

Using Blog Marketing Successfully

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>The objective of the thesis was to evaluate blog marketing as a marketing channel and whether it is a successful choice or not. The viewpoint of the thesis was the blogosphere in Finland and the Finnish fashion- and lifestyle blogs. This particular topic was chosen due to the personal interest of the author as well as the topic being very current and interesting. The concept of blog marketing is changing and improving all the time and it was interesting to do more research on that due to the fact that it is quite recent. The academic topics of the thesis are blogs in general, blog marketing and also social media marketing.</p> <p>The thesis is divided into the theory part and the research part. The theory section of the thesis includes the academic overview of blogs and blogging, including an overview of the history and evolution of blogging. It also has a brief overview of social media marketing in general. The research part included a research conducted for blog readers to get an overview of their insights of blogs and blog marketing as well as a research conducted for selected bloggers to get an overview of their views on blogging and blog marketing from their point of view. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used for these reasearches. Also a social media professional was interviewed to gain a deeper knowledge of the current state of blog marketing in the Finnish blogosphere.</p> <p>The thesis research showed that blog marketing indeed is effective and it has many strengths and opportunities – but also its own challenges. Consumers (in this case, blog readers) have sometimes a hard time trusting the blogger and they cannot be 100% sure if what they are writing is positive because their own experiences or if they are getting paid for it. It is important for companies to select well the bloggers they choose to co-operate with, since the blog is the face of the product.</p> <p>Blog marketing can be a great marketing tool for many companies and is definitely recommendable. It needs careful planning, but can for example be great for smaller companies, since costs are often relatively low. This thesis will give a great outline for companies who are looking into using blog marketing, as well as people who want to gain a deeper knowledge on this.</p>			
<p>Keywords Blogs, blogging, blog marketing, social media marketing</p>			

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- Appendix 1 Interview Questions for social media professional Helene Auramo (Zipipop Oy)
- Appendix 2 Questionnaire questions

1 INTRODUCTION

Blogging, blogs and bloggers might have been new beginners in social media and in the social media marketing world just a few years ago, but within the past few years the industry has grown to be one of the key players for many businesses and their marketing strategies. Blogs are a concept that everyone who uses Internet frequently is familiar with. They are just few clicks away, and for everyone to see and read – and even for everyone to create and publish!

Due to a personal interest for fashion and lifestyle blogs, as well as the topic being very popular at the moment with the controversial discussions of its commercialism, this was chosen to be the topic for my bachelor's thesis. Another key factor was that there is not quite much research done on the subject matter yet, so this would bring both challenges to the process, but also opportunity to contribute with something new to the field. The key theoretical points are to discuss what blogs are, how they have developed over the years and how they can be utilized as a successful marketing channel – with the focal point on Finland and Finnish fashion and lifestyle blogs. The theory points of social media marketing will also be discussed very briefly, as blog marketing is part of social media marketing.

The personal motivation for this thesis is to gain a deeper knowledge of the concept of blogs along with the concept of social media marketing. One of my personal interests throughout the time of my studies has been social media, and that is also the field that I wish to work in during my future career. The information and knowledge gathered throughout this thesis hopefully will be something that can in the future be used during my future work tasks.

The goal for this thesis is to define and justify if blogs are a successful marketing channel – especially when looking at Finnish fashion and lifestyle blogs and to evaluate the effectiveness of blog-marketing. The information can be utilized by for example different brands and companies that are looking into using blogs as a marketing channel. Many of the social media marketing theories can be applied on many companies and brands when starting to utilize social media.

The conclusions made in this thesis will be justified based on researches conducted on bloggers and blog readers. Also one social media professional was interviewed to gain a deeper knowledge on the topic. The entire structure will be broken down more clearly in the following chapters. Later on also the research questions this thesis is based on will be presented, and also more insight is given on the way of conducting the researches needed for this thesis.

This bachelor's thesis will work as a final masterpiece for the author – it will bundle up all the knowledge that has been acquired during the degree program, and will be put into use. As mentioned earlier, the topic is very current, and the author has great personal interest on the topic. The field of social media marketing is also something that the author wishes to be working in the future. This thesis hopefully will successfully be able to present the knowledge along with the ability to apply the theories, conduct successful researches and draw reliable conclusions based on all of this.

2 THE THESIS PROCESS

Purpose of this thesis is to find answers to previously formed research questions and to evaluate whether the hypothesis was correct or not. The thesis will also include theoretical parts; the theories have been chosen to give academic support on the topic, and also help to evaluate the viewpoints provided in this thesis. No research can be conducted without any theoretical background if it is intended to be reliable. Researches and interviews also will be conducted on the topic in order to find answers to the research questions. The researches will consist of both quantitative and qualitative methods. The research methods will be described more thoroughly later on in the thesis.

The goal of this chapter is to present the thesis and the process it requires. There will be a presentation about the structure of the thesis, with a small synopsis of each chapter. The research questions and the hypothesis, that are working as the foundation for this thesis will also be presented, along with research methods used while conducting the questionnaires.

2.1 Objective of thesis

The objective of this thesis is to research the Finnish blogging industry on the surface, with focus on fashion and lifestyle blogs and research the opinions of both bloggers and readers on the topic of blog marketing. This thesis will also look into blogs as a marketing choice and what are the strengths and weaknesses of them. The research part will focus on both the consumer experience as well as the blogger experience. The objective is to see if blogs are an effective marketing channel choice and also how customers see blog marketing. The hypothesis is that blog marketing indeed is very successful, but it is important to look into how it is done, since readers (in this case also customers) are becoming more and more doubtful of the true colours for the bloggers, so the one of the key challenges alongside to the success might be gaining trust from the customers. The hypothesis will be discussed more later on with the research results.

2.2 Research questions

Always when writing a thesis, or any thesis-like paper, it is written to solve problems or give answers to certain questions, also known as research questions. These research questions define the goals of the thesis and what the thesis will be about. For this particular thesis, a thesis about the use of blogs as a successful marketing decision especially in Finnish lifestyle- and fashion blogs, the main research question is "Can blog marketing be successful?"

Also the following sub-questions will be discussed in the thesis and they will be supporting the thesis and the research process.

1. What are blogs and what is blog marketing? How to use it and what are its strengths and weaknesses?
2. What is marketing and advertising in blogs?

To answer the main research question first the theoretical point of view will be taken into account and then the question will be evaluated and answered based on the combination of answers to the previously mentioned sub-questions – research question will tie the findings of this thesis into conclusions and suggestions for further use and information.

Sub-question number one will be answered with theoretical and academic viewpoints. Sub-question number two will be answered through conducted interview and questionnaires. Bloggers and social media professional will be interviewed, and the interviews are mainly based on open questions, so these researches will be mainly qualitative researches. The readers will be interviewed with a quantitative questionnaire. A qualitative questionnaire in form of an interview for social media professional was mainly conducted just to get a deeper knowledge on the field of blogs and blog marketing, as Helene Auramo, who at the time worked for Indiedays could really give a deep insight of the topic.

The main goal of this thesis is to discuss the topic of marketing and advertising in blogs, and the main focus will be in Finnish lifestyle- and fashion blogs. To return back to the starting point, the main goals of this thesis – in addition to discussing the theoretical points of social media marketing and blog marketing briefly– are also to

present blogging as a current phenomenon, and to look into the opportunities blog marketing gives in current days, especially in Finnish fashion- and lifestyle blogs.

2.3 The Structure of the Thesis

This thesis has been broken down into seven different chapters. The first chapter is the introduction to the thesis and topic in generic way. The second chapter will focus more on the thesis process itself, and give more explanations on the research questions, the research methods and the structure of the thesis. The introduction it gives is more theoretical than the one offered in chapter one.

The third chapter will give an introduction to the research methods with a theoretical background. The fourth chapter is the first theory chapter. Fourth chapter will focus on blogs and everything related to them. This chapter will explain the basic concept behind blogs, bloggers, blogging and the blogosphere in Finland. The chapter will also briefly discuss the development and road to commercialization of lifestyle and fashion blogs in Finland during the past few years.

The fifth chapter is also a theory chapter, focusing first very briefly on social media marketing as a new phenomenon and then focusing more on blog marketing as one of the forms of social media marketing.

The sixth chapter will look into the researches that were done. It will present the questionnaires and interviews, the conduction of them and naturally, the results. The results will also be evaluated based on the theory points, and with these two objects combined, the research questions will be answered.

The seventh chapter is the last one, and it will be the conclusion chapter for this thesis. It will tie up the entire thesis, and also offer some general suggestions for the blogosphere in Finland. It will also evaluate the outcome of the thesis, and if there were some things that could have been done differently.

At the end of the thesis naturally there is also list of all the references used in the paper, as well as the questionnaires and interview questions used as appendices.

3 RESEARCH METHODS

The thesis process was quite a long one. The topic is very wide and interesting, and it was important to find a topic that is versatile enough, but that also has a clear research problem as well as has something that can also be used in the future for other businesses. After lot of discussion with thesis supervisor, peers and social media professional, the topic started to form, research questions and research process created, and the work could start.

This chapter will take a deeper look into the research methods used in this thesis, as well as look over the literature and other academic materials used in this thesis. As part of the research the following methods were used (for the translated version, please see Appendix 1 and 2):

- Questionnaire with both quantitative and qualitative questions for blog readers to determine their opinions and relationship to blogging and blog marketing. This question had a focal point in the quantitative questions since the goal was to gather a lot of data that would be easy to analyse.
- Questionnaire with qualitative questions for bloggers to determine their relationship to blogging and blog marketing. Focal point was qualitative questionnaire to gather opinions and experiences.
- Interview for a social media professional to gain better understanding of the field and easier to determine the focus on this thesis.

With the combination of these research methods a research was formed and successfully conducted. This chapter will take a more theoretical and academic view on these methods, and later on in this thesis the actual research will be more thoroughly explained through. The decision was to use both research methods was rather easy – it was important to have data to prove the hypothesis. Since the group of blog reader respondents was rather large the usage of quantitative research was easy to use to get an overview of their opinions and feelings.

Since the group of bloggers and social media professional that were interviewed and sent questionnaire to for this thesis was much smaller, the main form of research

was easy to decide to be qualitative research and interviews. This way individual opinions and experiences were able to be gathered and analysed.

Helene Auramo, who at the time worked for Zipipop Oy (founding company for Indiedays), helped to understand blog marketing in Finland, as well as the development of blog marketing in the Finnish markets. Helene Auramo was interviewed by phone and the goal of that research was to get a deeper understanding of the blog marketing phenomenon in Finland at the moment, and also get a good and thorough overview of all the different methods used.

Always when doing research, the main goal is to find out something. Depending more on what the goal is, that also defines more of the research method that will be used. Quantitative research will provide more statistical and more general answers, whereas qualitative and interview techniques might lead up to getting individual answers from each individual and will require a different analysing technique. The differences and when to use what research method will be answered later on in this chapter.

3.1 Quantitative research method in the thesis process

Quantitative research is the more statistical and mathematical way of doing research. Since the research bases itself mainly on mathematical data, it is easy to use for to prove if the hypothetical data is true. Quantitative data is any kind of data that is somewhat numeric, for example percentages (Given 2008).

The reason why quantitative research was decided to be used for the questionnaire with the blog readers was simply the fact that the goal was to gather answers from a bigger group of respondents and also to be able to determine whether the hypothesis made was true or false. By conducting a quantitative research on the respondents it was easy to gather reliable information, it was easy to analyse it, easy to form answers and determine whether or not the hypothesis could be supported with the results.

The questionnaire was an online-questionnaire that was shared on Facebook, on one of the blog-portals and also e-mailed to a group of friends. That way it was easy to get many respondents and also get variable respondents, not only respondents of

similar interest – this would enhance the possibility of very realistic answers, and this was what was the goal and it was achieved. More deep analysis of the respondents will be provided later on in the thesis. All in all performing quantitative research, gathering data and analysing data was very interesting and successful process.

The questionnaire was open for two weeks and after that all the answers were gathered together, divided question by question, and analysed more thoroughly. Since most of the questions were multiple choice questions, they were easy to analyse and form general opinions. Some of the questions had an opportunity to leave comments, and they were also read through, analysed and categorized based on the input they gave. After analysing the questions, a final summary of answers was created, and presented later in this thesis in the research chapter.

3.2 Qualitative research method in the thesis process

Qualitative Research Consultants Association described qualitative research as following: “Qualitative research is designed to reveal a target audience’s range of behavior and the perceptions that drive it with reference to specific topics or issues. It uses in-depth studies of small groups of people to guide and support the construction of hypotheses. The results of qualitative research are descriptive rather than predictive” (QRCA 2013). Qualitative research can be used to get more in depth answers on the research matters when the focus is on the questions why and how. Qualitative research is not hard statistical data, but more answers to different forms of open ended questions and different interviews.

Questionnaire for bloggers

First part of the qualitative research was to use a questionnaire for bloggers to view their opinions and view on blogging, blog marketing and blog industry in Finland, among several other topics. I contacted some of the most popular fashion and lifestyle bloggers in Finland, and those who agreed to part-take of the process, were sent the questionnaire – thus, formed them into a focus group. Some of them were contacted afterwards to answer some of the questions more thoroughly or to get some more personal experiences. The translated questionnaire can be found in the Appendix-section.

The intention of qualitative research is to gather more detailed and more deep answers and understand more the how and why of the research (Arora & Stoner 2009). When using qualitative research, one can really get in depth answers and understand the field of research. Since the focus group was so small, and since there was no definite scale to measure the answers thus however, the answers cannot be used to confirm certain hypothesis in that sense, but they can definitely be used as the indicator of what the current situation is in the field.

After gathering all the information from the bloggers, the answers were divided into different categories so that they could have been better analysed. Many of the bloggers had quite similar experiences and answers, which made the analysing part much easier. All the answers and e-mail correspondences were saved, categorized and later on analysed. More on the findings will be explained in the research part of the thesis.

Interview

As part of this thesis, social media professional Helene Auramo was also interviewed for this thesis. Interviewing is part of qualitative research method. For this thesis the interview was more part of the theoretical part, as Helene Auramo helped to understand the bigger picture of the blogosphere in Finland, along with the blog marketing in Finland and the different types of blog marketing.

The interview was conducted over the phone – few days before the interview the questions had been e-mailed to Helene Auramo, which gave her a chance to prepare for the interview. Interview was recorded and also notes were made to make sure that none of the great and interesting points she made would not have been missed later on. Helene Auramo gave great insight of blog marketing from the view of a social media professional in Finland and from someone who at the time was closely working with Indiedays.

The interview was not recorded, but notes were made during the interview to be able to pin point the main points and get more insight for the process and for the theoretical part. The interview was a great and unique tool for the process.

Gathering qualitative data has of course its pros and cons. As mentioned before, qualitative data gives a lot of information from the focus group, but cannot always be

used as generic data, since the focus groups are often smaller. Gathering qualitative data requires often a bit more work than quantitative, at least in my opinion, since the answers also have to be analysed much deeper, and also grouped up into different categories.

All in all, qualitative research part of the thesis was also very interesting and very successful. Gathering data went well as well as the analysis. It was a great learning process – both in the field of conducting research, but also learning more of the opinions from the bloggers. The interview was a great way of gathering qualitative data, but can also be very time consuming if more people would have been interviewed.

4 BLOGS, BLOGGERS AND BLOGGING

Blogs have enabled to communicate with the entire world very easily. Blogs are a part of the world of social media, which is a growing trend and opens up new possibilities for people and for businesses. Social media marketing has developed into a new very effective marketing channel, and the business world has fearlessly started to use more and more social media in order to enhance their availability, visibility and credibility online. The deeper concept of blogs and blogging will be later on discussed in this thesis under the theory section.

Blogging is for everyone – there are no rules or guidelines, and you do not need to take a course on blogging. Jeff Jarvis once said how "it's the easiest, cheapest, fastest publishing tool ever invented, --the people have a voice they didn't have before" (Wortham 2007).

This chapter will focus closely on blogs themselves. This chapter will give a generic outline of what does a blog mean, how they work, and even why they were chosen to be one of the key concepts of this thesis. It will also give a short outline of the development of blogging in Finland, with the focus being in the lifestyle- and fashion blogs. Later on in this thesis there will be a chapter that will be focusing more on blogs as a marketing tool, now and in the future.

4.1 What are blogs?

While growing up, quite often the little girls used have their own journals. It was quite often a tiny locked book, filled with secrets, and the key was hidden well in order to ensure that the secrets would be kept out of sight. The current on-going technical development and media development has had its effect on how people experience the world. Diaries are not secretive anymore, and people are more and more interested of the world around them. If you want to read the adventures of a stay-at-home-mom in a small town in France, or a world famous CEO from their blogs, both of them are only few clicks away – any day, anytime and anywhere you are. In addition to so-called normal private persons who write blogs, also a big amount of celebrities, politicians and for example companies have their own blogs (Tuomikoski 2009, 1).

As the blogosphere (term stands for all the blogs and their interconnection) has been growing and gaining popularity, as well as power – as it was already said before – the opportunities arise. Companies can advertise and communicate with their customers through their own blogs. Many brands have also started co-operating with popular bloggers – a topic which has raised a lot of controversial discussions among blog readers. The commercialism of fashion and lifestyle blogs in Finland, and the advertising and marketing that happens through them is constantly a hot topic, and the opinions vary from one end to the other. Can readers trust what they read in blogs? Is the blogger praising the lotion only because she received it for free? Are bloggers opinion leaders? Is there too much advertising in blogs? Do readers just ignore it? Are bloggers always required to tell if they have received the product through blog? These questions are just few examples of the questions that bloggers and readers are dealing with almost on daily basis.

Blog can be defined as a website, where one can publish text and other multimedia, such as news, cartoons, music or interesting links. Posts are published in a chronological order and people who read blogs will have a possibility to comment the posts (Alasilta 2009, 20). Person who writes a blog is called a blogger, and writing a blog is called blogging. There can be more than one person who keeps updating the blog. Blogs often focus on few certain topics (Mayfield 2008, 16), for example fashion, lifestyle, cooking and baking or a certain hobby– some are strictly professional and focus for example different successful and interesting marketing campaigns all around the world. There are many companies that have their own blogs, for example Finnair's Kiitotie-blog. Company blogs are an easy way to communicate with the customers: the blog posts can for example be presenting the new products and innovations, and this way, customers can always be updated about the company's current actions. It is a great way to tighten the bond between customer and company, and make the company more available for the customers. (Ala-ajos 2010, 43) The figure below (FIGURE 1) shows us an example of a blog.



FIGURE 1. Example of a blog. (Nio till fem, 2012)

Even though blog is not the same as an online-diary, they have many similarities, which often lead people to mistakenly consider them as synonyms for each other's. Online-diary can be defined as notes of daily happenings, also written in chronological order. What brings in the differences between blogs and online-diaries are how blogs are meant to be shared, and people in most cases write for other people, whereas diaries are usually written for just one self. Blog posts can also be hidden and shown to only certain audience. This will though limit the audience that will be able to see the blog. Most bloggers enable commenting on their blogs, and this gives a great base for interactive discussion and communication. Commenting can be seen as the essential action of being part of the blogospheres (Weber 2007, 172).

Especially in fashion- and lifestyle blogs the value of commenting is high – commenting is a way of communicating with the readers. Bloggers often ask opinions about their outfits, ask recommendations about some product they are about to buy and they also often post posts just plainly asking what would the readers be more interested to read about – whether it'd be more outfit posts, more product reviews, or maybe more just about normal daily happenings, just like one would write to their diaries? Many blogs have regular-readers who comment regularly, which creates a solid interaction, not only between blogs, but between bloggers and the “outside-world”. The figure below (FIGURE 2) gives us an example of one form of the commenting field in a blog.

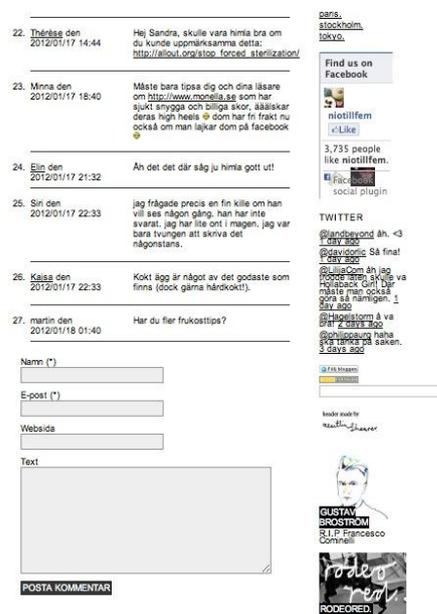


FIGURE 2. A commenting field in a blog and some comments. (Nio till fem, 2012)

Many individuals that blog often write about their own lives, along with their interests. Blog is also not same as an internet-column, and it is not just like any kind of a website. Blogs can often also be mixed up with published columns, but they are not synonyms to each other either. People who write columns in most cases are professionals in their field, and columns often include even strong opinions – whereas anyone can be a blogger and write about their own topic. Columnists hardly ever comment on other columns, and don't share other texts – these are the main differences among columnists and bloggers, which clearly state the differences (Alasilta 2009, 24).

Blogging is an easy way to make sure your message reaches a bigger audience – there are plenty of great ways to make one's blog more popular, these points will be discussed later on in this thesis. As already stated earlier, anyone can start up an own blog and start writing it. There are many reasons why people start to write blogs – usually it is to meet people of similar interests, and share their ideas and their daily observations about life around them (Rinkinen 2009, 5). People want to share their daily happenings with friends or family, and sometimes even with the entire world.

What are fashion and lifestyle blogs?

It is often very hard determine the exact classification of blogs and which category they belong to. A Finnish blog-listing site blogilista.fi finds 4620 blogs that have listed themselves under the term fashion (muoti) and 5601 one listed under lifestyle

(Blogilista 2013). As already mentioned in this text before, anybody can blog and there are many reasons why to blog. A fashion or a lifestyle blog usually has the blogger telling about their life and the main focus often lies within for example shopping, design, fashion and their lifestyle – it is bloggers own channel to share about their life and their experiences with brands and products – to name a few reasons. Blogging is not a traditional way of journalism, since usually blogging does focus on the bloggers themselves (Griffith 2011).

4.2 History of blogs and blogging

Blogging has come a long way since it started as its current form. As an actual term, it was first introduced in the late 1990s. John Barger had his own website, to where he collected interesting links to other websites, and he started to call his website “a weblog”, which is a combination of words web and log. In 1999 Peter Merholz changed this into a saying “we blog”, and since then blog has been part of everyday Internet-vocabulary (Kilpi 2006, 11). The first blogs could be considered to be more similar to collections of interesting links, and the first ever blogospheres instead of being blog-communities, were basically just different blogs linked together. In 1999 Para Labs was established, which was one of the most successful blogging servers – it in fact became so popular, that Google bought in 2003, and Para Labs has since been known as Blogger (Alasilta 2009, 69). The renewed Blogger was reopened in 2004, and since the development and popularity has only been increasing (Kilpi 2006, 12).

The U.S. Presidential Election in 2004 has been said to turn the world of blogs for good. It's been said that was when people started to consider blogs as a serious form of media. Even though political blogs differ from the usual blogs in many ways, due to their strong opinion-orientation, this can be thought of as one of the turning points (Kilpi 2006, 13).

Although these are the so-called real first versions of blogs in the modern days, the style roots to already few centuries back. Between 1711 and 1714 Joseph Addison and Richard Steele published a magazine called *The Spectator*, that can be seen as the early origins of blogging. The way it was written, reminded much more of the current way of blogging than for example the way how newspapers are written these days.

There are many ways to blog on the internet. Some of the most popular web-tools all over the world on the Internet are Wordpress and Blogger. Blogger is owned by Google. There are numerous other websites that are more popular country wise, for example Vuodatus in Finland and Blogg in Sweden. Blogs can be also created elsewhere on the web than on a blog server – as said, blogs can be found anywhere on the internet. The key point seems to be the easiness of access and updating.

There are plenty of ways to search other interesting blogs – few of the most popular ways of finding them are simply through search engines, such as Google. Many bloggers link other interesting or similar blogs in their own blogs. Many countries have their own so-called blog databases that collect blogs, and where both readers and bloggers can register. For bloggers this is a great way to keep track of how many readers they have and what kind of traffic they get into their blogs. For readers this is a good way to keep track of the blogs they are interested in and follow them. These kinds of web tools are for example Bloglovin and Blogilista. Blogilista.fi is a very popular in Finland, and in November there were about 54 000 registered blogs (as a comparison, January 2012 there were almost 41 000) on the page – as a comparison, in January 2009 the same number was 20 000 Finnish blogs on Blogilista.fi – the growth still keeps happening (Alasilta 2009, 70). On Blogilista people can use different key words to search for blogs for their own interests. Blogilista also has their “hot now”-list, which shows the most popular blogs over the past week.

Blogs are here to stay. They are a significant sign of technological, social and economic change force – it has turned readers into publishers, and consumers into suppliers. As said earlier, anyone can blog – anywhere and anytime (Kilpi, 2006 3). Blogging is one of the most popular and most growing forms of social media, and it is developing constantly. The key point is not where the blogs exist; the more important part is how the blog is done. A successful blog for example gets updated frequently, has variety, is visually easy to look at and is easy to browse. A good blogger is interactive and comments other blogs. It is important to also respect your readers, and also realize that one simply cannot please everyone – everyone will receive negative feedback at one point or another. It is important to keep the blog nice and neat and easy to read – a blog that has many links and is hard to follow, does not tempt readers or invite them to visit the blog again (Mayfield 2008, 16) – which

actually is one of the main goals of a blogger, to give the people something they will come back looking for later on, and then again the next time, and the next time, and so on. In the world of fashion and lifestyle blogging, it seems to be important that the readers can easily relate to bloggers and that the bloggers also share stories about their everyday lives.

4.3 Blog development in Finland

The blogosphere in Finland has gone through many tremendous changes and a lot of development over the past few years, and the commercialization of blogs has brought many new opportunities for brands and companies in the field of social media marketing. The most popular Finnish blogs get tens of thousands unique readers every week (Blogilista 2013). Many people read blogs that they can relate to. People read blogs often for example to seek inspiration, to get ideas and tips and to interact with their peers.

The commercialization has been even more highlighted after blog portals, such as *Indiedays.com* and *Lily.fi* were founded, and bloggers started to blog for companies and brands (for example *Nelliinan vaatehuone* and *Magipoks* for *Olivia-magazine*). Later on also the blog portal *Lily.fi* merged with *Trendi-magazine* and some of the most successful bloggers in Finland started their own blog portal (*refashion.fi*) – all of this tells about the commercialization of blogging, as well as how there are more and more blogs, more and more readers and how the blogosphere can be customized for customers and anything can find something that they are interested of. This phenomenon will be discussed more detailed in the chapter of blog-development in Finland.

The commercialization has brought a lot new to the blogging table, but also raised a lot of negative voices. Especially readers have started to question bloggers' motives, and whether they anymore can trust what they read on blogs. As stated earlier, the topic is very new and interesting, and there is not much research done on it – these have led to conclusion of looking into the topic more.

The hypothesis is that the opinions as well as the level of effectiveness of blog marketing when evaluating from the readers' point of view, is definitely weak. One of the

goals of this thesis is to find out whether this hypothesis is true, and if it is how the effectiveness can be increased.

In May 2013 the Finland's Customer Marketing Board (Asiakkuusmarkkinointiliitto) created guidelines for Finnish bloggers about advertisements in blogging and how these guidelines should be presented and should be followed. The guidelines include for example how the marketing and branding co-operations should be brought up and how to avoid surreptitious advertising – which is illegal in Finland. The blogger should clearly separate so called normal text and advertisements. It has also been a discussion if it is the blogger's responsibility to make sure there is no surreptitious advertising or if it is for the company that they are advertising (Panttila 2013). This topic will also be later discussed in the thesis.

According to an article by Yle news, about 55% of 25-34 year olds read blogs (Simola 2013). Blogging in Finland has developed over the past few years quite tremendously. There is a big number of fashion- and lifestyle blogs that are extremely popular – they get tens of thousands readers every week and some of the bloggers earn all of their income from blogging. Even though bloggers who blog for living is far more bigger trend for example in United States, and in Sweden, Finland is slowly developing in to that direction.

The first ever "blog" in Finland was introduced already in 1995 when Kanerva Eskola started to publish an online diary on her homepage. The first forms of blogs actually were more like online diaries, which can now be counted as one of the subcategories of blogs (Alasilta 2009, 68).

The first fashion and lifestyle blogs in Finland started to develop around 2006, and already during the year 2007 clear blogger scene was created. In October 2008 the first exclusive blogger-cruise to Stockholm was organized. Eight fashion bloggers among the most popular bloggers in Finland were chosen for this cruise, which was organized together with VisitSweden and Viking Line to name a few sponsors. Joonas Halla, who now works as a PR manager for VisitSweden wrote his master thesis about this blogger-cruise, and has in his thesis "Analysing User Created Content in Blogs – A Case study of Fashion Blogger's PR trip to Stockholm" described the content of the cruise in a great detail. This cruise was one of the first big sponsor and marketing events that happened in the fashion blogging community in Finland. Dur-

ing the cruise the bloggers for example took part in a styling contest and met few Swedish designers during their time in Stockholm – and of course, blogged about all of this (Halla 2009). Later on VisitSweden has organized many more blog-cruises, even one in the beginning of 2010 that was open to all the bloggers in Finland. VisitSweden is just one example of many different companies that have paired up with blogger or bloggers to advertise, to market or to brand their products. This phenomenon is one of the key topics in this thesis and will be discussed more thoroughly later on in this paper.

In the late 2000s was when things started to happen in the blog-world in Finland. In March 2009 Stella Harasek, who is famous for her blog "Paras Aika Vuodesta" was bought by publishing house Bonnier Publications Oy and Stella started to blog under the Finnish lifestyle magazine Olivia after they renewed their websites. This was believed to raise the amount of readers (Sulopuisto 2009), and the amount has increased substantially. In January 2012 Stella started to blog also under home decoration magazine Divaani, which is a sister magazine to Olivia. In many ways, Stella Harasek can be thought as the forerunner in the Finnish blogging communities. The commercialization of blogs had started.

In January 2010 the times were changing in the Finnish blogosphere - Indiedays.com was created. Indiedays is a blogging community which collected some of the most popular Finnish fashion and lifestyle bloggers under the "same roof" and while bloggers moved their own blogs under Indiedays, they also started to receive some compensation for blogging. The community has an inclusive invitation only protocol for the bloggers – anyone can visit the page and read the blogs, but only certain bloggers are blogging on the site. In November 2013 there were 25 bloggers blogging on the site. All the blog posts are posted on the website and the site includes also fashion related news, promotions, blog for the editorials, highlighted posts and competitions.

The site works as any website in regards of the advertising space – advertisers and companies can buy advertising space from the website (Indiedays 2013). Indiedays organizes much collaboration on its website between bloggers and brands – for example Marimekko, Arabia, Net-Anttila, Yves Rocher and H&M. This can be clearly seen when visiting the website – the advertisements there are big and cannot be missed. The pictures down below is a screenshot from the website, and there one

can clearly see the layout of the page. The newest blog posts are in the middle of the page, and the page is "bordered" with big advertisements. When the bloggers move their blogs under Indiedays, they also agree in the contract that they signed that there can be ads in their blogs. The bloggers also receive inclusive invites to for example visit fashion weeks and PR-offices. The bloggers receive a lot of free products from different brands and companies due to the different collaborations (Auramo 2012). As mentioned earlier, the bloggers have received a lot of negative feedback from their readers due to this, and quite often they have been accused of giving false image about products (being too positive) and being surreptitious. The truth is though that all when all the bloggers signed their contract with Indiedays, they also signed their contract that they will not be practicing any product placement, since in fact it is illegal (Hakola 2010)(Saastamoinen 2010, 18-19). The bloggers have to clearly state in their posts if some of the products or services in the post they have gotten through blog and they have not paid for them. Also all the sponsored links have to be marked, and often bloggers mark them for example with a little star next to the text. The sponsored links will be discussed further a little later on. The figures below (FIGURE 3 and FIGURE 4) show us how the blogging portal Indiedays looks like, as well as how the front page and different forms of banner marketing and other ways of marketing have developed over the years.



FIGURE 3. Indiedays front page in early 2012. (Indiedays)



FIGURE 4. Indiedays front page late 2013. (Indiedays)

The idea to establish Indiedays came already during 2009 to the founder Esa Saario, when he had noticed how fashion bloggers are very popular in Finland, but just don't seem to get the recognition they deserve and even though they had thousands of readers, they weren't benefitting of it as much as they should have. The website seemed to be exactly what the Finnish market needed, and it quickly found its place on the market. The weekly visitors quickly rose up to over 100 000 unique visitors per week (Hakola 2010) (Saastamoinen 2010, 18-19). Indiedays has also made it much easier for companies to reach bloggers, and within the past year or so there have been many successful blogger-brand co-operations on the blogosphere (Auramo 2012). Companies are finally learning how to use social media the right way.

As it is not anymore enough just to exist in social media, but to "produce" right kind of social media, it is not just enough that one uses a blog as a marketing channel – one has to choose the right blog in order to reach the right audience. The last few years in Finland have proven that there is great potential among the blogging communities in Finland – Finland might not be yet quite where Sweden is, but Finland is slowly getting there.

Indiedays has been a big improvement and big change to the commercialization of Finnish blogging industry (Auramo 2012). Stella Harasek, who was mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, is one great example, and as said, a forerunner. Bloggers Mimmi and Peppi, who are bloggers for More to Love, are one great example also of turning blogging into a lucrative business. Mimmi and Peppi promote the idea of how bigger girls are as beautiful as skinny girls, and they have for example been co-operating with a plus-size clothing line GOSSIP. This included them touring around Finland and promoting the clothing line in Sokos-department stores all around Finland during the winter 2011. More to Love have had their their own calendars for 2012 and 2013, the two bloggers were chosen to be the most stylish fashion bloggers in Finland in the year 2011. They have collaboration with Villa-wool, a hat company, and More to Love-beanies were published in the end of 2011. Mimmi and Peppi also work together with a magazine for teenage girls (Miss Mix) as "big sisters" for the readers of the magazine. The blog is their company; the blog is their main source of income. These are great examples of turning blogs into lucrative businesses – and one can only think about the audience the brands get when co-operating with More to Love. Later on, More to Love-girls decided to part their ways and are currently blogging independently – however, they are one of the first examples of what a successful blogging, as well as successful co-operation with brands can do (More to Love, 2013).

Also in Finland, blogs are the big part of the future of social media – luckily companies are slowly waking up to that decision. Currently there are several bloggers that are writing their blogs under their own business id and that is their main source of income – sometimes in the side of their studies, and sometimes their blog keeps them fully employed – such as Xenia's Day, Mungolife and Pupulandia in Finland.

The blogosphere in Finland has gone through many changes since the start of Indiedays. Indiedays is no longer the only blog portal in Finland. Lily.fi has grown bigger and bigger and since its merging with a popular Finnish lifestyle-magazine Trendi (M&M, 2013) it is clear that it has well established its popularity in the blog-scene. Indiedays has also in 2013 started "Indiedays Inspiration" which lists hundreds of Finnish blogs with topics like fashion, lifestyle, cooking etc. – these blogs are not officially paid by Indiedays but they are recommended by Indiedays (Indiedays 2013).

Trendi is not the only magazine that uses the power of blogs – almost every magazine in Finland, and not just limited to fashion-related magazines have blogs on their website, and for example relatively new fashion magazine Costume uses the bloggers as a big part of the monthly magazine. There is also a portal called refashion.fi, which was established by some of the most influential and popular lifestyle-bloggers in Finland, who were tired of blogging under any specific label, and just wanted to write about what they liked, without someone telling them what to do (Iltalehti 2013).

Blogging, blog portals and the entire blogosphere has grown so much, and is still only growing. Blogging is currently about so much more than just bloggers writing about their everyday life and purchases – they are being opinion leaders and they are making business.

5 BLOG MARKETING AS A MARKETING CHANNEL

Blog marketing is one part of social media marketing (SMM). This chapter will first very briefly look into the concept of social media marketing, and then blogging as a social media marketing choice. The main focus of the chapter however is to look more into blog marketing as a marketing channel – to look into how it works, what are the different ways of blog marketing and the theory behind it as well as also to conclude with a SWOT-analysis. This chapter will be the last academic part of the thesis and will then lead to the research part of the thesis.

5.1. Social media marketing – briefly

What is social media? How to define social media? Kaplan and Haenlein have created a classification scheme with six different types of social media:

1. Collaborative projects
2. Blogs and micro blogs
3. Content communities
4. Social networking
5. Virtual game-worlds
6. Virtual social worlds

(Kaplan & Haenlein 2010)

However, this is not the only categorization that there is – social media and social media marketing is currently in the buzz and constantly developing, and something that might have been accurate now, might be outdated and much improved in one years' time.

However, something that does apply to all the theories is indeed the core values and the core meaning of social media and social media marketing. As we can see from the categorization – social media is a lot about sharing, communicating, and being with one's peers. Many suggest that social media is built on three key elements – content, communities and Web 2.0 (Ahlqvist, T. & Heinonen, S. 2008). The first part – content – goes with sharing. By uploading content, whatever it now is – text, pictures, activities – we share, and the more we share, the more interesting it becomes. The second part – communities – comes from the social part of social media. To be part of something, to share, to find your peers – and to find the other ones that are

also interested in same topics as you are – that is the community part of social media. Web 2.0, and the third key element of social media is about the development about the Internet industry, all the applications and portals online and enables the sharing (Ahlqvist, T. & Heinonen, S. 2008). The figure below (FIGURE 5) shows us the social media triangle and the three key elements it is built on.

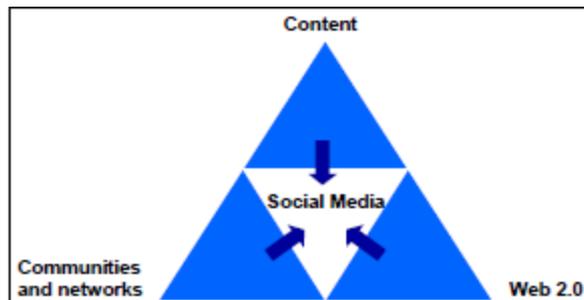


FIGURE 5. Social media triangle, 2013. (VTT)

To sum up this – social media is sharing content in communities online, to sum it up. Social media marketing enables companies to be in the same place as the customers, to interact with them, and to bring them closer to them. Social media marketing is an important part of today’s marketing choices – and most likely it will be the most important in the future of the marketing.

5.2. Blog marketing as a social media marketing choice

Farhad Divecha has determined blog marketing as following: “Blog marketing is any process that publicizes or advertises a website, business, brand or service via the medium of blogs. This includes, but is not limited to marketing via ads placed on blogs, recommendations and reviews by the blogger, promotion via entries on third party blogs and cross-syndication of information across multiple blogs” (Divecha 2007). Later on in this chapter we will look into the different types of blog marketing as we have seen in the Finnish fashion and lifestyle blogs – but of course these ways are universal. By interviewing Helene Auramo from Zipipop Oy (Zipipop Oy was founding Indiedays) I was able to discover all the different forms of blog marketing.

Why should companies choose you to use blog marketing as one of their marketing channels? Everybody loves recommendations, especially from people that we believe we can trust that are giving a good recommendation, right?

5.3 Making money with blogging

Not everyone blogs in just a sole meaning of making money. The bloggers who wish to use their blog also as a source of income have several ways of doing it, and these points will be discussed right now in this thesis.

The most common way for marketing or branding co-operation for a blogger is advertising in their blogs. This has been a bit of a discussion since the beginning and also one point in the research of this thesis. In Finland surreptitious advertising is prohibited, and for example Indiedays has their own ethical code for their bloggers. The ethical code reads for example that every blogger has their own right to their opinions, Indiedays is only working as a co-operator for the bloggers, the blogger has to clearly state if the blog post is an ad etc. As mentioned before, the bloggers have to clearly state which parts of the posts are so called paid-for posts, which are advertisements etc – the following figure shows few ways of doing so (the text says: "There is some advertisement in the blog that is carried through in cooperation with different companies or brands. Such may occur in ad links, which may financially benefit the blogger. The blogger chooses her cooperating partners by herself and advertises nothing that she doesn't fully believe in herself. ") and it is displayed at the bottom of the page (FIGURE 6):

HUOM! NOTE!

Osa blogissa näkyvästä mainonnasta toteutetaan yhdessä bloggaajan yhteistyökumppaneiden tai yhteistöiden kanssa. Tämä voi ilmentyä mainoslinkkeinä, joista bloggaaja voi hyötyä rahallisesti. Bloggaaja valitsee yhteistyökumppaninsa henkilökohtaisesti, eikä mainosta mitään mihin ei itse usko.

There is some advertisement in the blog that is carried through in cooperation with different companies or brands. Such may occur in ad links, which may financially benefit the blogger. The blogger chooses her cooperating partners by herself and advertises nothing that she doesn't fully believe in herself.

Palvelun tarjoaa **Blogger**.

FIGURE 6. Disclaimer from the blog about ads, 2013. (Jenni Ukkonen)

One of simplest way for a blog to make money is by adding ads on its side – however, this requires a lot of smart planning or unless the result might be quite unprofitable (Kortesuo & Kurvinen 2011, 105). What is important for both the bloggers and then the brands together when co-operating is to create a successful strategy to-

gether that will be as beneficial for both parties and also interesting for the customers.

5.4 What is blog marketing?

Bloggers can be thought as opinion-leaders. They might not be experts on their area, but readers really believe what they read in blogs. Blogs are one of the fastest ways to reach readers and customers. For companies, blogging is an easy, cheap, and in most cases, very cost-effective marketing channel. It is an easy way to provide customer the information they need (Juslén 2011, 7). There are many papers written on corporate blogging, but this thesis will focus more on the visibility on other blogs. In addition to companies' own blog, it is important to look into the opportunities that other blogs give. Individual fashion and lifestyle blogs in Finland receive tens of thousands individual readers each week, and it is really worth it for companies to investigate which blogs have the best fitting audience for them and then start planning on what kind of marketing activities would be the key ones.

Opinion leaders often strive to get more information and want to effect on what is around them. They are a very important group for the marketers, because – as already mentioned before – people listen to opinion leaders. If someone who can be considered as an opinion leader likes the product or service, it is very likely that they will share it with their peers and then the product or service gets their voice out in the market. Opinion leaders are extremely important for the organizations. (Bergström & Leppänen 2009, 114.). Opinion leaders and their relation to word-of-mouth-marketing (WOM) will be discussed more later on.

Free product samples and gift cards

Bloggers are given free product samples (make up, clothes, drinks, anything), and it is up to their pleasing whether they like it or not. Bloggers write about their experiences, often they also organize small drawings in their blogs so even readers can enjoy these freebies. This method has also been used with for example cameras and cell phones, and even trips. They might also get invites to certain events and often companies might ask for the blogger to write about their experience. Often companies are either after for some sort of long-term co-operation or then they will give money for when their products show up in the blog (Auramo 2012). Usually it re-

quires minimal effort from the companies to send their products to bloggers and in most cases bloggers are interested to write about their positive experiences. Sometimes also bloggers get free products that they can draw out for their readers through a specific competition. These competitions are often fairly popular.

It is important that the blogger clearly marks if some of the products she is using or presenting in her blog are clearly marked as gifts from the brand. As mentioned before, Finland's Asiakkuusmarkkinointiliitto has drafted guidelines for bloggers as a code of conduct of how to present ads in their blogs and how to make sure that everyone does blog marketing the same way (Blogissa mainos ei aina näytä mainokselta, 2013).

Sponsored links and other offers

The bloggers receive for example different bargain codes that they can post in their blogs for readers to enjoy (for example a special code that one can get 15% off from their purchase from an online-store). Often bloggers get a certain compensation for all of the purchases made through these links. Sometimes bloggers will also receive compensation just based on the amount of the clicks and views that the links receive. Quite similar to Google Ads and affiliate marketing, that some bloggers even use independently in order to gain some profits. Affiliate marketing is defined by the marketing terms-glossary as following "Revenue sharing between online advertisers/merchants and online publishers/salespeople, whereby compensation is based on performance measures, typically in the form of sales, clicks, registrations, or a hybrid model".

Blogger could for example publish an ad in their blog as a link and when a customer clicks the link and purchases something from the web store, the blogger will get certain amount of the sum as a commission - for example 10-15% of the total amount of purchase. The link can be valid for certain amount of time. According to Jarkko Kurvinen affiliate-marketing is increasing all the time and for example during 2012 affiliate-marketing in Finland produced about 14 million euros (Simola 2013).

Kiosked is a new Finnish establishment, which could in a way be thought to be a form of affiliate marketing. Kiosked is a huge library online, by September 2011 there were over one million pictures uploaded already there, and the amount was growing

steadily with 50,000 new pictures per day. Kiosked is meant to be used by web-content producers, such as bloggers. All the pictures have a built in web-store application. When pictures are added to for example blog posts, just by dragging your mouse over the picture, it will open up a possibility to get information on where to buy the product, and even buy it right away. The person who had linked it also gets compensation from all the purchases made from the link they posted – Kiosked receives a compensation from the web store and gives 40% for the link publisher and 10% to the owner of the picture. This is a new way for example for bloggers to earn more money (Erkkilä 2011).

Co-creation marketing

In the fall 2010 Marimekko, which is a famous Finnish design brand, and selected bloggers from Indiedays together created co creation marketing campaigns. Co creation stands for “a business strategy that is focusing on customer experience and interactive relationships”, according to the Businessdictionary.com definition. With this campaign Marimekko seemed to want to bring the brand closer to young customers and break out from the prejudice that it is meant for older people. Some of the bloggers received outfits from Marimekko and took pictures of their outfits by themselves. This campaign received a lot of positive feedback from the readers and was well received. There have been other similar campaigns – the main thing in these projects seems to be to bring the customer closer and show them how the products can be part of their style and everyday life. The figure below (FIGURE 7) shows us an example of a co-creation marketing campaign.



FIGURE 7. Image from pupulandia.indiedays.com – part of the co-creation campaign with Marimekko, 2012. (Pupulandia)

Banners

Banners are part of almost all of the blogs and are also the most visible – they are usually at the top of the page or on the sides. Banners are meant for the customers to click and that will open up an ad on a different site or for example lead them to the web store (Bergström & Leppänen 2009, 371).

Word-of-mouth-marketing and being an opinion leader

Blogging is a form of word of mouth-blogging. These kinds of recommendations are based on what people hear and read. The marketing director for Procter & Gamble, Jim Stengel, has said how young people these days are more likely to believe what they read on the Internet – does not matter if it is someone they know or not – rather than what they see on TV (Nyman & Salmenkivi 2007, 97). According to a research conducted by MediaCom in 2008, about 48% of the participants had bought something based on what they read about it in blogs and almost 42 % has given up on the decision of buying something based on what they had read (Mediacom 2008). People use search engines to find out information about the product or service they are about to purchase and the better the availability of resources is, the more likely they are to make the purchase.

Through blogs it can be easier for companies to find customers and easier way – and also cheaper way. The most popular bloggers have up to 50 000 unique readers per week. Bloggers that blog for a certain portal get a monthly income and also companies pay provision for new customers (Pirkanen 2013). Outi Pyy writes in her blog how blogs are a great way to “jump into the markets” for the smaller companies who might not have the budget yet for the bigger marketing campaigns (Pyy 2013).

5.5 Why use blogs?

Why is it so important for companies to also exist through co-operations with blogs? Isn't company's own blog enough? The answer is yes and no. People read blogs from normal everyday people, so they can relate to them. The brand images are built through experiences – both own and heard. People usually tell about either very bad experience they've had, or a really great experience they've had with the brand. The

amount of blog readers keep increasing year by year. In Finland in 2010, about 40% people that used Internet on daily basis read blogs on daily basis (Tilastokeskus 2012). The amount has been steadily growing – what a great audience this gives for different companies.

From the following figure the increase within the blog readers in Finland can be seen (the percentages are of all the internet users). The amount for 2010 has stayed at about the same, but the trend is still increasingly booming as can be seen from the figure below (FIGURE 8).

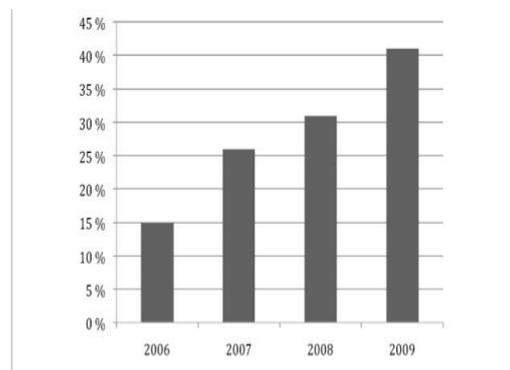


FIGURE 8. People who read blogs out of all the internet users between 2006 and 2009, 2012. (Tilastokeskus)

Word of mouth-blogging also brings its own challenges to the table as it impossible to control what people say and how they really feel – some bloggers might have negative experiences from products, and this way they will be spreading negative feedback onward to their readers. Also the real return on investment might sometimes be hard to measure – how many readers does the message really reach? How many of the readers just read it and forget, and how many buy the product now? How many buy it in two months?

5.6 SWOT-analysis of blog marketing

When looking at blogs as a whole, a SWOT-analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) is a good way of analyzing the real potential blogs have as a marketing channel. As we can see from the following SWOT-analysis – there definitely is lot of potential in blog marketing, but it just needs thorough planning and follow-up. The table below (TABLE 1), shows us the swot-analysis on blog marketing.

TABLE 1. SWOT-analysis on blog-marketing.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cheap - Easy to reach audience - Fast - Word of mouth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sometimes hard to measure success - Sometimes hard to target audience
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Blooming channel - Easy to adapt - Relatively cheap 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Word of mouth - Needs to evolve with the marketing world - Keeping customers trusted

Strengths

As already mentioned before – using blog as a marketing channel is in most cases relatively cheap option, and when co-operating with one of the most popular blogs, it is also easy to reach a wide audience through blogs. The message travels fast – both through other bloggers and readers, and as already before mentioned – the word of mouth travels fast (can be though both positive and negative).

Weaknesses

When it comes to weaknesses of blog marketing – the hardness of success measurement is one of the first things. Of course there are plenty of ways that the success can be determined, such as clicks, impressions, time spent reading the text, if the click lead to a purchase, if there was an increase in the market etc. The fastness of blog marketing and the way it reaches its customers can also bring in some troubles – how to really measure the success? What if a customer decides to buy the product but does not buy it until in two months? What if someone reads a blog post three weeks after it was posted? In my opinion it does still count as part of the success, but as mentioned, it does not make it easier to measure the success and profitability.

Even though many of the blog readers do have a certain profile, and they often read blogs that have the same interests as they do, it might be sometimes hard to target the audience – especially if your audience is too niche. Another challenge might also be finding the right blog to use as a channel – but once again, depends a lot about the product.

Opportunities

As mentioned early – blog-industry is constantly growing and constantly drawing more and more to the commercial direction – which just means that there are plenty of opportunities and the opportunities keep growing and expanding. This channel is easy to adapt to, and also the message is easy to adapt to match the targeted audience. It is also easy to adapt based on the blogger you are looking to co-operate with. As mentioned – using blogs can be very beneficial – it is definitely not free, but often as easily you will reach as many people as by for example using a newspaper ad – and this way it can even be relatively easier to target the audience.

As we all know – people talk about the positive experiences, but even more if they have had negative experiences – blogger Jenni Rotonen for Pupulandia mentions in her interview that if she a company offering a good product wants to co-operate with her she will definitely take upon the offer, but however, if she has nothing positive to say about the product, she will not spend her time writing a negative post about it (Simola 2013). Of course this does not mean that all the bloggers work the same way!

In a fast growing marketing field such as social media marketing, what is important for blogs and blog marketing is to keep evolving with the marketing world and be able to offer both marketers as well as the consumers.

Threats

One of the biggest both challenges and threats is earning the trust of the customers – as we know by now, the ads in blogs are there so that the blogger can earn some income from her job/hobby – sometimes it might have the customer wondering if they can be able to trust the source (the blogger), or if the bloggers are just promoting a product just because they are getting paid, not because they actually believe in

it. Same goes with product placement – if it is not mentioned that the blogger has received it somewhere, but is praising the product, reader might not fully believe what the blogger is writing or doubt if it is just a question of product placement – even there are official guidelines, not everyone is necessarily following them, as sometimes it is hard to maintain. The question of gaining the trust from the readers was one of the main questions in the research part and will be discussed and analysed thoroughly in the next chapter.

6 THE RESEARCH

The goal of the research was to look deeper into how the consumers/readers use blogs, how they feel about blog marketing and if they feel it is effective. This was done through a questionnaire that was mainly quantitative but also had some open ended questions to share their opinions. The questionnaire was shared via Facebook by the author and her friends, and also posted on Lily.fi as a blog post to get as many possible answers as possible. The questionnaire was open for 2 weeks and was conducted during the fall 2013. Since the questionnaire was not sent to a certain amount of people, an actual response rate cannot be counted. The limitation to this might also be that the respondents were searched from specific platforms, so many of them were more likely to be frequent blog readers, and this has also been taken into account in the process of analysing the responses. In total we reached 308 respondents and due to the variety of the answers, it is fair to believe that this gives quite a realistic view of how the blog marketing is viewed in Finland. The questionnaires are available at the appendix section of this thesis.

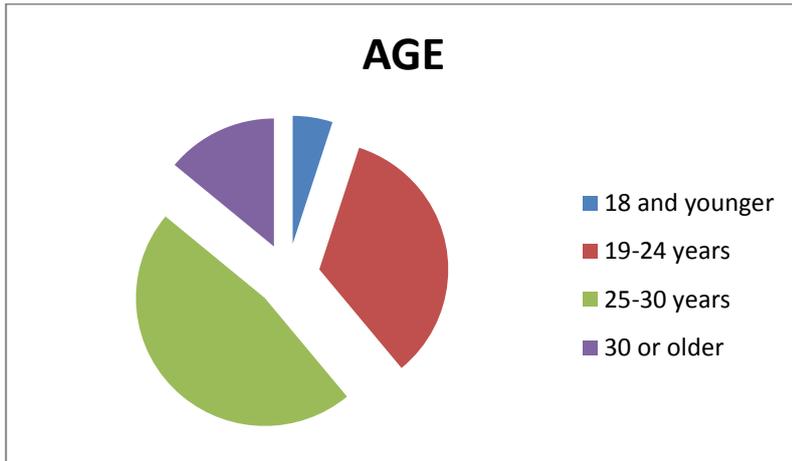
Another part of the research was to interview Finnish fashion and lifestyle bloggers with a questionnaire with a focus on qualitative questionnaire. A group of most popular fashion and lifestyle bloggers were chosen as a focus group, total of 10 bloggers.

As parts of the thesis process also a social media professional was interviewed, however her interview was not part of the research, and it was more part of the academic part of the thesis. The interview and the information gathered were used mainly in the theory section, for example when gathering information of the current state and the past development of blog industry in Finland, as well as the different forms of blog marketing that can be seen in the Finnish blog industry.

6.1 Demographics of the research – blog readers

All in all – 12% of respondents were male and 88% respondents were women. The age groups were divided as following (can be seen from FIGURE 9):

FIGURE 9. Age of respondents.



18 and younger	5%
19-24 years	34%
25-30 years	47%
30 or older	14%

As we can see, and also as anticipated – majority of the respondents were in their early or late twenties, which has also earlier also been mentioned to be one of the biggest groups to read blogs.

30% of the respondents mentioned that they also have their own blog that they write. 78% of the respondents said that they read blogs daily or many times a day, whereas 19% read once a week or more seldom. 69% of the readers mentioned that the blogs they read are focused on fashion and lifestyle. Other popular topics were work related, cooking and blogs for their friends or people they know.

The demographics were quite much what expected – and gave a good basis for the research. It was interesting to see that the percentage who read blogs often was a bit higher than expected, but that might also be due to the fact that the questionnaire was distributed through a popular blog portal.

Here we can already see that people interested in fashion and lifestyle are often quite active blog readers and for companies it means that they can easily and fast reach a vast amount of the target market – once again it is good though to remember, that the research is very niche and of course is not the absolute truth.

6.2 View on advertising in blogs

Next part of the research focused on ads and in general advertisement in blogs, how much attention do readers pay on them, and if they find them useful or annoying. The respondents also had a possibility to leave their own suggestions or ideas.

In total 38% of the respondents said that almost all of the blogs they read have some kind of advertising or promotions in them and approximately same amount said that at least half of the blogs they read have that – which means that majority of the respondents see ads in blogs on daily basis. The view of the advertisement is quite neutral – 14% said that they have stopped reading some blogs because of the excessive amount of advertisements there are, and for 25% it does not make any kind of difference of if there is advertisement or not.

66% of the respondents said that they believe that blog marketing can be very effective – on a scale from 1 to 5 they had chosen 4 or higher. Majority of the respondents said that they have not necessarily clicked any of the links or bought anything through a blog, but have definitely taken up on many of the recommendations – so even though the effect might not be able to be seen directly, it definitely is effective.

Majority also thinks that as long as the amount is reasonable and the style of the text is still like the blogger and does not just seem like money-making, ads are okay. 30% of the respondents actually said that to them it does not really matter if the blogger tells if the product or service is sponsored, even though then in open ended questions many of them left comments that they wish the bloggers were being honest and that the readers do deserve to know the truth – it is good to remember at this point too that however in Finland bloggers are required to clearly state if the post is promoted. 53% also think that it is not always as clear if it is a promoted post even though the newly published code of conduct does require for every blogger to clearly state if it is a sponsored post and also all the ads should be clearly visible from the normal text.

30% of the respondents said that they do not believe that bloggers are always being honest – many of the comments brought in the viewpoint that the sponsored posts are an advertisement, and when of course the advertisement cannot advertise any-

thing false, but it is definitely understandable that since it is an advertisement, it does often highlight the positive sides of it. 65% of respondents said that they would like to also see more negative posts on blogs – not just for the sole purpose of being negative, but many said that it would be also healthy to see that the bloggers can also have negative opinions. Understandably this would create the trust bond between readers and bloggers – but when have we seen negative advertisements? That is not the purpose of advertising.

6.3 Bloggers

For this thesis I interviewed the total of 10 Finnish fashion and lifestyle bloggers (bloggers A to J). The interviews were conducted via an online-questionnaire with many open ended questions. The goal of this questionnaire was to acquire a better knowledge of the general view of blogging from bloggers – how do they feel about being part of companies' marketing communication, how do they choose the companies they co-operate with, do they feel that they are opinion leaders and how do they view themselves as bloggers. All the bloggers wish to stay as anonymous as possible.

The bloggers that took part to the interview were all among the popular blogs in Finland and most of them blogged under one of the blog portals in Finland. On average the responding bloggers have 40 000 to 50 000 unique readers per week. The bloggers all described their blogs to be lifestyle blogs where a big focus is on their own life. Some of the blogs were a bit more niche – two of them mentioned them focusing on sports and four of them also in fashion. All the bloggers said that companies contact them one to three times per week and are interested in blog marketing cooperation with them. About half of the campaigns are such that the bloggers in general ignore – and there are many reasons for that; no time, no interest, has tried the product and does not believe in it, and the most common reason is that the product or what it represents simply does not fit what the blog represents.

All the responding bloggers mentioned that the most interesting campaigns and the ones that they usually choose are the ones that give them as much freedom as possible to create the campaign, and not the ones where they basically name them what they want them to do, how to present it in a blog and what kind of opinion they should have. The biggest motivator for bloggers to participate into blog marketing is usually according to them of course all the free products that they get, but also being

able to share good tips to their readers and other peers – and also for them to be informed of what is currently in! This is the answer that nine of the bloggers gave.

The bloggers who currently write their blog full-time have of course more time for different co-operations. Three of the responding bloggers are currently writing full time and six do it on a side of their studies. All bloggers that are not blogging full time do wish that they had more time for these kinds of projects. Four of the bloggers mentioned that also on the contrary they do not want to become “sell-outs” and want to still keep the original nature of the blog. All of ten responding bloggers told the contacts straight from the companies or brands, but they also co-operate with different PR-firms and the ones that are blogging under a certain blog portal, also receive contacts from their own employer – at the time of the interview total of seven bloggers were writing under a blog portal, and three were writing independently.

All of the bloggers that were interviewed are aware that they always have to clearly state if the product or service is something that they have received through their blog and according to them, they do follow this guideline 100% and believe that since it has been so much even in the media during the past year, that at least all the more popular bloggers do all follow the same guidelines. All of the bloggers have written their blog for 2-5 years – the forerunner of the respondents was blogger A, who has written her blog since 2006 and is currently one of leading bloggers in Finland. All of the bloggers mentioned that during their blogging career they have learned to know their readers, so they know what works and what does not work and also what fits the blog’s image. Nine out of the ten bloggers said that the feedback they have received from the campaigns and advertisements has been mainly positive or very neutral and the negative feedback is very rare. Negative feedback was described to be in comment form, and comments included messages such as blogger turning into a sell-out, blogger not being honest, or that isn’t there anything else the blogger could be writing about. Blogger B also mentioned in her comments how she has realized and seen that blogs where the content has turned almost to be half just advertisements, is receiving much more negative feedback and readers are losing trust in the blogger.

Seven out of ten of the responding bloggers believe that blogs have some effect on the buying behaviour of the readers and that they also can effect on it – blogger C shared an experience where she had bought a pair of jeans from a local clothing

store and mentioned in her blog how cheap and fitting they were and the same week all the same jeans were sold out from all the stores in that city – so readers do listen for tips from “someone they know” – the bloggers. Three of the bloggers said that they believe the effect to be above the average.

When asking and discussing the reasons why the responding bloggers think that the effect is so great are many of the reasons that were already listed in the theory part of this thesis, which is definitely positive! The bloggers listed the reasons behind blog marketing success to be the fact that through a blog post you can easily reach tens of thousands unique readers, it is much cheaper than for example traditional TV-, radio- or magazine advertisements. Usually the readers and the bloggers have similar interests, so it is easy for the companies to find the target market they want. For many readers it is easier to look up to someone who is like them, unlike models in fashion magazine and journalists who write for magazines. Blogs are a growing phenomenon and more and more part of the everyday life. Eight out of ten of the bloggers wished to use their blog as the main resource of income in the future.

6.4 Research summary

Sub research question number one was meant to be answered by the research part of the thesis; “1. Marketing and advertising in blogs – experiences from both the consumers and the bloggers”. The research did give a great outlook from both the blogger and the consumer point of view and some conclusions can be drawn from these. By interviewing a social media professional a general outlook was created for the field of blog marketing in Finland, and it was used both as to help to build up and conduct the research, as well as to determine the theory part.

As already mentioned before – most of the respondents to the questionnaire read many blogs on daily basis, so for many companies blog marketing can be a successful choice due to the fact that they can reach a lot of their target market by choosing the right blog – they will reach the target market fast and it will often also be relatively cheap – of course it depends what kind of promotion it is but at least compared to other more traditional forms of printed marketing, it definitely is cheaper and by many means can also be more effective. What is although important to take into account is that blog marketing is effective only for certain target groups, as blog read-

ing is not as popular for all age groups. From this thesis it can for example be seen that the most active blog readers are females in both of their early and late twenties.

When asking respondents about the affectivity of blog marketing, 66% ranked it to 4 or higher. As already discussed before – sometimes the return on investment cannot be determined and counted directly as easily as some might see an ad and go and buy it directly, some might buy it in two weeks etc., so the affectivity factor has to be determined – meaning also the goal. The affectivity came also across when interviewing the bloggers and how for example all the jeans ended up being sold out in the city where the blogger is from as blogger B mentioned in her interview.

With 53% of respondents saying that they sometimes are a bit unsure if the blog post is sponsored or not definitely means that from the blogging side there is a need to step up. For 30% it does not even matter, but according to Finnish law, the bloggers always have to make sure it is clearly stated.

When reading blogs though quite often you can for example see the following examples used to let the readers know that the post is sponsored:

- The sponsored links are for example marked with a star
- There is a disclaimer on the bottom or on the side of the page telling that the blog has some sponsored posts and advertisements
- Clearly stating for example in the subject line or the beginning of the post
- Stating clearly which products or items are bought self and which have been received through their blogs.

These are just some of the examples that have been seen in blogs in Finland to make readers aware of the sponsored posts and products.

30% of the respondents mentioned that they sometimes have hard time believing in bloggers and the opinions and experiences they share in their blogs and 65% would like to see more negative posts as well – so is key to finding trust publishing honest and negative posts? It shouldn't be. It is great to see that the readers are not blindly buying just anything they see or read about and that they are being concerned. However, that is definitely something to remember for the companies using blog marketing – how to sound believable and not over-exaggerate anything! It is im-

portant to use bloggers that seem true and who readers like and also only give something that can be promised, not to promise super-powers for your product!

There were some of the numbers that were quite interesting, and will definitely be useful for companies that are looking into blog marketing in the future. Some of the advice that I would give to a company that is looking to go into blog marketing would be some of the following – choose your target! This means both choosing the target market and also the target blogger. About half of the offers that the bloggers receive they end up ignoring, so it is important to choose the bloggers that you know that will be interested and co-operative. By choosing the right blogger, you also choose the right target audience. It is important to think what kind of campaign you want, what you want from the blogger and what you want from it yourself. Instead of telling the blogger word-to-word what you want (this is something that most likely will never work out), it is good to of course give some ideas and what are your goals – so plan well ahead!

It is good to also keep in mind that it is not enough to just contact one blogger – it is good that the readers will see the product/service from many blogs and it will probably ease up the buying process. The bigger blog portals have always a contact person who takes care of the selling of the ad-space so instead of contacting all the bloggers, you can easily reach more at once.

It is important to also remember to have a budget –some of the bloggers blog for living and have realized their worth, and will not do this for free. Only a free bottle of lotion will not necessarily be enough! It is also important to think what kind of promotion or advertisement is the best – but this also is much up to the fact that what are the size and the resources of the company.

All in all the research did prove the hypothesis to be true – readers have sometimes hard time to believe everything the bloggers read, they would like the bloggers to clearly state when the post is sponsored but what was interesting – nevertheless all this, the readers to read and listen to the bloggers!

The bloggers understand the role of blog marketing, and carefully select what kind of products fit their profile. They have realized their role as opinion leaders and just

think – if a blogger writes about a negative experience, there might be 50 000 people who read it within a week, and one can just think what kind of affect it might have!

All in all, research was successful and answered the research questions. Of course since research group was such a small one, it cannot give definite answers, but research definitely gives direction of where blog marketing is headed with the bloggers and the readers.

7 CONCLUSION

All in all, the thesis process has been a success. The objectives were met; the research questions were answered with theoretical and academic points and theories as well as with a research. Due to the freshness of the topic it was a bit of a challenge to find literature, but luckily there were other good thesis works as well as some online articles to support the work. The topic can easily also get too wide, so it was somewhat of a challenge to find the right topics and keep it all relevant. All in all the process was a great final for the studying process, and really felt like one was able to put all the knowledge together.

In the beginning the objective of the blog was described as following: "The objective of this thesis is to research the Finnish blogging industry on the surface, with focus on fashion and lifestyle blogs and research the opinions of both bloggers and readers on the topic of blog marketing. This thesis will also look into blogs as a marketing choice and what are the strengths and weaknesses. The research part will focus on both the consumer experience as well as the blogger experience. The objective is to see if blogs are an effective marketing channel choice and also how customers see blog marketing. " All the parts of the objective were well covered and discussed in the thesis, meaning that the thesis was a success.

The research questions were the following and went along the line with the objective of the thesis; main question "Can blog marketing be successful?"

Also the following sub-questions were discussed in the thesis:

1. What are blogs and what is blog marketing? How to use it and what are its strengths and weaknesses?
2. What is marketing and advertising in blogs?

In the beginning of the thesis the hypothesis was described to be "The hypothesis is that blog marketing indeed is very successful, but it is important to look into how it is done, since readers (in this case also customers) are becoming more and more doubtful of the true colours for the bloggers, so the one of the key challenges alongside to the success might be gaining trust from the customers. The hypothesis will be

discussed more later on with the research results. " The research indeed proved that the hypothesis was true in most cases. Blog marketing is a successful marketing tool when planned and performed correctly. Readers do sometimes have challenges with believing that bloggers are being honest and presenting their right experiences. When at the same time readers do relate to bloggers and gather tips and experiences from products, at the same time also many readers are being doubtful and might even not buy a product because it has been in a blog. More of the experiences can be read in the research chapter.

While this thesis might not have necessarily brought something totally new to the table of this field, it has definitely researched deeper into the concept of blog marketing. The respondent group for the questionnaire for readers was quite big and also quite versatile, so it can be assumed that it did give a very realistic view of what the current views of the topic are. It would be very interesting to read for example deeper on the effect of blog marketing, how to measure it etc.

As mentioned in the beginning of the thesis – the blogs are here to stay, and it is a growing part of social media. What makes blogs and blogging so easy is that everyone can do it – of course everyone cannot be world-famous and live on it! Blogging includes all the important parts of social media – content, community and Web 2.0, and when popular Finnish bloggers have tens of thousands of unique readers per week, they definitely are available for everyone within just few clicks.

Blog marketing is a great way for a company to reach a lot of customers at a relatively cheap price. It is important however for a company – no matter big or small to plan well – this goes of course with any marketing activity!

It will definitely be interesting to see in the future how the blogosphere in Finland will turn out to be as it keep growing and getting more popular, especially from the customer-relation part of view. I hope that this thesis can be of help for someone when looking at the opportunity to use blog marketing as a marketing channel – blog marketing is a successful choice, when it is used at the right time and the right way.

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FIGURE 1. Example of a blog from Nio till Fem-blog. (Nio-till-fem/<http://rodeo.net/niotillfem/>, 2012).

FIGURE 2. Example of the commenting form from Nio till Fem-blog. (Nio-till-fem/<http://rodeo.net/niotillfem/>, 2012).

FIGURE 3. Indiedays.com blogportal's front page. (Indiedays.com, 2012)

FIGURE 4. Indiedays.com blogportal's front page. (Indiedays.com, 2013)

FIGURE 5. Example of co-creation marketing. (Pupulandia, 2012).

FIGURE 6. Social media triangle (Ahlgqvist, T. & Heinonen, S. VTT/<http://www.vtt.fi/inf/pdf/tiedotteet/2008/T2454.pdf>, 2013).

FIGURE 7. Promotions disclaimer. <http://yummyj.blogspot.com>

FIGURE 8. People who read blogs out of all the internet users between 2006 and 2009. Source Tilastokeskus.

FIGURE 9. Age of respondents. Author's own.

APPENDIX 1 Interview Questions for social media professional Helene Auramo (Zipipop Oy)

1. Could you describe your company shortly and how it works in the world of social media.
2. The concept of marketing in social media: What do you see as the current trends? What are the trends in the future, which direction is social media marketing headed to?
3. Marketing and advertising in Finnish lifestyle and fashion blogs – what kind of campaigns do you remember? Which ones do you consider as being the most successful ones?
4. Blogging communities, such as Indiedays, lily.fi – what do they bring to the blog scene in Finland? How successful have they been?
5. How important marketing channel/tool blogs are when comparing to other marketing options the companies have these days?
6. Marketing through blogs – pros and cons?
7. Other thoughts on blogs and marketing.

APPENDIX 2 Questionnaire questions

Part 1 - Bloggers

1. Please list the main three key words of your blog.
2. How many unique visitors per week does your blog have?
3. How often do companies contact you in regards of a possible co-operation/sponsorship?
4. How many of the offers do you end up ignoring?
5. What kind of co-operations you like or favor the most?
6. Could you imagine yourself doing even more blog marketing if possible?
7. What is your biggest motivator to be part of blog marketing?
8. If you have received a free product that simply is not pleasing, do you feel like you are obligated to write about it to your blog or not even mention it? Why?
9. On a scale from 1-5 how big effect do you think blog marketing has on customers' buying behaviour?
10. On a scale 1-5 how big effect do you think your blog has on customers' buying behaviour?
11. Do you clearly state if the post is sponsored somehow? Why yes/why not?
12. How do the companies often contact you?
13. How are your readers reacting towards ads in your blog?
14. Could you imagine yourself getting your main income through blog? About how much do you get from your blog now?
15. Why do you think blogs are a success full marketing channel?

Part 2 – Blog readers

1. Sex
 - a. Female
 - b. Male
2. Age
 - a. Under 18
 - b. 19-24 years
 - c. 25-29 years
 - d. 30-34 years
 - e. Older
3. Do you write your own blog?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
4. How often do you read blogs?
 - a. Many times a day
 - b. Daily
 - c. 2-5 times a week
 - d. Weekly
 - e. Monthly
 - f. Other
5. How many blogs do you read regularly?
6. How do you find the blogs you read?
 - a. Through a blog portal (Indiedays, Lily etc.)
 - b. Recommendations
 - c. From other blogs' sidebars
 - d. Blogilista, bloglovin
 - e. Other, please explain
7. Please describe with few key words what are the most interesting blog topics for you
8. Have you seen any paid ads or posts in the blogs you read?
 - a. No
 - b. In a few
 - c. In about a few
 - d. Majority
 - e. All of them
9. How do you feel about advertising in blogs?

10. Do you feel that the blogger is obligated to announce every time the post is sponsored? Please elaborate.
11. Please check what applies – you can choose many options.
 - a. I think it is totally okay to advertise in blogs – bloggers need their reward.
 - b. I have sometimes clicked some of the ads in blogs.
 - c. I have no opinion about blog marketing.
 - d. I have stopped reading a blog because it had (too many) advertisements.
12. On a scale 1-5, how effective do you feel blog marketing is?
13. In the future – would you like to see even more advertisements in blogs?
 - a. This is a perfect amount
 - b. No
 - c. For some blogs yes – depends on the blog
 - d. I don't know
 - e. Yes
14. Please elaborate question 13.
15. Through what marketing channels do you usually get informed of the new products?
16. Do you believe the bloggers are being honest of the products they receive? Please elaborate.
17. Do you believe bloggers are making the truth prettier because they are getting paid for the advertisement?
18. Would you like to also hear negative feedback from the bloggers of the products and services they use?
19. Do the bloggers state clearly enough if the post is paid for? Please give examples.
20. Any other comments are more than welcome!



