

Optimizing Brand Visibility in the Blogosphere: Developing cooperation and relationships between PR agencies and bloggers

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<p>WHY NOT PR, the commissioning party of this thesis, is a small full-service public relations agency located in Helsinki. In their work as brand representatives they cooperate with various Finnish bloggers.</p> <p>The popularity and amount of blogs has been rapidly increasing worldwide for the past eight years, especially since 2011. Widely-read blogs and bloggers are a great and still fairly inexpensive way for brands to gain visibility and promote their products.</p> <p>Brand representatives are continuously competing for the attention of influential bloggers. It is therefore crucial for brand representatives, such as public relations agencies, to find the most effective methods of contacting bloggers and getting them motivated and committed to brand-blogger cooperation. Strong blog visibility and successful cooperation with bloggers is also increasingly important for creating interest, leading to strengthened presence in the traditional media as well.</p> <p>The objective of this thesis was to find the most effective ways of contacting influential bloggers and getting them motivated for cooperation. The importance of building relationships with bloggers and treating them as a significant stakeholder group for public relations agencies is also discussed. The empirical part of this study was a qualitative research conducted by interviewing six influential Finnish bloggers in February and March 2014.</p> <p>The results of the study reveal the importance that treating bloggers as individuals has on motivating them for brand cooperation. Targeting and personalizing messages specifically to a blogger is crucial, especially in the first contact. The results also show that bloggers appreciate human relations and are eager to create and maintain close relationships with brand representatives. Bloggers felt that close relationships with brands will ease the work of both parties, the blogger and the brand, and may also lead to the blogger writing more positive and better quality blog posts about the brand.</p>	
Keywords Brand-blogger cooperation, public relations, blogs, bloggers, brands, communications, stakeholders	

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1 Introduction

In the current world traditional media is losing its' significance as a marketing tool for products and brands as blogs and social media as a whole, are continuously becoming more popular and possess many opportunities for companies (Decker 2014). Popular and widely read blogs have great influence on making various brands visible and desired by consumers. Wide coverage in blogs can lead to mainstream media attention as well (Scott 2010, 240). Consumers also perceive bloggers as being a trustworthy and credible source of information (Gummerus et al. 2011, 1480), which makes bloggers excellent marketers for products and brands.

As bloggers are still a fairly inexpensive cooperation partner for companies when they want to gain visibility for their brand, it is important to find the best methods of contacting and creating lucrative relationships with bloggers. It is also necessary for public relations agencies to identify and treat bloggers as an important stakeholder group for their company.

This thesis aims to find out what are the best communicational means for approaching bloggers and motivating them to commit to endorse a brand that a PR agency represents.

This thesis will also concentrate on viewing bloggers as an important stakeholder group for public relations agencies.

1.1 The commissioning party –WHY NOT PR

The commissioning party of this thesis is WHY NOT PR. WHY NOT PR is a small full service PR and Communications Agency located in the center of Helsinki. The company was founded in 2011.

WHY NOT PR focuses mainly on representing beauty, fashion and lifestyle brands. The company represents brands such as Timberland, Joutsen, Avon, Extreme Lashes and MAKE UP FOR EVER.

1.2 Objectives and research methods

The purpose of this thesis is to find the best communicational means for different brand representatives for contacting bloggers and for building a long-term and beneficial business relationship with them. In this thesis bloggers are considered as important stakeholders for public relations agencies and the aim is to identify and understand the stakeholder perspective of the relationship.

The focus will be on public relations agencies (later referred to as PR agencies). The aim is to find out how and through which channel(s) influential bloggers wish they would be contacted by brand representatives, i.e. PR agencies in this thesis, and to discover the key incentives by which the bloggers decide to cooperate and endorse the brands that PR agencies represent.

The main research questions of this study are:

- how and through which channels(s) influential bloggers wish to be contacted by brand representatives (i.e. PR agencies in this thesis)
- what are the key incentives by which the bloggers decide to cooperate and endorse the brands that PR agencies represent

This thesis will consist of a theoretical part and an empirical study. To find answers and to meet the objectives of this thesis, influential and widely-read Finnish bloggers from the fields of lifestyle, fashion and cosmetics will be interviewed; thus a qualitative research will be carried out.

The six (6) bloggers that will be interviewed for this study are all writing their blogs under a blog portal. To gain variety to the research questions different types of bloggers will be interviewed. The interviewees will consist of cosmetics, lifestyle, fashion and travel bloggers. The aim of interviewing different types of bloggers is to find out whether or not they perceive the research themes differently.

1.3 Scope of the thesis

Although it is likely that monetary compensation acts as an incentive for bloggers when they decide to cooperate with a company and represent their brand, this thesis will concentrate on the communicational means of engaging bloggers for lucrative co-operation.

This thesis will also concentrate on popular bloggers from the fields of lifestyle, fashion and cosmetics in Finland, thus leaving international bloggers beyond the scope.

When discussing stakeholders, this thesis will introduce different definitions and acknowledge that different stakeholder groups exist. However, this thesis will concentrate only on bloggers as a stakeholder group for public relations agencies.

2 Public relations as a profession

Throughout its' history, beginning in the 1900s, public relations has often been described with negative adjectives. It has even been referred to as being plain propaganda. Public relations have commonly been perceived as a means of persuading the public into viewing certain news or a certain product or brand in a positive light. Critics of PR see that the objective of public relations is merely to hide or at least polish the surface on bad news (Broom 2009, 21).

The image on public relations is, however, not all negative and it is now accepted as a two-way communication versus one-way communication (PR agency → public). Also, the term "PR" has very many different definitions and it is difficult to find just one that all scientists and public relations professionals would agree upon.

One definition that is widely accepted is the following definition by public relations pioneer Rex Harlow from 1976: "Public relations is a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and co-operation between an organization and its publics - - " (Theaker 2004, 4). Public relations can also be simply described as being about reputation (Theaker 2004, 6). In other words, it is about what you say, what others say about you and by this, how you are seen by the public.

Another definition is provided by the Public Relations Society of America, where they describe PR as being a "strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics" (PRSA 2009-14). In this thesis the term "public relations" is also defined as above. This definition is especially descriptive as this thesis discusses the importance of PR agencies building relationships with popular bloggers.

There are also many different types of public relations activities, which is why it seems to be difficult to find just one accurate and satisfying definition for PR. Some forms of PR are e.g. events management, media relations, crisis management and corporate PR,

just to name a few (Theaker 2004, 7). This thesis will concentrate on treating PR from the media relations point-of-view.

The profession of public relations has also faced changes during its history. Back in the day PR professionals used to write press releases on news and new product launches and then send them to a handful of journalists in hopes that they would cover it in their articles. By doing this, the information on the press release was visible to consumers only if the media decided to cover the topic (Scott 2010, 11). Nowadays this is not the way to reach the publics and gain visibility and sales for products.

As Scott (2010, 22) writes in his book, organizations should forget about spending money on programs that aim at making journalists cover the organization's brands and products. Instead organizations, such as PR agencies, should target bloggers, online news sites and consultants, just to name a few. The power of social media is also undeniable and organizations should strive to use it to its' full potential as that is the way to communicate directly with the publics.

The importance of good PR work is also all the time increasing; this means that PR agencies have to continuously stay up to speed and find the right style of communication and communication channels to reach the proper audience for its cause.

According to Scott (2010, 239) many journalists have started seeing PR professionals and the profession itself as just pure spamming as large amounts of press releases are continuously sent to them. This is one of the reasons why it is vital for PR agencies to find new and proper means to communicate with its' stakeholders and publics and also to understand the power of the web.

Due to the web's power and potential, it is especially crucial to realize the importance and potential that bloggers have as a communication channel and as a stakeholder group. The popularity of blogs is continuously on the rise and consumers view bloggers as a credible source for information (Gummerus J., Liljander V., Sepp M. 2011, 1480), thus making bloggers excellent marketers for the brands that PR agencies represent.

Bloggers also have the ability to make information on companies and products quickly visible to large publics (Gummerus et al 2011, 1480), which is exactly why it is important for PR agencies to cooperate and build relationships with influential bloggers.

The web has truly changed the way of doing business in PR and as Scott (2010, 24) puts it in his book: “The Internet has made public relations public again, after years of almost exclusive focus on media”.

Public relations may be changing and it is still very important for all companies. Over two decades ago, in 1990 Peter Gummer, a renowned public relations professional stated that the importance and value of PR will increase and that it will continue to be an “indispensable tool of management” (Theaker 2004, 320). Now in 2014, the importance of good PR is very high and as a profession it is also becoming more popular as the number of PR professionals and PR agencies is continuously on the increase throughout the world (Broom 2009, 21).

It is difficult to get an exact number on how many PR agencies exist in Finland as it is not possible to register solely a PR agency into the Finnish trade register.

Also, very many communications and advertising agencies also do PR work and are not limited only into their own trade, i.e. making advertisements for example. However, according to the Account Manager of WHY NOT PR, Heidi Koskela, there are about 15 companies in Finland that work purely in the field of public relations.

3 Blogging and bloggers

In this chapter the term “blogging” will be discussed as well as the popularity of it and the power it has on the consumption choices of consumers.

3.1 Changes within the blogosphere

The very first Weblog, or commonly referred to as “blog” emerged in 1996. A blog is a website where a person or group of people produce content (Dictionary.com 2014). The content can include e.g. the writer's own experiences and opinions and it can also have a certain theme it concentrates on, e.g. fashion, cosmetics or food. Some blogs are lifestyle blogs, where the writer shares his/her everyday activities. Blogs are usually updated on a regular basis and include a lot of visual elements such as pictures, videos and links to other websites (Jyväskylän ammattikorkeakoulu). There are different forms of blogging, the most popular being the individual blog. However, group blogs and corporate blogs exist as well. People writing their own individual blog are usually people who want to share their own passion and expertise with the world (Scott 2010, 59).

For many bloggers blogging is just their hobby, however, a change can be seen happening within the blogging culture. According to the study made by Viestintätoimisto Manifesto in 2011, many bloggers keep their blog in hopes of establishing new networks, professional growth and earning income (Yle 2011). In 2013 already 70% of Finnish bloggers participating in a new study by Viestintätoimisto Manifesto reported receiving income from their blog (Blogibarometri 2013). Often bloggers receive their salary from some mediahouse (e.g. A-Lehdet) or the blog portal they are writing under.

In Finland, currently the most professional group of bloggers are the ones blogging about fashion and style. However, cosmetics and interior design bloggers are becoming increasingly professional as well. These three groups of bloggers also have much experience of brand cooperation (Viestintätoimisto Manifesto, Blogibarometri 2013).

The blogging culture has definitely seen some changes since the first blog post in 1996 and since mid-1999’s the popularity of blogs has increased exponentially (Herring,

Scheidt, Wright & Bonus 2005). From 2006 the number of blogs worldwide had grown from 35 million to a staggering 181 million by 2011 (Prayush 2012).

Number of Blogs Tracked by NM Incite

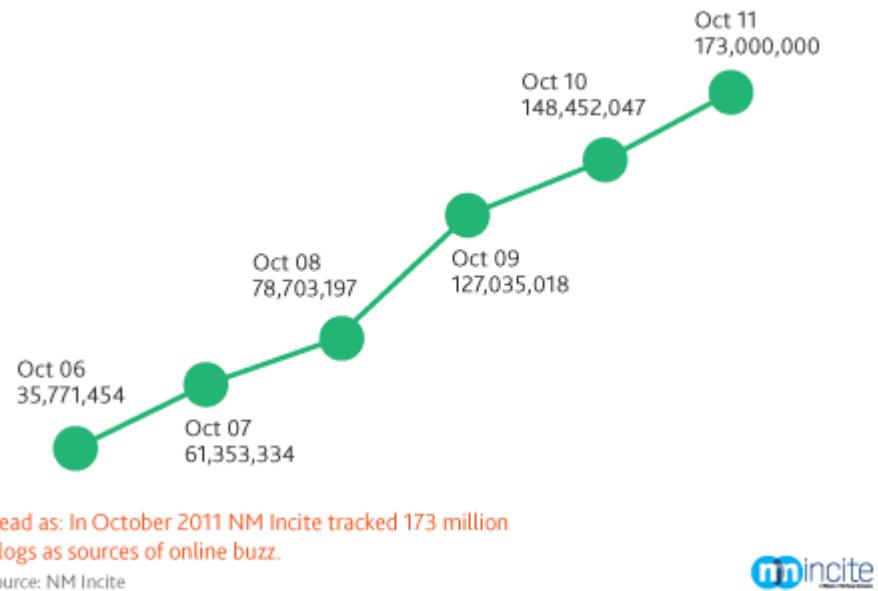


Figure 1. Increase in the amount of blogs worldwide between 2006-2011. NM Incite.

By 2011 the number of blogs worldwide was enormous and the popularity of blogs and blogging has continually been on the rise. Also in 2011 BlogPulse, a search engine and analytic system for blogs, estimated that 100 000 new blogs are added each day (McQuarrie, Miller, Phillips 2013, 140).

To date there are no accurate statistics on how many blogs there are in Finland and how many people actually read or actively follow blogs. However, in February 2014 almost 55 000 blogs were listed in Blogilista.fi, a website dedicated to gathering information on blogs (Blogilista.fi 2014). Also, according to the Finnish Broadcasting Company Yle, 55% of women between the ages of 25-34 alone read blogs (Yle 2013).

As this thesis concentrates on popular Finnish bloggers from the fields of fashion, life-style and cosmetics, the current top five blogs based on their subscribers are listed below. The numbers in the parentheses first show the amount of subscribers for the blog and secondly the amount of readers per week.

Top five blogs in Finland on January 28 2014:

Table 1. The top five blogs in Finland in January 2014. Blogilista.fi. Sanoma News.

Position	Blog name	Subscribers	Readers/week
1.	Mungolife	4193	96 003
2.	Motherfuckin' fashion	3818	27 748
3.	P.S. I love fashion	3441	55 997
4.	Nelliinan vaatehuone	3312	52 665
5.	No Fashion Victims	3183	32 927

So, blogs are very popular in Finland, but Sweden is still way ahead of us when it comes to the number of blog readers. The most popular Swedish blog, a fashion blog by Kenza Zouiten, has approximately 170 000 daily readers, i.e. over a million weekly readers. All the top five blogs in Sweden have hundreds of thousands weekly readers. Even the blog placing fifth on the list, Sophie Elise, has over 370 000 weekly readers (Bloggportalen.se 2014).

Although the most popular Swedish blog at the moment is a fashion blog, the top five list does not include only fashion blogs, unlike in Finland. In Sweden blogs on e.g. motherhood and daily life are also very popular.

Even though blogs in Finland do not reach the number of readers the blogs in Sweden do, they are still hugely popular and companies are beginning to understand the power blogs have in product visibility.

In 2009 Helsingin Sanomat reported that Finnish companies aren't interested in using bloggers as advertisers for their products, but now all that has changed. Today Finnish companies are very eager to send products to bloggers as the bloggers will most likely mention it in their blog (Hara 2012, 5). All this is a great opportunity for companies and it is also fairly inexpensive.

Bloggers are a great way to get visibility for brands, but bloggers have also found ways to make themselves and their blogs more visible. In Finland many bloggers have chosen to write their blogs under a blog portal or on the web pages of a women's magazine instead of writing under their own URL address. Bloggers are motivated to move under portals in order to gain more visibility, rewards and also to feel a sense of community. Bloggers also find that writing under a portal is easier and more carefree (Viestintätoimisto Manifesto 2013) than writing under an own URL address.

3.2 Blogs and the power of word-of-mouth

The popularity of blogs and the power of word-of-mouth (WOM) in blogs are undeniable as consumers enjoy reading blogs simply for their own enjoyment and pastime, but also to gain information on e.g. new products. Consumers perceive bloggers as being a trustworthy and a credible source of information (Gummerus et al. 2011, 1480), thus making them excellent marketers for products and brands.

A study carried out in Sweden in 2008 showed that 58% of blog readers had actually purchased a product after reading about it in a blog (Gummerus et al. 2011, 1480). A high percentage like this naturally raises the interest of companies and their desires to get bloggers to cooperate and promote their brand. In this thesis the term "promote" is used to describe the action of a blogger advertising a product or brand in her blog. A blogger can choose to have clearly recognizable advertisements on her website, e.g. brand banners. However, advertising in blogs is often made through product testings, i.e. the blogger receives a product from a company, which she tests and writes about in her blog. According to new regulations made by the Finnish Competition and Consumer Authority, a blogger should clearly state in her blog if the product testing and endorsement is made in cooperation with a brand (Kilpailu- ja kuluttajavirasto 2013, 3).

Blogs have also shaken the traditional balance of firms communicating to consumers e.g. via paid advertisements; blogs now provide a platform for conversation where consumers can exchange thoughts and opinions on the products the bloggers introduce and endorse. Of course, blogs and their discussion boards also provide information for companies as they can study the likes and dislikes of consumers (Gummer-

us et al. 2011, 1480), thus making it easier for companies to target specific products and brands for specific bloggers and a group of consumers.

It makes sense for companies to investigate blogs and what kind of a conversation they create as by this, companies can aim at making popular bloggers their “part-time marketers” (Gummerus et al. 2011, 1480). This may happen even without the bloggers really realizing it, because the primary motivation for bloggers to write a blog is not to market companies and their products, but instead to express themselves and share their passions and expertise to the world (Scott 2010, 59).

Bloggers make excellent marketers for products and brands also due to their capability of producing unique, exciting and different type of content about brands than the company itself. When a company writes about its’ own brand consumers might perceive it as being bland and impersonal as for bloggers are more personable and are not seen as representatives of companies. Bloggers usually blog with their own name and face and they interact with their readers on a more personal level; something that a large company might not be able to do. Bloggers also produce new content continuously, which is something that companies may not have resources for (Vuollo 2013).

If companies want bloggers to promote their products more and really make them their so called part-time marketers, it is crucial for companies to know how and through what channels to contact them and also how to build an actual relationship with them.

Chapter 5 of this thesis will discuss the importance of building relationships with bloggers. In order for the relationship building between PR agencies and bloggers to begin and be effective, PR agencies should acknowledge bloggers as a stakeholder group; this will be discussed in the following chapter.

4 Identifying bloggers as stakeholders

A company needs to acknowledge its different stakeholder groups and treat them accordingly. Although there is not one completely undisputed definition for the term “stakeholder”, below a couple definitions will be introduced.

In her book “The Future of Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management” Toth (2007, 29) introduces one of the most classic definitions for the term stakeholder, where a stakeholder is: “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the firm’s objectives”.

The definition above was created by philosopher and professor of business administration, R. Edward Freeman in 1984. Still today this definition is commonly used to describe the term “stakeholder”. The term has, however, faced criticism by scholars due to its broadness (Toth 2007, 28).

According to another definition, stakeholders can also be divided into primary and secondary stakeholders. With this thinking primary stakeholders can “harm or benefit the organization” and secondary stakeholders are “those who can affect or be affected by the actions of an organization” (Toth 2007, 29). As can be noticed, the latter definition is quite similar to the classic definition provided by Freeman. The definitions for primary and secondary stakeholders seem to be very similar, the difference being that secondary stakeholders can not affect or be affected by the organization’s actions to such a critical extent that the primary stakeholders can, e.g. the secondary stakeholders do not and cannot have the same kind of financial impact on the company as primary stakeholders do.

However, based on both of the definitions above, stakeholders are a group of people somehow affected by an organization’s actions, therefore e.g. customers, employees, government, company shareholders, directors, unions and the community are all stakeholders (BusinessDictionary.com 2014) of organizations.

When thinking about the stakeholders of PR agencies mainly press relations, i.e. media, journalists and nowadays bloggers come to mind. Public relations agencies do, however, have various other stakeholder groups to keep in mind as well. For instance also customers, employees, political people, suppliers and trade unions are all stakeholders of PR agencies (Quéré 2013). However, not all stakeholder groups are equally important and that is why it is useful to categorize stakeholders e.g. based on the power that they have and the degree that they are likely to display interest in the company's activities. The power-interest matrix by Joep Cornellisen (2011) is designed to help companies categorize their different stakeholder groups; the matrix will be introduced more precisely later on page 15.

As said, PR agencies have many various stakeholder groups, but this thesis will focus on bloggers as important stakeholders.

Bloggers are a new stakeholder group that companies should recognize. In their book “M2: Maineen uusi aalto (2011, 181) Aula and Heinonen introduce the idea of a “stakeholder group C” (later referred to as stakeholder group C), which is described as a creation of social media.

Due to the characteristics of stakeholder group C, bloggers, and especially widely-read bloggers, can be seen belonging to this stakeholder group.

The people of stakeholder group C are described to be connected and creative. They also produce and consume different types of contents, are eager to collaborate and are also communicationally competent. According to the theory this stakeholder group forms a new and unique stakeholder group, to which old communication methods may not be effective. It is also argued that their actions are difficult to predict. However, stakeholder group C does hold a great amount of positive potential for companies due to their vast social networks, large audience and desires to cooperate.

As mentioned previously, the downside of this new stakeholder group C is that their actions may be difficult to predict. Aula and Heinonen (2011, 181) argue that this stakeholder group is the first to point out if a company is doing something wrong and

they are also very active in communicating what is and what is not allowed for a company.

Although stakeholder group C may be unpredictable, it does hold great marketing potential for companies and brands, which is why this stakeholder group should be acknowledged and communicated with. Stakeholder group C can include all people active within different social media channels, but particularly bloggers can be seen belonging to this group due to the fact that they are especially active in producing content to the web. Bloggers also reach thousands, sometimes even millions, of readers. This means that anything they write about, positive or negative, will spread to publics in very little time.

If bloggers are viewed as stakeholders to the firm, PR agencies need to think about how and what to communicate to them. Different issues are communicated to different stakeholder groups, for instance a company would inform its shareholders of financial issues, but bloggers could be informed only of new product or service releases.

When communicating with stakeholders, companies should begin by categorizing its different stakeholder groups based on what stake they hold in the company's activities (Cornelissen 2011, 44). This categorization will help a company determine what issues each stakeholder group is interested in and what should and can be communicated to them.

The power-interest matrix below (figure 2) categorizes stakeholders based on the power that they have and the degree that they are likely to display interest in the company's activities (Cornelissen 2011, 48).

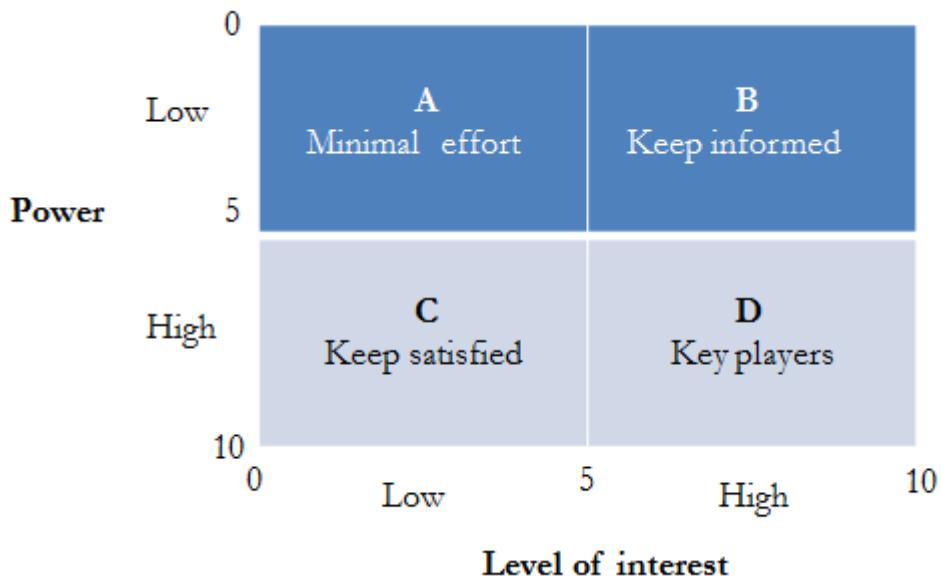


Figure 2. The power-interest matrix categorizes stakeholders based on the power they have in a company's activities. Joep Cornelissen. 2011.

The stakeholders in quadrant A (minimal effort) are people who have very low interest in the company's activities and therefore do not require close management from a company.

Quadrant B (keep informed) shows the stakeholder group that does have great interest in a company's activities, but they have a low level of influence. However, this stakeholder group should be kept well-informed so that they stay committed to the company and also spread positive word-of-mouth about the company.

In quadrant C (keep satisfied) is the stakeholder group that is the most difficult to maintain relationships with. This stakeholder group lacks interest in the company, but when it is dissatisfied with a certain corporate activity, it might exercise its power. Regulatory bodies, for example, can be placed in this quadrant.

Quadrant D (key players) is the most important stakeholder group to a company and they should be kept informed of company activities and decisions at all times, i.e. constant communication is required.

On the basis of this categorization, in this thesis bloggers are placed in quadrant B. Bloggers do not have a much influence within a company, e.g. a PR agency, but as they have great word-of-mouth power, they should be kept informed for example of new brands that the PR agency has begun representing. Bloggers will feel appreciated if they are kept informed of new brands, especially if it falls under their line of expertise, but this will also be good for the brand and the PR agency as the bloggers might endorse the brand in their blog and hence, increase visibility and sales for the brand.

It should also be noted that even though bloggers are an important stakeholder group, some bloggers are more important for brands and PR agencies than others. For instance the more popular a blog is e.g. in terms of subscribers and weekly readers, the more important that blogger is to a PR agency than a blog that only has few followers. Another issue that makes some bloggers more important than others is the subject they are blogging about. For instance for a PR agency focusing on fashion, cosmetics and lifestyle, bloggers blogging about those issues are the most important and are the ones to communicate and maintain relationships with.

5 Building relationships with bloggers

Occasional cooperation with bloggers can be practiced by PR agencies; however, this chapter will discuss the importance and necessity for public relations agencies to build relationships with bloggers.

5.1 Creating relationships by understanding

The key to building relationships is to understand the party that one wants to create a relationship with (Gummerus et al. 2011, 3); this applies to the attempts of a PR agency in creating relationships with bloggers.

As a company should understand the counterpart it wants to create a relationship with (in this case bloggers), they must begin by trying to understand what motivates the blogger to write a blog and also what motivates them to promote a brand. If the motives are clear it will be easier for PR agencies to create attractive messages and target the right product and brand to the right blogger.

It must be noted that the author of this thesis sees that it is important for PR agencies to actually create a relationship with popular bloggers instead of just wanting to cooperate with them occasionally. A relationship will take some time to build, but once established, the cooperation between a PR agency and a blogger will be less arduous and time consuming. Once the blogger also feels that (s)he has a relationship with a PR agency, (s)he is more likely to respond well and trust the messages received by the agency as well as the products and brands the PR agency represents.

Scott (2010, 240) also suggests in his book that PR professionals should create relationships with journalists, including bloggers. Approaching bloggers and getting coverage in widely-read blogs will lead into mainstream media attention as well. Scott goes onto saying that a way of establishing a relationship with journalists and bloggers is by commenting on their blog posts. PR professionals should consider what type of messages they send to whom and they should also compose messages that are especially crafted for a certain recipient, instead of just spamming everyone with the same message.

Creating relationships with bloggers is very beneficial for all brand representatives, because bloggers can produce new content and reach a lot of readers in very short time. Although traditional media (e.g. print, TV, radio) does reach a lot of consumers and is good for raising brand awareness, it cannot engage and create conversation with readers the same way that social media can. Also, although bloggers and social media are not completely free for companies, they are still a less expensive marketing tool than traditional media (Dawson & Swift 2013).

5.2 Blogger credibility and motives for brand endorsement

Most blogs, especially popular ones, advertise on their pages. However, the question is that what makes the bloggers choose to advertise a certain brand.

The study by Gummerus et al. (2011) suggests that most of the times bloggers choose to advertise products that they like and are interested in. One of the participants in the research (a popular blogger from Estonia) had also chosen to advertise a training program he had participated in himself, because he felt that he owed it to the company.

When cooperating with bloggers, one of the aims of PR agencies is to make bloggers respond positively to the products they have been given for testing. It is desirable that the blogger would then endorse the products in his/her blog and by that gain visibility and increased sales for the products. Nowadays it is important to be visible in blogs, as large visibility in blogs will lead into visibility in mainstream media as well (Scott 2010, 241).

The opinions and consumption choices of blog readers can be heavily influenced by credible bloggers. Publics seem to perceive bloggers to be honest and credible, because they are thought to be free from corporate interests (Chu, Kamal 2008, 26), this is one reason why bloggers are a powerful channel of marketing. If a blogger has been able to prove herself to the readers as an expert and credible source of information, the less she will have to justify her opinions to the readers. In such a situation readers are more likely to just accept the information as being accurate instead of truly scrutinizing it (Chu, Kamal 2008, 28). On the contrary, if blog readers perceive a blogger to have a

low level of trustworthiness, the readers' attitudes towards a certain brand mentioned in the blog are not highly affected (Chu, Kamal 2008, 29). This shows that it is crucial for brand representatives to target and cooperate with the right bloggers, i.e. bloggers who are widely-read and are suitable for the brand's image.

According to Chu and Kamal (2008, 28) blog readers will also trust the opinions and reviews of bloggers on brands even more if other bloggers write similar blog posts, i.e. the information presented must be bona fide if many bloggers agree. If this is true it makes sense for brand representatives to cooperate with many influential bloggers in order to make readers truly trust the message/brand endorsement.

As bloggers are considered as credible marketers for brands, it is essential that brand representatives target the right bloggers. Still, it is difficult for a PR agency to know beforehand exactly what brands and products a certain blogger will like or dislike. Nevertheless, by following their blog and building a relationship with them, the PR agency can better evaluate the response to certain products and should also be able to target certain products more precisely in order to increase sales. If a PR agency follows different blogs and bloggers, it will make it easier for them to contact bloggers as well, as they already have an insight into the blogger's personality.

Popular bloggers are approached daily by PR agencies and other companies. Thus, it is important for companies to create the right kind of messages and channels for optimal interest and attention to bloggers in order to make their message stand out.

In 2009 a PR agency called Text 100 conducted a web survey for 449 bloggers from 21 countries in order to find out *how* and *to what extent* bloggers want to cooperate with companies (Scott 2010, 68). The results were especially good, since 90% of the respondents wanted to be contacted by companies who operate in the field that the blogger writes about.

A similar survey was conducted in Finland in 2013 by communications agency Manifesto. Altogether 149 bloggers (132 women and 15 men) participated in the survey. The survey showed that 94% of the bloggers have been contacted by PR agencies and

other companies in hopes of cooperation. Most of the bloggers reacted positively to the contacts and almost 50% wish that they would be contacted even more (Viestintätoimisto Manifesto 2013).

According to another Finnish survey, carried out in 2010, bloggers appreciate most messages from companies that include product samples and invitations to events (Viestintätoimisto Deski 2010, 12). The survey also found out that 67% of the bloggers were interested in cooperating more extensively with companies as well.

So, as bloggers do wish to be contacted, it is necessary for PR agencies to know how bloggers want to be contacted and what the message should include.

Scott (2010, 69) writes in his book that PR professionals often fail to send the right type of material and messages to bloggers, because they don't really read the blogs or understand the "target bloggers' communities". PR professionals often send bloggers corporate material, e.g. press releases, not realizing that that is not the sort of material bloggers are eager to post on their website. Instead, Scott suggests (2010, 69) that bloggers should be treated as individuals. If bloggers are treated as the individuals they are, most likely the messages sent to them would also be more effective and interesting to the blogger.

Also, in the business world today it is crucial for PR agencies to treat important and influential bloggers the same way they treat important reporters (Scott 2010, 241). This means that PR agencies should e.g. send bloggers information that would be useful for them; this information should also be specifically targeted. The blogger is likely to appreciate receiving targeted information and will help create a trust between the PR agency and the blogger. The survey carried out by PR agency Deski also suggests that bloggers should be contacted by creating messages that are specifically targeted at them (Viestintätoimisto Deski 2010, 13).

6 Research method and implementation of the research

This chapter will introduce the chosen research and data collection method for this study as well as criteria for the bloggers participating in this study.

6.1 Qualitative research

The chosen research method for this thesis was a qualitative research as it was seen as the best method for gaining the appropriate data for the study.

Often in sciences it is difficult to find just one precise and accepted by all definition for various terms and qualitative research does not make an exception. However, in this thesis qualitative research will be defined by the following characteristics.

Qualitative research aims to describe the nature of things and also to understand the human nature; in other words qualitative research aims to describe the “real life” (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2009, 161). It also aims to study the research subject or object in the most holistic way possible and by this also understanding that when gathering data from people, the data may not always be the most objective data possible, as people and their opinions are always tied to their own personal values and beliefs (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 161).

For this thesis, qualitative research was seen as the most suitable method for finding the most accurate research data, because thematic interviews with semi-structured and open-ended questions will allow the interviewee to elaborate more freely on her answers and thoughts and thus, go more in-depth into the issue. If necessary, the interviewer also has the opportunity to ask additional and clarifying questions throughout the course of the interview and by this, gain more concise information. In an interview, the interviewee may also provide more information on herself and the subject in question than the interviewer had anticipated beforehand (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 205).

6.2 Data collection

To gain the qualitative data, six (6) influential Finnish bloggers were interviewed. A thematic interview consisting of semi-structured and open-ended questions was carried out. Five (5) of the bloggers were interviewed face-to-face but due to scheduling issues one (1) blogger answered the questions in written form via Facebook messenger. All interviews were conducted in Finnish during February and March 2014. Five (5) of the interviews were taped with a voice recorder and were later transcribed into written form.

The interviews consisted of eleven (11) questions which were sent beforehand to the interviewees by email so that they could prepare and provide more profound answers in the interview. However, as a thematic interview allows it, additional questions were asked during the course of each interview in order to gain more concise information. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes.

To achieve the most honest and therefore best possible answers for the research, the bloggers and their blog were promised anonymity and thus their names will not be made public in this thesis.

All of the chosen six bloggers for the study were women between the ages of 25-33 and have been blogging actively during the past 3-6 years. The chosen bloggers were women due to the requests of the commissioning party WHY NOT PR. In Finland the most popular (in terms of readers) fashion and cosmetics blogs are kept by women and therefore they were seen as the most suitable interviewees. Fashion and cosmetics bloggers also often cooperate with brands and therefore they can provide valuable insight into the research.

To achieve the best possible research data all interviewed bloggers had to fill the following criteria:

- experienced bloggers, i.e. have been blogging actively at least for the past two years

- blogging about issues related to lifestyle, traveling, fashion and/or cosmetics
- are popular on terms of subscribers and/or weekly readers
- have been contacted before by brand representatives in hopes of cooperation and product endorsement
- have cooperated with companies in the past

As the commissioning party of this thesis, WHY NOT PR, concentrates on beauty, cosmetics and lifestyle brands, it was necessary that the participating bloggers in this research blog about similar issues. This type of bloggers understand the field and can provide more valuable information for the research than what other type of bloggers could.

Each of the participating bloggers writes their blog under one of the following blog portals and are amongst the most read blogs within their own blog portal:

- Bella blogit
- Fit Fashion
- Indie Days
- Rantapallo

Bella blogit is a blog portal consisting of 10 lifestyle blogs written by women. The blogs consist of themes such as fashion, cosmetics, sports, traveling, cooking and interior design (Bella blogit 2014). During the past six months from September 2013 to February 2014 Bella blogit- portal had on average 50 000 visitors per week, however peaking with over 120 000 visitors on week 4 of 2014 (TNS Metrix 2014).

Out of the six interviewed bloggers, two write their blogs under Bella blogit. One of the blogs concentrates mainly on issues related to fashion and cosmetics. The blogger has been blogging actively for the past six years and cooperates often with various brands. On average the blog has over 13 000 weekly readers. The other blogger writing under Bella blogit has been blogging for three years and has approximately 12 000 readers each week (Blogilista.fi 2014). The blog is a lifestyle blog concentrating on the blogger's everyday life and issues such as fashion and interior design.

Fit Fashion blog portal is a portal dedicated to healthy lifestyle and training blogs. Currently in March 2014 the portal consists of 70 blogs, out of which 63 are held by women and the remaining seven (7) by men (Fit Fashion 2014). Fit Fashion blog portal opened in April 2013 and during November 2013- March 2014 the portal had approximately 88 000 weekly visitors. However, the number of weekly visitors is continuously increasing and during the beginning of 2014 the number of weekly visitors has been approximately 100 000 (TNS Metrix 2014).

One of the interviewed bloggers writes her blog under the Fit Fashion portal. She has been blogging actively for the past three years and has approximately 5 000 weekly readers (Blogilista.fi). She cooperates often with various brands and holds many competitions for her readers where they can win prizes from the brands she promotes in her blog.

Indie Days- blog portal was founded in January 2010 and consists of approximately 300 lifestyle blogs, however with the majority of them relating to fashion (Indie Days 2014). Between November 2013 and March 2014 Indie Days portal has constantly approximately 300 000 weekly visitors (TNS Metrix 2014).

Out of the six interviewed bloggers, one keeps her blog under Indie Days blog portal. She has been blogging for five years and has approximately 25 000 weekly readers (Blogilista.fi 2014). The blog is a fashion, style and cosmetics blog.

Rantapallo is a blog portal dedicated to traveling. Anyone can start up their own blog under the portal and currently in March 2014 the portal includes over 160 blogs (Rantapallo 2014). Between November 2013 and March 2014 the blog portal had over 190 000 weekly visitors (TNS Metrix 2014).

Out of interviewed bloggers, two keep their blogs under Rantapallo blog portal. One of the bloggers has been blogging for almost five years and has approximately 40 000 readers each week. The blog is a traveling and lifestyle blog, however, including also blog posts on fashion. The bloggers has cooperated with various brands and advertises on her website. The other blogger writing under Rantapallo has been blogging for

about three years and at the moment her blog has under 100 weekly readers (Blogilista.fi 2014). The blog is a travel and photography blog.

7 Results

This chapter will present the findings obtained from the interviews. The interview can be divided into three parts based on the theme of the questions. These themes are introduced below.

7.1 Contacting bloggers

In this part of the interview the purpose was to find out how often bloggers are contacted by brand representatives, through which channels and how they wish to be contacted. The purpose was also to find out what kind of a title a contact message should have and what should the message itself include. The bloggers were also asked if they had some memorable, good or bad, contacts they have gotten.

All of the six bloggers are contacted by different brand representatives, but the frequency of contacts is linked to seasons as during summer and Christmas time the number of contacts is very minimal or non-existent. Some dispersion on how often each blogger is contacted by different brands can be found:

- Two (2) of the bloggers reported being contacted daily by different brands
- One (1) reported being contacted once a week
- Three (3) reported being contacted once or a couple times a month

The answers also revealed that the amount of contacts is very closely related to how often they have been writing blog posts, i.e. the more often they make posts, the more often they are contacted by brands.

There is also some difference between the different blog portals the interviewees write under. From the bloggers 5/6 say that they are contacted personally to their own email address they have created for their blog. However, one (1) blogger said that most of the time she is contacted by employees of the portal in charge of advertising and all cooperation. For that portal, brands mainly contact the portal, which then suggests suitable bloggers for the cooperation. Still, if the blogger is contacted personally, she

can decide for herself whether or not to cooperate. Her answer also revealed that smaller brands prefer to contact her personally instead of through the portal.

The bloggers were asked **how they are contacted and how they wish to be contacted** by brands. The table below shows the different channels through which they are contacted:

Table 2. The table demonstrates which channels the bloggers are contacted through.

Blogger	Email	Channel of contact	Phone	Blog
		Facebook: blog or personal		
1	X	X	X	
2	X	X	X	
3	X	X		
4	X	X		
5	X			
6	X			

The results reveal that almost 100% of the time they are all contacted through email. Also, each of them reported that that is the channel they wish to be contacted through. The reason for email being the most preferred way of contacting is that they can read it at the most suitable time for them. Email also allows them to really concentrate on the message and find out more about the brand before answering the message and possibly starting cooperation. Another reason for preferring email was that by that they always have a clear record of what has been communicated and agreed upon.

The interviewed bloggers felt that Facebook was not only a quite ineffective way of contacting as messages often go unnoticed, but they also saw it as not being as professional as e.g. email. However, 3/6 bloggers said that if a small brand or a brand that they have already cooperated with in the past sent them a message through Facebook they would see it as acceptable and would answer the message. One of the bloggers reported having received event invitations through Facebook and felt that they were actually “nice”.

Two of the bloggers said that they occasionally also receive phone calls from brand representatives, mainly PR agencies. Both of them thought that it is nice and felt more personal, however, they said that they still need all details in written and most preferably via email. Two bloggers felt that phone calls would go unanswered due to irregular working hours and because of that are quite inefficient.

None of the six bloggers reported ever being contacted straight through their blog. This, however, does not seem surprising as most likely all cooperation suggestions want to be kept in private by the company and the blogger.

7.2 Importance of title and personalization of the message

When the bloggers were asked about **what kind of title should a contact message from a brand representative be** all of the answers were in-line with one another. The most important thing is that the title clearly states what the message concerns, i.e. is it for example an invitation, a press release or maybe a suggestion for cooperation. The bloggers all said that it should be as informative as possible, because they open messages based on its title. 5 bloggers out 6 said that they do open all messages they receive, however, the title of the message determines how fast they will open the message. If it is well-titled it will raise their attention and they will open the message at once when they see it. One blogger mentioned that if a message seems in any way as being just an ad, she will move it to the trashcan straight away.

So, when a brand representative contacts a blogger the title of the message is the first important thing, but the message itself is even more important. The bloggers were asked **what a message from brand representatives should include** and yet again the answers were very much in-line with one another.

One of the first things that all of the bloggers felt that is important is that the message feels personal and that it is directed to them and their blog. They saw a message being personal even if the message simply starts with “Hi X (first name)”. The bloggers reported often receiving messages that begin with just “Hi blogger”. Each of the blog-

gers said that that kind of message gives a bad first impression on the brand and the company in question, since they couldn't even bother writing the bloggers name.

The answers also revealed that not only mentioning the bloggers name, but mentioning something about their blog and why it would be suitable for a particular campaign or other cooperation is equally important. The message should feel personal on all levels and it should show that the brand sending the message knows exactly what the bloggers is writing about and what kind of a personality she is. One of the bloggers mentioned a particularly good message where the sender was able to point out a three-month old blog post she had made; she felt it showed that the sender truly is familiar with the blog and blogger.

Although it is extremely important that the message feels personal, the message also needs to include the following:

- who is contacting and from which company
- what is being offered to the blogger and what the brand wants in return
- contact details

What is being offered to the blogger and what the company wants in return was extremely important to all of the bloggers. They also wished that it would be very clearly and even bluntly stated.

One blogger also saw it to be important that the suggested cooperation or product endorsement is transparent, i.e. if a brand wishes that the blogger doesn't mention in her blog that she received a certain product or service for free, she would not go along with it. She also reported getting contacts where the brand wishes that she doesn't endorse another brand e.g. for the next two months. The reaction to this type of request is very negative and the cooperation will be turned down.

When the bloggers were asked to give an example of a good or bad contact they have received from a brand representative, all of the answers had one attribute in common: the best contact was personal. Each of the bloggers mentioned that the best contact

they have received is when the brand representative was able to show why she has the right personality and the right type of blog for the cooperation.

Two of the interviewed bloggers had also had bad ways of contacting them. The other blogger was contacted by a large multinational company, which approached her by saying that she may write about their company and receive a 20% discount on a selected product. She reacted very negatively to this message and later was even careful not to mention the company in her blog as she did not want to support it.

Another bad way of contacting was by sending a product by surprise and unannounced to the bloggers home and later asking why she had not written anything about it in her blog. The blogger felt that this was a bad way of approaching her and that it would be best to agree on product deliveries and promotions beforehand.

7.3 Bloggers view on brand cooperation

The objective of this part of the interview was to find out what motivates the bloggers to cooperate with different brands and endorse them in their blogs. The aim was also to find out what raises their interest towards a new brand.

The bloggers were asked **how they feel about brands contacting them** and whether or not these contacts are desired by them. The result was that all six (6) bloggers want to be contacted by different brands, especially since cooperation can always also be turned down if it is not the right type of brand for the blog.

One of the reasons for wanting brands to contact them is that by that more content can be produced to the blog and one blogger felt that since she works very hard on her blog, it is nice to get something in return (e.g. products). However, this same blogger revealed that she would rather concentrate on broader cooperation with some selected brands instead of cooperating with many different brands at the same time.

Another blogger saw it to be very important that the brand contacting her knows her personality and the type of blog she keeps. She said that many brands contact all blog-

gers without really knowing the types of blogs in question. It is of great importance that the brand targets the right type of blogger already in the beginning. Again, the necessity of treating bloggers as individuals comes out.

7.4 Motivations for brand cooperation

The bloggers were also asked **what motivates them to cooperate with brands** and brand representatives, e.g. PR agencies. The main motivations for brand cooperation were:

- Suitable brand, i.e. a brand that reflects the personality of the blogger
- Everybody (blogger, brand and blog readers) gaining something from the cooperation
- Sharing information with readers
- Producing more content to the blog
- Product gifts

It became very clear from all the bloggers' answers that a big motive for them was that the brand "looks like them", i.e. it is suitable for their personality and the theme of their blog. For instance the interviewed fitness blogger said that all brand cooperation must somehow be linked to the theme of healthy lifestyle and taking care of oneself and if it is not, she would not cooperate with the brand. It was also important that the brand desiring to cooperate with the blogger proves to the blogger why she is the one that they want to cooperate with.

One blogger revealed that a great motivation for her to cooperate with a brand is if she gets to influence how the cooperation will be executed. She felt that if she has influence on, e.g. how the product is presented, the more motivated she is to cooperate with the brand. She felt that all brand promotions should be executed in a way that it also reflects her personality.

The interview revealed that none of the bloggers would promote products and brands in their blog if it is not in anyways related to the theme of their blog. This was the case

even when they had been offered monetary compensation for the endorsement deal. The reason for turning such deals down was that they didn't want to ruin the image of their blog and lose readers. Two bloggers felt that their readers would straight away notice if they made pure advertising of brands in their blog and were sure that this would affect their credibility and the amount of blog readers.

Another motivation for cooperating with brands was the aspect of everybody (themselves, the brand and blog readers) winning, i.e. gaining something from the cooperation. Two (2) bloggers mentioned that a win-win-win situation was their main motivation for cooperating with brands. This means that the bloggers want the brand to get a true benefit out of the cooperation, e.g. new customers and increased sales, but they themselves want to benefit from it as well; the benefit can e.g. be product gifts. It was also important that blog readers benefit from the cooperation, for example they get to find out easily of new and interesting brands and products. So, sharing information with readers was also seen as a motivation for brand cooperation.

Five (5) of the interviewed bloggers also mentioned the product gifts or free services as being a motivation for cooperation. It is nice to receive free products and services, but yet again, they must be the type that is suitable for the theme of the blog. One blogger mentioned that by receiving these giveaways she is also able to produce more content to her blog.

In this part of the interview the bloggers were also asked **what raises their interest towards a new brand.**

The answers for this question revealed that for three (3) out of the six (6) bloggers the brand has to be related to their blog's theme in order to raise their attention. The remaining three (3) bloggers felt that if the product is good and it is well presented it can raise their attention in any case. A press release and the visual aspects in it as well as events were mentioned as good ways to introduce and promote new brands.

Two of the interviewed bloggers said that visual aspects are very important when a new brand is being introduced to them. If the first contact message from a brand repre-

sentative includes visual elements such as photos and/or videos, it will raise their attention and interest more than if it is e.g. a press release including only text. The other blogger also mentioned that it would be good and effective if the message would also include all the social media channels that the brand is involved in (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest). She said that she always checks those out and it would be best if they were already included as links in the message or press release.

Good pictures and well-written and structured press releases can make the blogger excited about the brand and make her want to share it with her readers, however, as two of the bloggers reported, the press releases they receive are often quite bland and full of text with only a couple photos.

7.5 Relationship between bloggers and brands

The final part of the interview aimed at finding out **how bloggers see relationships between themselves and brand representatives**, especially PR agencies and also do they feel that it has some value and what would that value be.

When the bloggers were asked if they want to build a relationship with brand representatives, especially PR agencies, 5/6 of the bloggers replied affirmatively. One of the bloggers replied yes and no. She felt that having a too close relationship with just one PR agency might close doors and lead to a lack of contacts. Still, she did appreciate close and friendly relationships with brand representatives.

The five (5) bloggers who wanted to build and maintain a relationship with PR agencies felt that it would be beneficial due to the following reasons:

- it is easier to communicate and organize things with familiar people
- the blogger can easily stop by at the agency's office to hear about new brands
- relationships with brands creates a continuum for blog content

The answers revealed the importance that human relations have on blogger-brand cooperation. The bloggers felt that having a relationship with brand representatives would ease their life and how cooperation with brands is organized. One of the blog-

gers also felt that the best way of introducing a new brand to her is if she visits a PR agency and the representative introduces the brands and products face-to-face.

One of the bloggers also revealed that she would write a better blog post promoting a new product and brand if the PR agency that introduced it to her is sincere and also wants to maintain a more friend-like relationship with the blogger. She has seen differences between PR agencies and she feels that some of them are not interested in building any type of relationship with the blogger and instead just want to use her blog as an advertising channel. She is not eager to cooperate with this type of agencies and because of that prefers to work only with an agency that she has good relations and feels comfortable with. This answer shows that an actual warm and sincere relationship with bloggers is beneficial for brand representatives as they might get their brand promoted in a more positive light.

One of the bloggers mentioned that one of the reasons for wanting to create and maintain a relationship with different brands is that it also creates a continuum to her blog and its content. She feels that by having a long-lasting relationship with a certain brand(s) it will also benefit her readers. The brand(s) will be visible often in her blog and because of that readers have time to really familiarize themselves with the brand(s). She also feels that cooperation is much more natural if an actual relationship is built and maintained. She goes onto saying that long-lasting relationships will also help her differentiate her blog from others, because most likely the brands that she has been promoting will not be as visible in other blogs.

When asked about how the bloggers wish to build and maintain relationships with brand representatives their answers were very much in-line with one another. They felt that a good way of keeping relations is by visiting the agency and by attending various events such as PR days and press conferences. Visiting the office and attending events are an easy and natural way of catching up and meeting with the brand representatives.

Finally the bloggers were asked that **do they see value in building a relationship with brand representatives** and if they did, what kind.

All six (6) of the bloggers agreed that there is value and that building a relationship is beneficial for both parties, the blogger and the brand.

The table (table 3) below lists the benefits that the bloggers saw in creating and maintaining relationships with brand representatives. It includes benefits for both, the bloggers and brands, however, focusing on the benefits for the bloggers.

Table 3. List of benefits of relationship building for bloggers and brands as seen by the interviewed bloggers.

	Benefit	
	Blogger	Brand
1.	Trust	Trust
2.	Visibility	Visibility
3.	Ease	<u>Blogger writes better blog posts</u>
4.	More content to the blog	
5.	Finding out about new brands and products	
6.	New contacts and opportunities	
7.	Remuneration for her work	

Although the benefits are listed in random order in the table above (table 3) it is clear that creating a relationship with brand representatives will create mutual trust and also ease the work and cooperation for both parties. One of the interviews revealed that a good and trusted relationship will also make her want to write better posts concerning the brands that the PR agency represents.

Visibility was seen mostly as a benefit for the brand, but as one blogger mentioned if she cooperates with a certain brand there is always the possibility of getting a link to her blog to the brand's website and thus, increase the amount of her blog readers. She also mentioned that visibility is a good reward for the amount of work put in a blog post promoting a certain brand, i.e. the reward does not always have to be tangible.

Finding out easily about new brands and products was also seen as a benefit from a relationship with brand representatives. The interviews revealed that bloggers truly en-

joy finding out about new brands and contacts with PR agencies make it easy for them to know about the latest brands and products. Learning about what's new in the market also brings more content to the blog.

For one blogger the greatest benefit from a relationship with brand representatives was that the relationship may lead to even more contacts, relationships and possibly even new career opportunities.

Although compensation in the form of money or products was not seen as the greatest benefit from a relationship with brand representatives, it still did play a role in the maintaining of relationships. However, based on the interviews product gifts were valued over monetary compensation.

7.6 Validity and reliability

Although the theoretical framework behind this study does support the findings made in this research, the results of this study can not be generalized to concern all bloggers. This was a qualitative research with all interviewees expressing their own personal feelings and views; thus, their views may not be the views of all bloggers as opinions are always tied to ones own values and beliefs. Also, it must be noted that a specific type of bloggers participated in this research and therefore the results obtained from their interviews may not applicable to different type of bloggers (e.g. men blogging about technical issues).

However, the results obtained from the interviews act as good guidelines for all brand representatives when beginning or maintaining brand–blogger cooperation.

8 Discussion

This chapter will present the conclusions for this study. Also, based on the findings of the research, recommendations for action will be made for the commissioning party of this thesis, WHY NOT PR.

8.1 Conclusions

The conclusions on the findings made from the research will be presented in this chapter. As the thematic interview was divided into three sections based on the themes, the conclusions will also be presented as three sections. Recommendations for action for the commissioning party will also be presented in this chapter.

The first theme of the interview was about brand-to-blogger communication. The aim was to find out **how often bloggers are contacted by brand representatives, through which channels and how they wish to be contacted**. The purpose was also to find out **what kind of a title a contact message should have and what should the message itself include**.

Based on the answers of the bloggers, fashion bloggers get most contacts from different brand representatives. They are contacted daily, except during holiday season in summer and Christmas time. Almost 100% of the time the bloggers were approached by email and only sometimes by phone or through Facebook. The bloggers also felt that email was by far the most suitable and effective method of contacting them.

So, the bloggers do prefer being contacted via email, but when a blogger is contacted daily, the importance of sending concise and well-thought of messages comes all the more crucial for brands if they hope to get the attention of the approached blogger. The interviews revealed that although 5/6 bloggers open all received emails, the **title of the message determines how fast they will open the message**. This data reveals that the title of the message is of great significance and it is something that the sender (i.e. brand representative) should truly think about. When a PR agency approaches a blogger, especially for the first time, it is best if they clearly state what the message

concerns, e.g. is it an invitation to an event, a product sample or perhaps a press release.

The bloggers were also asked to express their thoughts on what the contact message in itself (e.g. email) should include. As mentioned earlier in the results chapter of this thesis (chapter 8.1) all bloggers felt that the first important thing about the message is that it feels **personal**, i.e. that the message is directed to that one blogger in particular. The message can feel personal already by such a simple thing like addressing to the blogger by her name and not just e.g. “Hi” or “Hi blogger”. This, however, seemed to be an issue that most brand representatives fail at doing. Although addressing to the blogger by her name is a great start, what makes the message even better and more personal is by e.g. mentioning a blog post that caught the brand’s attention or some precise reason why she and her blog, above all other blogs, would be exactly the right one to promote the brand.

The thoughts and answers of the bloggers about messages having to be personal in order to truly raise their attention is also in-line with Scott (2010) when he argued that all bloggers should be treated and contacted as individuals. This thought was introduced earlier in chapter 6. The survey carried out by PR agency Deski also suggests that bloggers should be contacted by creating messages that are specifically targeted at them (Viestintätoimisto Deski 2010, 13).

These answers from bloggers have great value and importance for all brand representatives. One of the most valuable data gained from these answers is the importance and necessity of approaching bloggers on a personal level and treating them as individuals; even a small thing like addressing the bloggers by their name takes the brand and possible brand-blogger cooperation a long way. As brands are continuously competing for the attention of influential bloggers, the significance of showing to the blogger that the brand is familiar with her blog is of the utmost importance and something that all brand representatives should concentrate on if they desire to cooperate with bloggers, especially the influential and widely-read ones.

Although approaching the bloggers as the individuals they are is the most important thing for the bloggers, other important issues were to clearly state **what the blogger will receive for the cooperation** and **what the brand wants in return** as well as who is contacting them and from which company and also precise contact details.

In the second part of the interview bloggers were asked **whether or not they wish to be contacted by different brand representatives**. The results were very good as all six (6) interviewed bloggers want to be approached by brand representatives. Their answers were in-line with the survey conducted by PR agency Text 100 where 90% of the 449 bloggers who participated in the survey wanted to be contacted by companies who operate in the field that they blog about (Scott 2010, 69). More details of this survey can be found from chapter 6 of this thesis.

So, the results from this study and from the more extensive survey by Text 100 suggest that bloggers truly do wish to be contacted by different brands. Since bloggers do wish to be contacted, what remains important is how brand representatives introduce and inform bloggers about new products and brands. Scott (2010, 69) claims that PR professionals often send bloggers press releases and other corporate material that the bloggers are not eager or likely to post in their blog. The interviews conducted for this study reveal that 2/6 six bloggers do not wish to receive press releases, two (2) are indifferent to them and the remaining two (2) don't mind getting them, however, the content of the press releases should be renewed. Seems like at the moment the press releases the bloggers receive contain a lot of text and only little visual content, although **visual content** is exactly the thing that bloggers appreciate. Thus, the press releases should be updated and visual content such as photos and videos should be added to them. Also, the different social media channels that the brand is active in should be added as links to the press release. Perhaps if the content of press releases was updated and they were made visually more attractive, bloggers wouldn't mind receiving them and the time spent on composing and sending press releases would actually be time and money well-spent as the effectiveness of press releases would be increased.

In the second part of the interview the bloggers were also asked **what motivates them to cooperate with brands and brand representatives** and also **what raises their attention in a brand and makes them want to promote it** in their blog.

The study by Gummerus et al. (2011) suggests that most of the time bloggers choose to promote products that they like and are interested in. The same result could be obtained from the interviews for this study as well. The bloggers participating in this study said that they are motivated to promote a brand that represents their personality. Since it is extremely difficult to know the likes and dislikes of a blogger without examining her blog and getting to know the blogger on a more personal level, the author of this thesis feels that it is justified to claim that brand representatives should aim at creating a relationship with bloggers, especially influential ones. A relationship with a blogger will reveal her personality and because of that it will be easier for brand representatives to target certain products and campaigns to the right bloggers.

The conducted interviews also suggest that **bloggers do think about themselves as a brand** as well, which is why they carefully consider which brands to endorse in their blogs. The brand image must always be in-line with their personality and blog. Again, a relationship and understanding of bloggers' personalities will help target the right brands to the right bloggers.

In the final part of the interview the bloggers were asked to express their views on **how they see relationships between brands and bloggers**. They were asked whether or not they wish to build a relationship with different brand representatives, especially PR agencies and do they see value in building a relationship with them.

As mentioned earlier in part 8.3, 5/6 bloggers wish to build a relationship with brand representatives. One (1) blogger felt that too close relationships with brands may lead to closing doors from somewhere else and for that was unsure whether or not she wishes to build a relationship with any brand.

So, many bloggers do wish to build and maintain relationships with PR agencies and the feeling should be mutual, just like Scott (2010, 240) wrote in his book. Scott (2010)

suggests that PR professionals should create relationships with all journalists, bloggers alike. The argument for this is that getting coverage in widely-read blogs will lead to mainstream attention as well. It is likely that this works both ways; an issue that is covered in mainstream media can also lead to attention in the blogosphere and thus increase visibility in social media as well. Naturally, the more visibility a brand and product has in all media, the chances of higher sales are increased. A brand getting more visibility in all media is of great value to it.

When the bloggers were asked do they see value in relationship building with brand representatives, **visibility was one value that they saw for both parties**: the brand and the blogger. As the number of blogs and blog readers are continuously increasing (as demonstrated earlier in part 3.1) the chances of visibility are getting better for brands, especially if they are able to cooperate with influential and widely-read bloggers. As visibility and sales are of key importance to brands, the brand representatives should aim at creating a relationship with bloggers. As revealed in the results part of this thesis (chapter 8), **bloggers are even motivated to write better stories on brands if they know, like and are in a trusted relationship with the brand representative**. The author of this thesis sees that this is a very essential reason for why brand representatives should aim at creating a relationship with bloggers; the benefits can be very substantial for business.

8.2 Recommendations for commissioning party

Based on the findings from this research, the following recommendations are made for the commissioning party WHY NOT PR:

- **Contact bloggers via email.** Facebook messages are ineffective; however, phone calls can be made if the same information is later provided also in writing via email.
- **Title all messages as informatively as possible**, i.e. show in the title of the message what it concerns (e.g. an event, a cooperation possibility with brand X, a press release).

- **Address the blogger by name** when contacting her, not just e.g. “Hi” or “Hi blogger”. Bloggers appreciate being addressed to by their name and it will instantly create a more personal feeling and also give out a better image of the brand and brand representative in question.
- **Show the blogger why she and her blog is the one the brand wants** to cooperate with above all others. This can be done e.g. by mentioning a specific blog post(s) that raised the attention of the brand.
- **Be as honest and clear as possible in all messages sent to bloggers.** When a blogger is approached in hopes of brand cooperation the message should right away reveal what is being offered to the blogger and what the brand wants in return.
- **Do not ask bloggers to keep the brand cooperation in secret.** Bloggers react very negatively to this type of requests and will most likely turn down the cooperation proposal.
- **Add photos, videos and links to the social media channels the brand in question is active in.** At the moment bloggers view press releases as quite ineffective and boring. By adding more visual content the interest of bloggers can be raised and thus, the effectiveness of the press release increased.
- **Keep bloggers informed and target your messages.** Bloggers enjoy hearing about new brands and products that are related to the theme of their blog. Bloggers are continuously seeking for more content to their blogs; this is a great thing for brand representatives as well.
- **Brainstorm together with the blogger how the brand cooperation/campaign could be executed.** Bloggers enjoy cooperating and being involved. They want to make good campaigns that also project her personality.
- **Keep inviting bloggers to events and to your office.** Bloggers like attending events and see them as a good way of maintaining a relationship with brand representatives. They also think that stopping by at the office is a great way to catch up and to hear about brands and products.

Finally, on the basis of the interviews it became clear that bloggers truly do want to build relationships with brand representatives such as PR agencies. They felt that it will ease their life and make all future cooperation simpler. They want to be kept informed

of new brands and events and want to get to know the people they are working with. When they know and trust their business partner, they are eager to write better blog posts on the brands that e.g. the PR agency represents. This of course, is of great value to all brand representatives and therefore PR agencies should view bloggers as an important business partner and stakeholder group.

8.3 Self-assessment

The aim of this research was to find out how influential bloggers want to be contacted, what the contact message should include, what motivates bloggers to cooperate with brands and do they see value in creating relationships with brand representatives such as public relations agencies.

I feel that the objectives of this thesis were achieved and that also the commissioning party of this thesis gained information which will be of use for them in their future brand-blogger cooperation.

I also feel that I was able to find a lot of relevant and current background literature for the theory of my thesis. The results obtained from the interviews with the bloggers also ended up supporting the theoretical part of my thesis.

My thesis was very well managed throughout its' whole process. In fact, I was able to turn in the final version of my thesis two weeks before the scheduled deadline; this was mainly due to strict self-control and keeping in mind the final deadline for the thesis.

This thesis process has been a great learning experience for me as I got to write about and study a subject which was of great interest to me. I also feel that this subject is very current and the data obtained from the research will come in useful.

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Attachment

Attachment 1: The questions used in the interview.

1. Kontaktioivatko eri brändien edustajat sinua usein? Kuinka usein?
2. Miten he lähestyvät sinua? Puhelimitse, sähköpostitse, Facebookin kautta, blogisi kautta, kirjeellä, jollain muulla tavalla?
3. Kuinka toivot, että sinua lähestytäisiin? Sosiaalisen media kautta, puhelimitse, sähköpostitse, kirjeellä, jollain muulla tavalla?
4. Minkälainen otsikko viesteissä (esim. sähköposti) pitäisi olla, jotta se herättäisi sinun mielenkiintosi? Mitä otsikon pitäisi pitää sisällään?
5. Mitä itse viestin pitäisi pitää sisällään?
6. Onko jotain mieleenpainuvaa yhteydenottoa minkä olet saanut? Jos kyllä, millainen se oli?
7. Koetko, että yhteydenotot eri brändeiltä ovat haluttuja?
8. Mikä motivoi sinua yhteistyöhön brändien edustajien, esim. PR-toimiston kanssa?
9. Mikä herättää mielenkiintosi uutta brändiä ja tuotetta kohtaan ja mikä saa sinut kirjoittamaan siitä blogissasi?
10. Haluaisitko rakentaa suhdetta eri brändien edustajien, esim. PR-toimistojen kanssa? Jos kyllä, miten?
11. Näetkö jotain arvoa suhteen rakentamisella brändien edustajien kanssa? Jos kyllä, millaista?