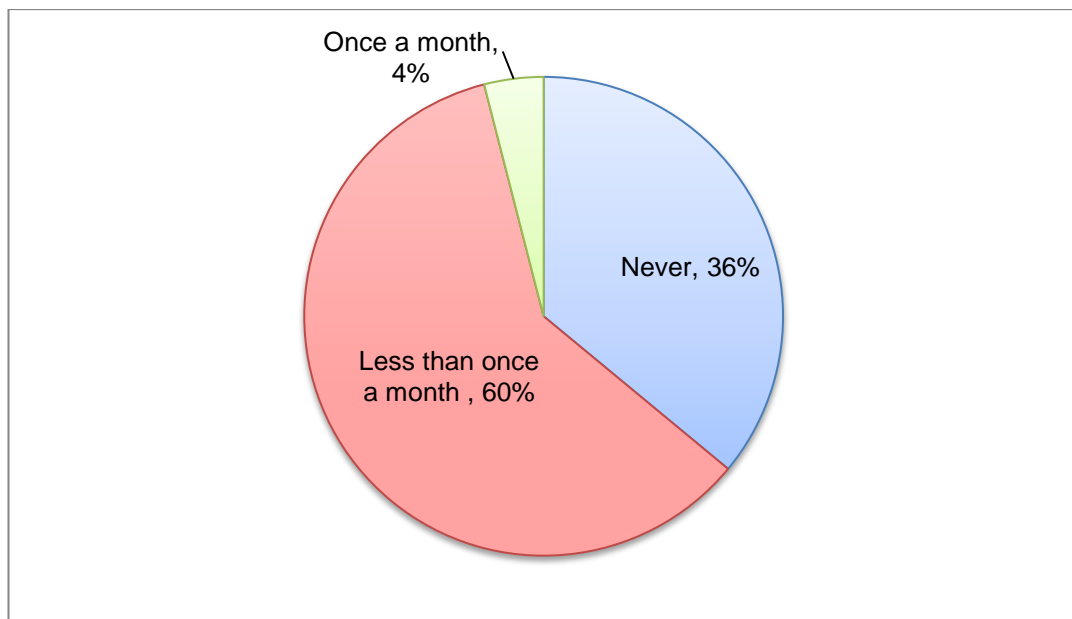


Figure 14. How often people buy products after seeing it in a blog (the Author, 2014)

As stated earlier the online media has revolutionised the world of marketing completely. On a report conducted by Technorati (2013) they research the effect of online media on people. From the survey they conducted as a research they realised that many consumers do turn to blogs when making purchasing decisions. Blogs were rated as the third most important digital influencer on purchasing decisions (31%). Blogs were listed right after retail sites (56%) and brand sites (34%). Blogs there for have an impact on people's purchasing decisions.

It seems that in an international level blogs are perceived as a bigger influencer than it is in the Finnish market. Finnish people do show interest in purchasing products after they saw it in a blog. This could possibly be a growing marketing channel in the Finnish market.

4.9 Brand Loyalty for products on Blogs

As it seems that the blogs do influence purchasing decisions the interesting question is that does the reader buy the same brand mentioned in the blog. The target group was asked: If you buy a product after you saw it on a blog, do you buy the same brand? Based on the survey, only 1% of the people advised that they always buy the same brand after seeing it on a blog. Majority of people (39, 33%) answered that they sometimes buy the exact same brand. About one third (30, 34%) said that they never buy the same brand as the one seen in the blog. These can be seen from the above figure. Based on the result 69, 66% of the people do even sometimes buy the exact brand. In a conclusion it seems that the blogs do create buying behaviour that favours the displayed brand, but not to a very big extent. As the question was for people that do buy products because of a blog, they probably do not buy that brand but are motivated to buy do to the blog.

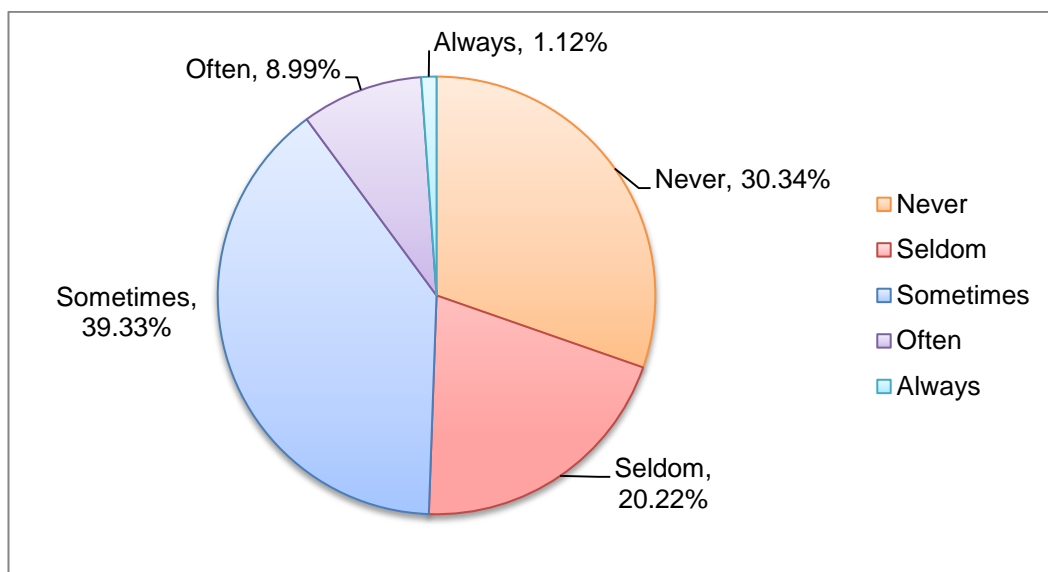


Figure 15. If you buy a product after you saw it on a blog, do you buy the same brand? (The Author, 2014)

As discovered earlier people buy brands because of the emotional connection with the brand. (Leventhal, R. 2006) The blogger probably has formed that connection with the brand but for the reader there is no connection. Therefore it would be assumed that if the reader has already created an emotional connection with the brand before they are more likely to be loyal to the same brand as the blogger. Vice versa if there is no con-

nection the reader most likely do not see the need to buy the exact product but an equivalent one.

4.10 Do People Buy Products From Links Provided by the Blogger

One of the ways how bloggers receive compensation is links that they provide in their blogs in order to guide people to company websites. The question is that do people actually buy products through these links?

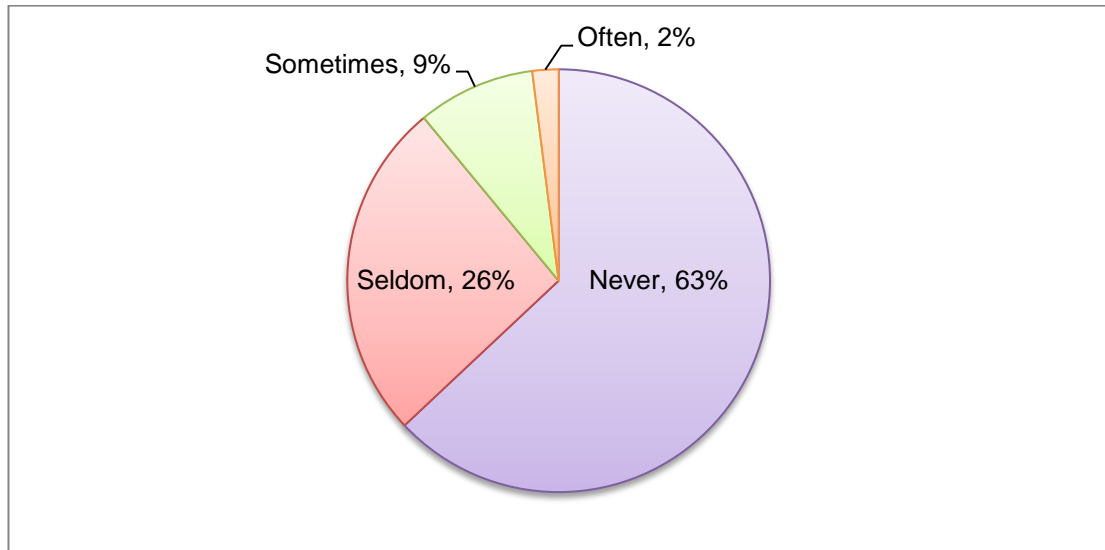


Figure 16. How often do people buy products through links provided by the blogger (The author, 2014)

Based on the survey it seems that it is really rare for people to buy products through those links; majority (63%) say that they never buy products through the links provided. Some people (26%) say that they rarely buy products through those links and (9%) say they buy the products sometimes and only two per cent say that they buy products through the links often.

4.11 Credibility of Bloggers Receiving Compensation

Bloggers are able to make money through their blog and the most followed ones usually do. The ways they earn money are usually cooperation with companies; product samples, advertising, writing about the company, providing links to company websites etc. The list is long. (Helsingin Sanomat, 2014) In the survey I conducted I questioned if the fact that the blogger is receiving compensation does affect people. Most people (38 %) did not even acknowledge the fact and many 32 %) said it does not affect them.

Still a third of the people said that it does affect them if the blogger is receiving compensation from companies. The affect as expected was not positive. Many people mentioned that this makes the reader question the blogger and affect the credibility. The common feeling was that if the blogger receives compensation they are on the company's side and therefore they are more sceptical towards the content. Some people had even stopped reading some blogs do to the fact. From the people who answered this survey the social aspect of blogs was strong, and the feeling of getting advise from a "friend" was clear and when the blogger starts to receive money from the company's the blog has changes from providing information into advertising.

5 Conclusion

When people are making purchasing decisions in today's society there are several influencers as information is transferred to them from several sources constantly. The online media has been one of the biggest developments in today's marketing as it has allowed strangers to talk to strangers online. Online people can freely say their opinion; negative or positive. As a platform blogs are a place where people share their opinions and other people follow them because they feel that they have something in common with the blogger or they look highly at them. As mentioned by William Simcoe (2009) said there are opinion leaders; people who influence their crowd's opinions, and Song, et al. (2007:971) identified bloggers as opinion leaders. Successful bloggers that have big follower crowd have a massive power to spread their opinions to big masses. Positive comments made about a company in a blog post can be a big boost on the company image and vice versa negative comments can be crucial to the company image. One blog post in itself is not dangerous but this post can be shared online to thousands of people in a second; followers often share the posts of bloggers and therefore expose them to even bigger crowd. As in one survey the majority of people said that reviews are important when making purchasing decisions. As 90 % said that if the products has positive reviews it will encourage them to buy the product, and 86 % advised that they would not buy a product if it had bad reviews. (Constant Contact, Pinkham, R. 2013) Even though blogs are not the same as reviews there is a lot of similarities, as the message is coming from outside of the companies. Not all bloggers blog about companies, but a lot of them do mention companies whose products they buy or use. As already identified earlier in the report positive information that is independent from the company creates credibility for the company and/or product, and vice versa negative

information can destroy the image. (Chaffey, et al. 2009:39) In other words bloggers do have a massive power and their posts could make or break the company image.

As it has become obvious bloggers have an influence on people, but the question is that do they have an influence on the purchasing decisions. There are many factors that influence consumer behaviour, defined by Kotler (et al. 2008) there are four categories cultural, social, and personal and psychological factors. Blogging is counted as a social factor as people read blogs and communicate with the person. The opinions are coming from real people and not from corporate sources. What kind of blogs people read is influenced by the personal factors and mostly because of the lifestyle of people; blogs people read are chosen as they find something interesting in the subject of the blog. For example if a person is interested in fashion and follows fashion blogs, if they see an interesting item on the blog that might trigger them in to buying it. As per the survey conducted majority of people (64%) buy products at least sometimes if they see it in a blog. It is therefore obvious that the bloggers do act as opinion leaders in the internet and therefore encourage people to buy products they see in blogs.

The fact that people buy products inspired by the blog does not mean that they buy the exact same brand. In the survey most of the people who bought products after seeing it on a blog did not buy the same brand. Therefore it can be assumed that the blogs do inspire people to consider the products the blogger shows in the blog, but when they buy they buy something similar rather than the same brand.

Philip Kotler (et al. 2008) identified that when people make purchasing decisions they first need to realise that they have a need and after that they start to look for information and after that people evaluate the alternatives and then make the purchasing decision. This is how it used to work but now days it is just a theory. Online media has made the process a lot more complex as it provides interactivity to people. Chaffey et al. (2009:32) acknowledged that from the previous push market the online media has transfer it to a market that pushes and pulls; markets work in a dialogue rather than a monologue as before. Before the companies pushed the information to the consumer and then hoped that the people buy, in the present people are looking for communication and interaction. In case they have questioned they want them answered quickly either by the company or others with experiences of the company. There are several sources for information search online and blogs is one of the. In the survey approxi-

mately one third of the people used blogs as a research tool. People do use blogs to search information online.

It seems that people that read blogs are affected by them. They do base purchasing decisions on blogs as well as search information through the. Technorati (2013) discovered that blogs is a web marketing factor that offers a lot of new possibilities. They have also discovered that bloggers do have an effect on purchasing decisions the people and therefore a huge potential lays there. The question is how to efficiently start using this channel for marketing purposes. As per the survey people do not buy products through the links provided by the blogger and blogs do not create brand loyalty. And if it becomes obvious that the blogger is receiving compensation for their posts they lose their credibility. The people who replied the survey had strong opinions against bloggers who receive compensation as they felt that the message the blogger is posting is in conflict with their real opinion. The message is now coming from the company rather than from the blogger. It could be that blogs are a tool that should be sacred from the companies, as people do not appreciate companies' involvement in the context of the blogs. Bloggers have an effect on people when they are sharing their own messages rather than the company's message. Companies should find a way to have the blogger talk about them in their own words without trying to push their own company message.

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Survey

Survey questions.

Gender		Female	Male			
<i>Sukupuoli</i>		<i>Nainen</i>	<i>Mies</i>			
Age	<i>Under 20</i>	<i>20-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60 or</i>
<i>Over</i>						
<i>Ikä</i>	<i>Alle 20</i>	<i>20-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60 tai</i>
<i>yli</i>						

What is your primary use for internet? (Number from 1 to 4 one being the most important)

Mihin käytät eniten nettiä? (Numeroi kaikki tärkeysjärjestyksessä ykkösen ollessa tärkein)

Information research	<i>Tiedon hakuun</i>
Entertainment and on free time	<i>Viihteeksi ja ajan kuluksi</i>
Communication with people	<i>Kommunikointiin ihmisten kanssa</i>
To look for interesting products	<i>Etsiäksesi mielenkiintoisia tuotteita</i>

What affects you buying behaviour? (Number from 1 to 5 one being the most important)

Mikä vaikuttaa eniten ostospäätöksesi tekoon? (Numeroi kaikki tärkeysjärjestyksessä 1 ollessa tärkein)

Advertisement of the company	<i>Yrityksen mainos</i>
Price	<i>Hinta</i>
Reviews written by others	<i>Muiden kirjoittamat arvostelut</i>
Opinions of friends and family	<i>Läheisten mielipide (esim. kaverit, perhe)</i>
Previous experiences	<i>Aikaisemmat kokemukset</i>

Do you do research products online before buying?

Ostaessasi tuotetta haetko ensiksi tietoa netistä?

Never	<i>En koskaan</i>
Seldom	<i>Harvoin</i>
Sometimes	<i>Joskus</i>

Often	<i>Usein</i>
Always	<i>Aina</i>

If you do research what sources do you use? (You can pick several)

Jos etsit tietoa netistä, mitä sivuja käytät tietoa etsiessäsi? (Voit valita useamman)

Google and other search engines	Google ja muut hakukoneet
Customer review pages	Asiakas arvostelu sivut
Price comparison sites	Hintavertailu sivut
Blogs	Blogit
Facebook, Twitter and other social media	Facebook, Twitter ja muu sosiaalinen media
Company websites	Yritysten sivut
Other, what ?	Muu, mikä?

How often do you read blogs?

Kuinka usein luet blogeja?

Never	<i>En koskaan</i>
Less than once a month	<i>Harvemmin kuin kerran kuussa</i>
Once a month	<i>Kerran kuussa</i>
Once in two weeks	<i>Kerran kahdessa viikossa</i>
Once a week	<i>Kerran viikossa</i>
More often than once a week	<i>Useammin kuin kerran viikossa</i>
Daily	<i>Päivittäin</i>

How often do you buy products that you saw on a blog?

Kuinka usein ostat tuotteen nähtyäsi sen blogissa?

Never	<i>En koskaan</i>
Less than once a month	<i>Harvemmin kuin kerran kuussa</i>
Once a month	<i>Kerran kuussa</i>
Once in two weeks	<i>Kerran kahdessa viikossa</i>
Once a week	<i>Kerran viikossa</i>
More often than once a week	<i>Useammin kuin kerran viikossa</i>
Daily	<i>Päivittäin</i>

If you buy a product after you saw it on a blog, do you buy the same brand?

Jos ostat nähtyäsi tuotteen blogissa, ostatko samaa merkkiä olevan tuotteen?

Never	<i>En koskaan</i>
Seldom	<i>Harvoin</i>
Sometimes	<i>Joskus</i>
Often	<i>Usein</i>
Always	<i>Aina</i>

Do you buy through the links provided by the blogger?

Ostatko bloggaajan tarjoamien linkkien kautta ?

Never	<i>En koskaan</i>
Seldom	<i>Harvoin</i>
Sometimes	<i>Joskus</i>
Often	<i>Usein</i>
Always	<i>Aina</i>

If a blogger cooperated with a company (receives an incentive from reviews and product demonstrations) does it affect you?

Jos bloggaaja tekee yhteistyötä yritysten kanssa (saa palkkiota tuote-esittelyistä ja arvosteluista), vaikuttaako se sinuun?

I do not acknowledge it	<i>En edes huomio asiaa</i>
Yes it affects	<i>Vaikuttaa</i>
No it does not affect	<i>Ei vaikuta</i>

If it does affect you, how?

Jos vaikuttaa, miksi?