

HOW FASHION BLOGGING HAS HAD AN
AFFECT ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR
&

TO DISCUS HOW AUTHENTIC
AND CREDIBLE BLOGGERS
REVIEWS ACTUALLY ARE



Katharine Parratt

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the years there has been a change within the marketing industry. The usage of social media and blogging to promote brands is becoming increasingly popular and more successful. All be it, the case still remains, are bloggers true and genuine in their reviews or are they purely just promoting their sponsors branded products?

The main focus of this study is to look into the the effect fashion blogging has had on consumer behaviour, for example, their purchasing behaviours having viewed certain blog posts. This research delves into consumer's opinion on authenticity and credibility of the bloggers and in return, look at the bloggers opinion of subliminal marketing within their blogs.

Primary research will be carried out to gain a true understanding on the above issues. Online surveys will be executed to gather information on the type of consumer who are more likely to view and be effected by blogging. Focus groups will then be carried out to understand the consumers view on purchasing behaviour, influenced by blogging, alongside how genuine and biased consumers think bloggers are within sponsored blog posts. Established and less well known bloggers took part in interviews to gain a further understanding on how they view promoting brands products subliminally, and to what point they think consumers are aware of this happening.

Research indicates that blogging clearly has an initial effect on consumers behaviour's online. However, consumers are well aware of the 'not so' subliminal brand marketing that is going on within blogs. This then has no effect on whether the consumers purchase the products seen or not. It has been brought to light that consumers appreciably more 'blog savvy' that we first thought. It is evident that they tend to see through bloggers and pick up when they are not being as genuine as they should be.

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GLOSSARY

CONSUMER

A person who purchases goods or a service for personal use

FROW

Front row (normally at a fashion show)

WOMM

Word of mouth marketing

GENERATION Y or MILLENIUMS

The generation born in the 1980s and 1990s

SWOT

Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

BLOGGING

'Web-logging' a website containing authors written experiences/reviews etc

VLOGGING

Video blogging

SEO

Search engine optimisation

INTRODUCTION

“When making a purchase decision, bloggers do have sway. Forty-one percent of consumers say that blogs are among the top three sources that influence their purchase decision, beating out brands’ official Web sites and magazines.” [Jones, Sarah]

In today's society we are overwhelmed with the amount of social networking platforms we can access. Statistics show that 65% of adults are now using social networking sites. This is up by 7% from when researchers tracked the use of social media back in 2005. [Perrin, Andrew 2015]

Social media effects a great deal of things in our everyday life including things such as; the way we communicate with one another to influencing the way we dress, talk and act. Social media, in particular, blogging has had a huge impact on the fashion industry and consumer's behaviour. This exciting new movement is establishing an entire new breed of entrepreneur. “Where a simple love of fashion can be flipped over into a business. Savvy bloggers are changing the way brands reach customers forever, while defining trends for readers that were once only swayed by the big fashion magazines.” [Raye, Amanda 2012]

The industry has benefited immensely in regards to the rise of fashion bloggers as they have been acting as marketing strategies for chosen brands. As the new bloggers on the scene gained an audience, brands such as Chanel and Mulberry have begun to partner with bloggers for their marketing campaigns. Bloggers have begun to gain a huge following count and nowadays are the main rival for the magazine industry as more consumers are beginning to trust word of mouth reviews rather than magazines and the brands themselves. Blogging is creating amazing opportunities for high-end brands to reach a larger more age-specific audience. [Jones, Sarah 2014]

Authenticity and credibility are a complicated factor when it comes to fashion blogging. How can we trust bloggers reviews when they're sponsored by the brand? It all boils down to how genuine and transparent the blogger is.

AIM & OBJECTIVES

1. What influence do bloggers have when consumers view a blog post? Do consumers then go on to purchase products or search further blogs etc?
2. To discuss if companies are using blogging as a way to market they're products subliminally?
3. Is it beneficial for companies to use bloggers as a way of marketing their products? How effective is this compared to other marketing techniques?
4. To discuss how biased bloggers opinions on products actually are?
5. To investigate consumer perception of the credibility of blogs as a source of authentic fashion information.

AUDIENCE

Industry experts – specifically marketing sectors of the industry and how they can maximise strategies by involving popular bloggers etc.

Bloggers themselves – to gain an understanding on the consumer's point of view on blogging, in regards to how they view authenticity and transparency.

The 'blog savvy' consumer – allowing them to understand the struggle bloggers have nowadays to stay genuine, however, commercial at the same time.

OUTLINE

Throughout this study, objectives will be investigated allowing research to be gathered and the aim of the thesis to be met. The 4 chapters throughout will be explored allowing us to gain a better understanding on the topic. Chapter one starts with analysing the social media dependence we now have in our day-to-day lives. Showing statistics on the usage and how it is rapidly affecting the fashion industry. We then go on to discuss in Chapter 2 how influential blogging is now to the consumers and how this is beginning to effect their purchasing behaviours. Chapter 3 delves into word of mouth marketing and how consumers feel this is now a more influential source than the brands themselves, alongside, the use of blogging being used as marketing techniques. Authenticity and credibility is examined throughout chapter 4, where we are now looking at how biased bloggers feel their reviews are, or are not, and also how consumers feel on this matter. All four chapters are then concluded, and recommendations are made alongside areas that may be further researched.



METHODOLOGY

A combination of research techniques will be used throughout to gain the most knowledge on the topic, allowing both aims and objectives to be met. Secondary research has been used to look into existing literature on the chosen discussion topic.

SECONDARY

Statistics, facts and market reports are key to understanding the effect blogging has had on the industry throughout the recent years. Looking into existing research allows gaps to be seen where research needs to be carried out further.

Secondary research was used throughout the study to understand and see the past behavioural characteristics of consumers as well as gaining information on research methods.

- Books – Authenticity [Gilmore Pine] and Research Methods For Business Students [M.Saunders, P.Lewis and A.Thornhill] help gain a better understanding on which research methods were correct for this thesis. Style Feed – The World’s Top Fashion Blogs [William Oliver] help research popular fashion bloggers that could be a possible participant for interviews.

- Websites – Forbes website was really helpful throughout this research

- Market reports by Marketing Sherpa help gain an idea on statistics on the topic within the correct markets.

- Blog website – gaining a clearer understanding of how blogs can promote products.

There are many advantages of secondary data; it is unobtrusive, longitudinal studies may be feasible, you can provide comparative and contextual data and it can often result in unforeseen discoveries. Secondary data can also generally provide permanent references to source the information. [Lewis, Saunders, Thornhill 2012]

PRIMARY

Primary quantitative research was then carried out using surveys with a set of structured closed questions, gaining basic information we need to allow us to understand who the target market was for this topic. Once we had understood this, further primary research was carried out. The target market was now clear and the research could be narrowed down into more specific focus groups. “A focus group is a form of qualitative research in which a group of people are asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs and attitudes towards a product, service, concept, advertisement, idea, or packaging.” [EMRC] Using focus groups really helped narrow down the research to the correct audience. Online interviews were carried out to understand how bloggers themselves view this matter. Open ended questions were used to allow qualitative data to be gathered - “they are useful if you are unsure of the response, such as in exploratory research, when you require a detailed answer or when you want to find out what is uppermost in the respondent’s mind.” [Lewis, Saunders, Thornhill 2012]



ONLINE SURVEY

An online survey was created to initially allow the correct target audience to be located, and to also gather quantitative data. A pilot survey was firstly created, thus allowing us to see if the questions asked will gain the correct answers needed. This also helped to see if any questions were written in a biased form. Once the pilot was tried and tested a variety of 10-12 questions were listed for participants to answer online. The reason the survey was submitted online was to ensure a high percentage of responses. This is extremely important as a large sample needed to be gathered to be able to differentiate between types of consumers. One limitation to this was that the online survey was going to be posted on social media sites to allow a large audience response, however, this then restricts the variety of the audience. So other methods of posting the online survey needed to be looked into, to allow an older audience to respond. Closed questions dominated this survey making it easier and fairly effortless for the participants to answer. There is a lack of control over doing an online survey so this needs to be taken into account. However, it is fitting with the short timescale of this research. Once the survey has the correct amount of responses, the answers will then be analyzed to allow us to see any correlation between data found; thus making it easy to find the correct consumers to take part in the focus group. [See Appendix C for results]



FOCUS GROUP

A focus group was then carried out once the correct target audience had been discovered through the online survey. This allowed a more detailed analysis of the consumer's behaviour. A focus group of no more than 5 participants were asked a set of questions. The questions asked were 'open-ended' and semi-structured allowing the participants to speak freely of their opinions on the matter, thus allowing qualitative research to be collated.

"Qualitative research is about getting people to expand on their answers, enabling a better insight into their attitudes and behaviour. It's all about getting underneath people's responses to find out what is driving their decisions." [The Marketing Donut 2015]

Limitations to this research were that the majority of the participants came from the same academic background which limited the variety of research gathered.

BLOGGER INTERVIEW

Interviews were carried out with chosen bloggers. This was approximately 10 'open-ended' questions via email, as it was difficult to meet every blogger in person. They are extremely busy. The research needed to be consistent throughout, to allow the research to correspond; so it was decided on email. This interview was primarily based around how authentic and credible the bloggers reviews on products actually were, also, how consumer behaviour has been affected by blogging and the influence this has had overall. This involved asking the blogger candidates semi-structured questions. Thirty bloggers were emailed to see if they were interested in helping with the research, however, only 4 bloggers replied.

Fleur De Force – Instagram following of 716k

Bankè [astylediary]- Instagram following of 15k

Jodi Young – Instagram following of 1,399

Aine Tagon [Aines_wardrobe] - Instagram following - 1,480

Each of these bloggers were extremely helpful when it came to understanding authenticity and the use of blogging as a way to market products. Although only 4 bloggers were interviewed, each of them are at different stages in their blogging life, so it allowed varied response's from different point of views. Fleur is a very well known popular blogger whereas Bankè and Jodi are not as established which allowed a more varied response.

Semi-structured, 'open-ended' questions allow more data to be gathered - "they are useful when one is unsure of the response, such as in exploratory research, when one requires a detailed answer or when one wants to find out what is uppermost in the respondent's mind." [Lewis, Saunders, Thornhill 2012] This research is qualitative as many thoughts and opinions on the matter will be asked.

Carrying out face-to-face interviews would have allowed the topic to be discussed further, however, sadly this was not possible. The interview questions needed to be well thought out, allowing maximum knowledge to be obtained.

DATA ANALYSIS FOCUS GROUP

Before the focus group was carried out, participants were made aware that they will be recorded thus enabling transcriptions of the research to be carried out. The method of data analysis was decided upon coding. Coding is the more efficient way to analysis the qualitative data collected. Firstly, occurring dominant themes needed to be highlighted throughout the focus group transcripts. This then allowed 8 themes to be discovered throughout the 4 participant answers. From this data; a coding table was then able to be created.

Table 1

CODE	MEANING OF CODE	TIMES CODE OCCOURED OUT OF 4
Instagram being the most influential social media	Participants agreed that Instagram was the most influential social media platform when it came to purchasing products.	4/4
Seeing how the clothes are styled and how they fit	Participants mentioned that they preferred Instagram to other platforms as they can see imagery and get a look at how certain clothes were styled and their fit.	2/4
Visit further blog posts after viewing a particular blog	Participants stated that they tend to view further blog posts after seeing a particular post.	2/4
Visiting the brands website after seeing products on a blog - to see more of that specific brands products	Participants mentioned that they usually go on to the brands official website to view their products after they have seen blog posts incorporating the specific brands products.	4/4
Agreeing that companies are now using blogging as a way to market their products	Participants stated that there are aware that certain bloggers may be promoting products via their blog for some branded companies.	3/4
Bloggers or blogs are influential	Participants mentioned that they have brought a product after viewing a blog posts and that bloggers are very influential.	3/4
Consumer are aware that some bloggers reviews might be slightly biased	Participants mentioned that they are well aware that bloggers reviews might be slightly clouded when it comes to specific products they are reviewing. This is due to sponsorship; consumers are savvy especially when it comes to bloggers they religiously follow. They can clearly see when the blogger is not being genuine.	3/4
Is WOMM (Word of Mouth Marketing) influential	Participants mentioned that WOM is heavily influential and that they would act on a recommendation from a friend or family. This then relates back to trusting the bloggers opinion more than the brands themselves as they are real people giving real reviews.	4/4

BLOGGER INTERVIEWS

Table 2

CODE	MEANING OF CODE	TIMES CODE OCCOURED OUT OF 4
Bloggers can track sales to see which products sell well	Bloggers can see which products created most sales and it allows them to see patterns that are emerging within the industry.	2/4
Blogs are affecting consumer behaviour	All interview participants agreed that blogging does affect consumer behaviour to a certain extent – especially the consumer who follow blogs religiously.	4/4
Bloggers are no longer trying to hide the fact they are promoting certain products – normally a disclaimer	Bloggers mentioned that it is no longer subliminal marketing, consumers are well aware of the promotional methods that go on and bloggers now have to have disclaimers on the posts stating the brands they've used.	3/4
Consumers are aware of bloggers promoting sponsored products	Bloggers mentioned that the consumers are savvy to this regardless and more consumers are increasing becoming aware of this	2/4
Blogging is used as a cost effective way to market for companies	Blogger participants agreed that it is a cost effective way for companies to market products compared to traditional marketing techniques	3/4
Target audience – women from 18years old – 35years old	It is clear that the typical fashion blogger of today has a specific target audience – typically women ages 18-35 years old	4/4
Bloggers try their best to stay true and genuine when reviewing products	Bloggers were very concerned that the reviews had to be genuine and truthful. They make a conscious effort to be transparent as their followers are well aware when their favourite blogger is being anything but genuine.	3/4
Blogging is a way to make brands 'look good'	One of the participants stated "Its a new way of making brands 'cool'" brands are well aware that blogging is a new innovative way to give their companies a bit more 'street cred' on the market	2/4

Alike with the focus group research, coding will also be used to analyse themes that run throughout the blogger interviews. 4 varied bloggers were asked qualitative questions which then highlighted 8 dominant themes throughout. From this data; a coding table was then able to be created.



SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has evolved throughout the years and now plays a massive role in our day to day lives. Statistics show that Nearly 2.1 billion out of 7 billion people have social media accounts. [Bullas,Jeff 2015]

Since the introduction of web 2.0 it has allowed a new way of communicating and sharing of information, images and links etc. “Net savvy companies are using social media to advertise their products, build customer loyalty and many other functions. Interactions and feedback from customers help businesses to understand the market, and fine-tune their products and strategies.” [Q.Jenny 2014]

There are many social media platforms but the one that has affected the fashion industry predominantly is Instagram with online blogs you can access easily showing the latest trends from high street to runway. Instagram currently has 300 million users with 70 million photos and videos sent daily. [Bullas,Jeff 2015]

1.1

THE NEW INFLUENCERS

Besides celebrity influencers, fashion editors and creative directors, bloggers are now seen on the 'frow' ready to review this seasons hot pieces. Many independent fashion bloggers have just as much, if not more, credibility and influence than a respected fashion brand. [Jones, Sarah 2014] A huge amount of bloggers nowadays have signed contracts with companies due to their influence and large following they have built up over time.

Fashion magazines such as Elle are even hiring bloggers to 'bring life' to their column's as well as popular fashion brands paying a vast cost to have specific bloggers to sit on the front row of events. Bloggers have a huge amount of power over public perceptions.

Fashion used to only get coverage mainly from journalists and the retailers themselves, however, since early 2000 blogging has taken the fashion industry by storm.

Case studies of collaborations with designers and brands are becoming increasingly common as brands are understanding the power and influence bloggers now have on society. In 2014 Chanel collaborated with a well known blogger Peony Lim for a week. She collaborated with Chanel for both the beauty cosmetic aspect; showing consumers how she wears her favourite beauty looks 'Dark Beauty' and 'Sun Kissed' alongside many more. She also covered the fashion clothing aspect of the brand via her blog. [Peony Lim 2014 see appendix A] Another blogger/brand collaboration was Marc Jacobs and an extremely popular blogger 'Man Repeller'. Marc wanted to try and reach and connect with an older audience for his collection. This was the perfect blogger for the job. It is a great example of how brands are now reaching out well known bloggers as they are now highly valued by consumers. [Lamb, Rachel 2012 Appendix B]

CONSUMER PROFILE

MILLENNIALS / GENERATION Y

This specific generation have grown up amongst the progressively socially-networked, online age, and have obtained the most marketing attention throughout. “Follow your dreams” a quote told to many of the generation Y, they were constantly told that they were special, leading most of this generation to be very confident, however, this can easily be mistaken for narcissism. Optimism is key when it comes to millennials especially compared to other generations. When this generation enter adulthood they sometimes have unrealistic expectations which can lead to a lot of disappointment and disillusion. Millennials have grown up being absolutely besieged by marketing and advertisements. They have become some-what suspicious of any promoting material. From this, they have learnt that when it comes to purchasing products or services, they feel that WOM is easier to rely on. They prefer to listen to friends or family over marketing/PR or advertising material.

As Generation Y have grown up around technology, they adapt quickly to new software/technology. They are extremely comfortable when it comes to their social internet life. “This comfort with social media means they are good at self-promotion and fostering connections through online media.” [Rouse, Margaret 2015]

1.2

5

THE *‘BLOG-SAVVY’* CONSUMER

Primary research from blogger interviews have show that this specific consumer is heavily influence by the social media world. They are 18-34 year olds, typically students or full time working women with fashion and lifestyle inspiration.

- Predominantly female
- 18-34 year olds
- Single or in a settled relationship
- Disposable income
- Independent – living on their own
- No specific religion
- Normally living in cities / suburban areas

1.3

6

THE TRIBE

The tribe Identity Sharders – are people who are using social media to channel multiple voices or find their own. AKA – the self described ‘internet addicts’ the consumers within this tribe have a high knowledge when it comes to using different social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr. They use these sites to create their online personas. A study by social media agency stated that throughout September 2014 internet infiltration gained almost 42% of the population with 28% of those internet users creating social media accounts.

“Not all Identity Sharders are the same. Dora Moutot, The Elastic Persona, alters her identity based on what platform she is on. Julie DeNeen, The Self Discloser, is a social media addict who shares everything online. Karel Kumar, The Professional Sharder, has to negotiate between being a professional online while still selling himself as a brand.”

1.4

Social Media

Sharders see social media platforms as a place to be themselves. They are active across all different platforms throughout the web. Their main focus is to create a unique voice and that different social media platforms can encourage different segments of their character.

Ease and speed are all that the Sharders are really looking for when it comes to their social media. Instagram and Twitter are their favourites as they are easy and quick to access and use. Tumblr and Pinterest are another popular favorite for this tribe as they have strong visual emphasis whereas Facebook is usually just used for the community factor.

Retail & Fashion

Sharders may spend a lot of their time on the web, however, this doesn't tend to mean they love internet shopping. This tribe's attitudes towards online shopping can be varied. Some tend to hate shopping altogether when others just hate the thought of shopping online. Sharders tend to enjoy shopping on Ebay rather than branded online stores. Hiding their personality and expressing it is both used when it comes to fashion. Professional Sharder Karel stated that this tribe loves to be seen as individuals when it comes to expressing themselves. *“They look to high-street brands such as COS, Banana Republic and even Primark to satisfy their sartorial needs.”*

Marketing & Media

The Identity Sharders are not easily influenced when it comes to marketing on the web. Netflix or YouTube and Hulu are their favourite way to stream services. They prefer this over watching normal television programs. From their constant online use, they encounter online advertising frequently – this tribe tend to not trust some brands. They quoted *“every time I see an ad, I know how fake it is”*. However, they particularly enjoy it when certain brands post witty comments on their Instagram or Twitter accounts. They don't interact with brands much online, but they feel that if a specific brand wants to reach the consumer, then using social media as a way of marketing is the more beneficial and effective way to communicate.

Technology

Online connection is key to this ‘always-on’ generation. The Identity Sharders will always choose Apple products over any other technology branded products – whether it is a computer, tablet or phone this tribe have stated that their products are always Apple. They also mentioned that they particularly love the use of the iPhone for the picture taking qualities. The Sharders prefer to read their books through their iPad or a kindle, rather than a hardback book as with most of their multi media is consumed online also.

HOW MUCH INFLUENCE DO INSTAGRAM BLOG POSTS HAVE ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR?

A report has shown that *'75% of people in the 18 – 26 age group used recommendations on social sites in product research before making a purchase.'* [Tornquist, Stefan – July 2012]

Primary research has shown that Instagram blogs are heavily influential when it comes to purchasing actions. Again participants compared bloggers to celebrity endorsements. It was compared with the likes of a cast member from TOWIE (The Only Way Is Essex ITV). It is the same process; consumers see an inspirational public figure (in this case a popular blogger) which then leads to the consumer wanting to purchase what they're promoting. Seeing a blogger in an outfit via their Instagram, inspires consumers to search the clothing and then most likely purchase it. As stated by participant 1 – focus group "When you see a blogger or celebrity looking really good in something and then tagging it on their Instagram where they bought it – you're going to end up clicking on the brands page to have a browse" [See appendix D] Majority of participants mentioned that viewing a bloggers Instagram tends to lead normally to purchasing products they've just seen, however, they also said they sometimes end up searching similar products and not purchasing anything – just browsing. [See appendix D]

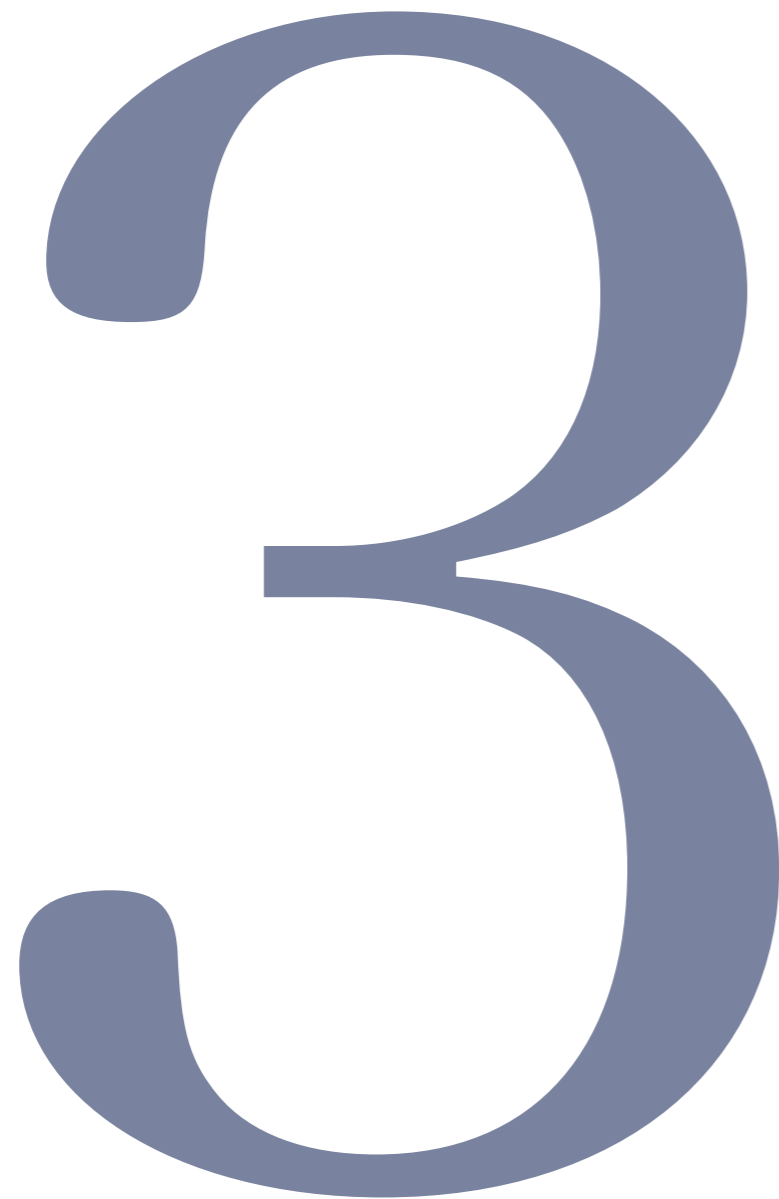




THE BLOGGERS OPINIONS ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR?

Primary interview research has shown that the bloggers are well aware of the actions consumer make once they have viewed a blog post. Fleur [appendix F] mentioned that nowadays you can track most links that you have posted to see who has directly purchased products from her videos, however, “with beauty it can be more about the brand itself and product awareness. Especially for lower-end products which are readily available and accessible on the high street.” [Fleur De Force 2015] She mentioned that she sees a much larger number of people clicking through and purchasing if the products are exclusively sold online, but it definitely affects purchasing activity. Fleur then went on to mention that she has seen certain products sell out in a few hours following it being featured in her content. Jodi Young – a blogger who is not as established as Fleur, used the example of ‘Zoella’ and stated that; “She wears something and it immediately sells out. I think every blog has the effect to a degree - I know certainly that I have purchased due to an Instagram post etc- and I know that others have because of mine.” These comments bloggers have made suggest that they are clearly influential public figures when it comes to consumers purchasing actions and that blog posts do increase sales. Aine Tagon [Appendix H] mentioned that, consumers may try something that their favorite YouTuber or blogger loves. However, it is not always about purchasing products it is also a good way to see how to style products etc.

2.1



WORD OF MOUTH MARKETING

WOMM [word of mouth marketing] is an amazing way to market anything. It works especially well within the fashion industry, as there are so many influential people these days reviewing products from the high street, up to high-fashion catwalks. Marketing companies used to focus on the 4 P's which were – price, product, promotion and place. Nowadays with the use of WOMM they have come up with a new set of marketing instructions. The 3 E's;

Engage – *“Give your fans the gift of you. Engage with them. Listen to what they are telling you. Be part of the conversation about your brand. Be a presence in your fans’ lives”*. [Whitler, Kimberly 2014] Brands/bloggers today have become very good at responding to fans/consumers via their social media accounts. This really makes the consumers feel a part of something and shows great customer service.

Equip – *“Give them reasons to talk. It can be amazing products, great service, insider knowledge, social elevation, incredible stories, unbelievable facts or even funny disclosures”*. [Forbes 2014] This depends very much on how you understand your consumer, and providing them with whatever they need from you. So for instance, from a bloggers point of view, consumers want genuine reviews on products – so this is what bloggers are giving them!

Empower - Give consumers different ways to talk and share. Let them know that they are important to you and that sharing their opinions is important to you. [Forbes 2014] Getting the consumers involved and empowering them.



3.1

ARE COMPANIES USING BLOGGING AS A WAY TO MARKET THEIR PRODUCTS SUBLIMINALLY?

Blogs are becoming increasingly popular for companies purely as a way to promote and market their products. Blogs aren't just helpful for the consumer, they add to both the consumer and the company. They are a very effective marketing technique for a brand to use, however, they also bring in other positive qualities:

- Blogs can bring consumer traffic to your website. Adding a blog alongside your main website can bring in a new consumer, which will then be directed to the main website.
- The blog can create additional advertising income.
- It allows you to almost 'humanise' your company. Allowing you to write as a real person with your own voice. Thus making the consumer feel reassured. It is considerably more informal than a business' website, however, this can be a great way to connect with the consumer and make them feel at ease.
- It can be used to provide customer service. The blog will allow people to voice their questions, again a great way to connect with the consumer, and might even attract new consumers because of the communication factor.
- Also; blogs can rapidly increase product sales. [Gehl, Derek 2006]

There are two ways to market products via blogging; one way is to put up a blog post of a specific product alongside the purchasing link, so people can easily purchase these products online. Another way is; simply just mention a certain product, this works extremely well if you are a popular blogger that has a large trusting follower account. [Gehl, Derek 2006]

Primary research has shown that bloggers feel like it is not a case of marketing and promoting products subliminally as nowadays bloggers have disclaimers under each posts, dependent on which brands they have incorporated. Fleur mentioned that now when it comes to marketing, most of the branded content is fully disclosed, and the audience are savvy to it regardless. [appendix F] This was a reoccurring response throughout the primary research. Bankè [appendix E] stated that *"It's no longer subliminal, brands now understand the role bloggers play in the industry; they are quite clear with what they want most of the time, it's all about brand awareness and potential conversion to sales."*

‘BLOGGING OVER BRANDS?’ TRUSTING WOM RATHER THAN BRANDS THEMSELVES.

Primary research has shown that consumers will purchase a product from a bloggers review on the specific product, rather than seeing this product in a magazine spread. Participant 1 [appendix D] mentioned that blogging allows far more scope for the marketing of brands to an audience, that might not have previously heard of this specific brand before. Blogging also has the element of human connection being able to market the product. It is far more influential than seeing the product in a magazine article. The participant also mentioned that magazine articles nowadays do not have the power to sell as much as blogging now does. Another participant [focus group] mentioned that blogging is a far more trustworthy as opposed to a magazine because one tends to follow bloggers who have similar style as you, so you are more likely to purchase these products, rather than products marketed through brands/ magazines. However, the argument being there are big branded magazines like Company or Elle for example, who are highly influential and those who do not tend to follow blogs as religiously, are more likely to trust these highly popular magazines.

3.2

“Nearly One Third Of Online Consumers Trust A Stranger Over A Brand” [Forbes]



HOW EFFECTIVE IS SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING COMPARED TO TRADITIONAL MARKETING TECHNIQUES?

In 2013, research was carried out to see how effective different SEO [search engine optimisation] were, and compared blog marketing to other social media platforms. Blogs came out on top with a large 32% [effective] compared to Facebook with 16% and Twitter with 13%. This was measured by the level of effectiveness [achieving objectives]. [Marketing Sherpa 2013] Social media marketing has many advantages compared to traditional marketing strategies. It is highly cost effective, thousands of consumers can easily be reached, interacted and communicated with, whilst creating a trusting relationship. Using social media to market is useful as one can measure the SEO, and marketing specialists can visually see where trends are emerging. One disadvantage of social media marketing is that it can be quite time consuming whereas traditional marketing such as advertisements for example, on TV, can gain short term results that have a bigger impact than some on social media.

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

- Social platforms allow the brand to access a large and varied consumer audience.
- Social media is easily accessible to everyone with smart phones.
- It is quick to upload marketing material (imagery or videos) to a brands social media page.
- Consumers can share online posts that brands have uploaded (i.e. marketing material can move through social media sometimes faster than traditional advertising).

WEAKNESSES

- It can narrow down an audience as not many people over the age of 30 years old access social media platforms such as Instagram or Twitter
- It might not create the same amount of impact as traditional marketing strategies might. [For example, a TV advertisement might create more talk on the brand rather than an Instagram post]. Brands have to be careful when deciding on their social media strategy to make sure it will create enough 'talk' through that social media platform.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Brands can use celebrity endorsements as an effective way to market their products – through the celebrity or public figures Instagram or Twitter pages; this can be used to promote the latest products, spanning from technology, fashion or lifestyle products.
- Brands can incorporate bloggers on to their websites as an additional way to offer style advice. This will initially create further interest for the consumer, as they can see how this brands products can be styled, and the advice given will be coming from a real person with real views. Someone consumers can trust.
- A simple brand X blogger collaboration is a powerful way to market and promote new products (via their blog).

THREATS

- The possibility of the brand not being shared with the right audience; as social media really only tends to engages a specific type of consumer with a specific age. For example, the older generation are not as likely to be using Instagram as the younger generation are. Traditional marketing techniques may reach a larger audience.
- Using social media to market brands products could possibly backfire. For example, if a certain brand has used a well known blogger to promote a product of theirs, some consumers may not agree with the way this blogger reviews on their blog, or just are not that fond of her/him in general. This could then jeopardise sales for the brand, as it has acquired bad recognition with a particular blogger.

3.3

“84% of marketers consider blogs at least somewhat effective for inbound marketing”

[Marketing Sherpa 2013]



AUTHENTICITY & CREDIBILITY

AUTHENTICITY *'of undisputed origin and not a copy; genuine.'* [oxford dictionaries]

The Unveiled Wife in June 2015 wrote an article on '5 Reasons Authenticity Is Vital For Bloggers'. Within this she talks about;

1. Authenticity produces consistency, cohesion, and a clear purpose.
 2. People are craving the truth.
 3. Copying others adds to the noise.
 4. You are an expert with your story.
 5. It will inspire people and change the world.
- [Wife Unveiled 2014 Appendix H]

CREDIBILITY *'the quality of being believable or worthy of trust'*. [oxford dictionaries]

HOW AUTHENTIC ARE BLOGGERS REVIEWS ON PRODUCTS?

Credible bloggers are what the public really want. They want to be able to trust their favourite blogger, and to value their opinions and reviews on products. Primary research has shown that bloggers are aware that consumers want this and bloggers work really hard on being true to their reviews, as trust is imperative when it comes to their blogs. Fleur De Force stated that she was very particular when it came to who she would work with as she is very aware that authenticity is paramount. Fleur also mentioned that most of her viewers are extremely loyal and have been watching her vlogs for years now so they know her style, and what she likes. She has to be really honest, and only work with brands she genuinely loves, and to promote products she believes in. If the standards weren't kept high it would most likely result in a loss of viewership over time, rather than growth as the viewers lose trust. [De Force, Fleur – see appendix F] This response was evident throughout the research. Bloggers are well aware that their followers are 'clued-up' as such, and can see when their favourite blogger is not being true in their reviews, Bankè [AStyleDiary appendix E] mentioned that she would rather decline a sponsors offer than be dishonest in one of her blog posts.

4.1



THE CONSUMER'S OPINION

How credible do consumers think the blog posts really are?

"Bloggers are the third most trustworthy source of information, behind friends and family" [Affilinet 2015]

Consumers want a source they can rely on for truthful information. The majority of people who follow bloggers/vloggers have been following them for quite some time now, and have built up a certain amount of trust on their opinions and reviews. However, to a certain extent there will always be a percentage of bloggers out there who don't blog genuinely, in regards to their sponsors products. The words authenticity and credibility occur regularly within this topic. A handful of consumers who follow blogs religiously, were asked if they think 'bloggers reviews may be biased at all'? The majority of the responses were similar, mentioning that it is pretty easy to see through some bloggers, especially when you've been following them for quite some time now, you can tell when they're not being true to their opinion. It was also mentioned that consumers feel that the lesser known bloggers are more genuine when they blog, as they are not sponsored by a brand or influenced in any way. However, popular well-known bloggers with thousands of followers have to be truthful and genuine as it will eventually lead to a decrease in following if not. [Fleur – appendix F] Consumers felt like some bloggers nowadays are very much alike with celebrity endorsement. It was compared with the likes of a cast member from TOWIE (the only way is essex ITV) at how it is now very obvious they've been sponsored by a company to promote either an item of clothing or health supplement. The same goes for some bloggers, they need to be completely transparent for the audience to trust and believe them.

4.2

4.3

Are consumers aware that their reviews on certain products may be biased?

Primary research has shown that most consumers are aware, to a certain extent, that a small percentage of bloggers may be slightly biased towards certain products. Participant 2 [Focus Group - Appendix D] felt that more established bloggers are likely to be sponsored by a brand therefore will be more inclined to speak highly of products when reviewing them. This suggests that the consumers are a lot more clued-up that we first thought, over the years the 'blog-savvy' consumer has developed a way of knowing whether the blogger is being genuine or not. Especially if they have been following a specific blogger over a long period of time.

CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed to explore the effect blogging has had on consumer behaviour, and to what point are bloggers authentic and credible sources. How transparent and genuine are they? All conclusions to this have been based predominantly on primary research along-side secondary existing knowledge of the matter.

Research conducted has show that, as a culture, we have become hugely dependant on social media and the online world; as it now plays a vast role in our day to day lives.

Blogging is becoming increasingly popular for the likes of popular fashion brands such as, Chanel and Mulberry [as stated previously]. Allowing the consumer to engage in a connection with a real person who has legitimate opinions and reviews on products. A higher number of brands are starting to sponsor and engage with bloggers as an additional element to their marketing campaigns. Companies are now also beginning to use bloggers for brand collaborations. This suggests that they consider that incorporating blogging is an effective way to promote and market their products, as it allows the 'humanising' of their brand.

Chapter two delves into the amount of influence blogging has on consumer behaviour. It is very clear that blogging has a fundamental effect on the consumer's purchasing actions, following viewing a blog post, whether it be on Instagram or a personal blog website. Primary research has clearly shown that it often leads to consumers viewing the link within the blog posts, and purchasing similar if not the same items of clothing or general products previously seen via that blog. Many of the participants that took part in the primary research compared bloggers to the likes of celebrities, in regards to the way it endorses the products and promotes them. By using bloggers as a way of marketing products highly appeals to the modern day consumer. It allows them to observe products on 'real' people, and to take a look at how each item of clothing fits. Primary research suggests that not only does it effect consumers purchasing behaviour, nevertheless consumers are also viewing blogs as an idea of showing unique ways to style clothing they might already have. Established bloggers nowadays are able to track their sales on products they have incorporated on their blog posts, thus allowing them to see trends emerging in sale behaviour. Primary research also suggests that it is more likely to see products sell out if they are just exclusively sold online, rather than a product that is in store. This is something brands that are not currently sponsoring bloggers should look into, as it is clearly an effective way to boost online sales.

Authenticity and credibility of bloggers is something consumers are aware of. Studies have shown that the type of consumer that tend to religiously follow blogs are, infact very savvy, and can see when their favourite blogger is being anything other than genuine in her / his reviews. However, when it comes to bloggers reviewing products belonging to brands they are sponsored by, they are meticulous about being truthful and transparent. Nowadays bloggers that are sponsored by specific brands have 'brand disclaimers' on each blog post, thus allowing consumers to see this for themselves. Consumers are well aware that brands are using blogging as a means to promote and market specific products. This does not normally have an affect on the consumer. Suggesting that brands then have no need to concern themselves about consumers being put off when recognising the blogger is sponsored by that brand. The type of consumer that follow popular bloggers is inclined to like what they're reviewing no matter what.

Word of mouth marketing is a strong direction for brands to go in. Studies have shown that a high percentage of consumers trust the opinions of fellow friends or family over the brand itself. This suggests that social media and blogging marketing strategies, have enormous benefits in comparison to the traditional type of marketing i.e. television advertisements or magazines etc. Marketing via social media, as opposed to traditional methods, gives companies a far greater scope to market the brands to a wider audience, some of whom will have never heard of this specific brand.

Following a full study on the matter conclusions to this are.. blogging clearly has an ever increasing affect on consumer behaviour, whether it be purchasing behaviour, or just generally internet trawling through blog websites, and social media, until the consumer has found what they are looking for. Brands are beginning to link marketing strategies with bloggers to include brand collaborations, however, this needs to be looked into further as there is a considerable gap in the market to do so.

Authenticity of fashion bloggers plays a vital role throughout their blogs. However, it is apparent that it is more of a sensitive subject for the blogger rather than the consumer. We have established that the consumer tends to trust their favourite blogger, and can tell if they are being genuine or not. Regardless of whether the blogger is being sponsored or not, this does not have an affect on consumers purchasing actions upon the blog posts.

Limitations to this study were mainly to do with primary research. Thirty-five bloggers were emailed, however, most of the bloggers did not have time to answer the interview questions due to their exceptionally busy and full schedule. Doing the interviews over email obviously wasn't the first choice of interview technique, but again, as the bloggers were under such pressure it was all that could be done especially considering the short time scale.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The research carried out on this topic will give an insight to both marketing professionals within the fashion or beauty industry and bloggers themselves, with regards to how they can benefit the brand and eventually boost sales.

Brands need to recognise this gap in their marketing, and use bloggers to their advantage. Creating a blogging sector to brands websites will engage a more diverse consumer. It will allow the viewer to see how they can style the clothing items seen on that brands website.

A new magazine could be created purely for bloggers to write columns on 'what to wear this season' or another example could be bloggers showing the consumer imagery on how they would style specific products, or how to 'jazz' up old clothing already in their possession. This magazine would be aimed solely at the Millennial generation, specifically to the likes of the Identity Sharder tribe as such consumers are more likely to engage in a magazine of this sort. Brands could collaborate with these bloggers that appear in the monthly magazine, thus allowing consumers to see what brands have to offer [it may even be a brand the audience have never come across before]. What a powerful way to introduce less established brands into the market place! It is harder nowadays for less established brands to get the acknowledgment they deserve.

Retailers need to look into using bloggers more to their advantage. For example; using a popular well-known blogger to appear in-store to give a talk about how she/he would style this seasons hot picks. Again it will bring in more consumers that are fashion conscious and willing to spend money on items that their favourite blogger has reviews positively.

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Appendix A

Brand X Blogger collaboration case study



Peony Lim collaborates with Chanel for a week - Main blog.
<http://peonylim.com/peony-lim-x-chanel-country-horse/>

APPENDIX

Appendix B

Brand X Blogger collaboration case study 2

Man repeller X marc Jacobs

Marc Jacobs Intl. looked to connect with consumers during its Marc Jacobs Collection runway show by collaborating with renowned blogger Leandra Medine of "The Man Repeller," who live-hosted the show last night. Since the Marc Jacobs Collection consumer is slightly older than the Marc by Marc Jacobs wearer, it made sense to engage these women with someone with whom they could connect. The collaboration was hyped a few days before the show via email and social media marketing.

"Leandra's blog has astounding reach and commands a huge following of loyal readers," said Daniel Plenge, director of digital for Marc Jacobs Intl., New York. "More importantly, she is a New Yorker with a quirky, effervescent style that fits well with the Marc Jacobs brand.

"We feel that it is a very natural collaboration that will expand awareness of the spring/summer 2013 Collection show, as well as the live stream that viewers around the world can watch from the comfort of their homes," he said. "We are huge fans of Leandra and her blog because she is very unique and she is a fascinating young woman who has so much to say about the fashion world today.

"Through this project, we are also able to pass the Marc Jacobs message through to her readership and generate increased excitement about the show and about Marc Jacobs Intl. as a whole."

Propel, not repel

Marc Jacobs announced late last week that Ms. Medine would be hosting the Marc Jacobs Collection pre-show, which ran yesterday at 7:30 p.m.

The brand immediately took to its social media pages and Web site to blast the news.

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Appendix C

Online Survey Results 100 samples

Do you use any social media platforms
YES 99% NO 1%

If so, which social media platforms do you use?

Instagram 87%
Facebook 93%
Twitter 83%
Pinterest 32%
Tumblr 16%
YouTube 53%
Snapchat 53%
Other 4%

Which age category do you fall in?

15-20 - 23%
21-25 - 59%
26-30 - 8%
31-35 - 0%
36-40 - 2%
41-45 - 1%
46-50 - 3%
50+ - 4%

Gender?

Female - 80%
Male - 20%

Do you ever shop online?

Frequently - 58%
Every now and again - 38%
Never - 4%

Are you..?

A student - 48%
Employed Full time - 37%
Employed Part time - 14%
Self Employed - 12%
Unemployed - 2%

Do you follow any fashion blogs?

Yes - 52%
No - 48%

If yes, do you feel at all influenced by these blogs?

Strongly - 29%
Moderately - 24%
No not at all - 24%

Do you blog yourself?

Yes - 13%
No - 86%

If yes, what do you blog about?

Fashion - 10%
Lifestyle - 6%
Food - 0%
Film - 0%

Appendix D

Focus group transcriptions

1.Which social media platform do you consider to be the most influential to your fashion purchases? And why?

Participant 1 – I would consider Instagram to be the most influential to my fashion purchases. I am always finding new independent fashion labels on Instagram that I wouldn't have previously heard of and I like the fact that often these labels are cheaper than say a high street brand like Topshop, and that you can't find them on the high street so, whether it's the case or not, it does feel slightly more unique. Various bloggers, MUA's and z list to a-list celebrities that I follow on Instagram definitely have an impact also; I think that the items of clothing that they're sponsored to wear and endorsing definitely have an impact on my fashion purchases. In light of recent news with girls telling the press how much time they spend taking one picture in a dress that they're being paid to wear I think nobody's totally blind to the fact that they didn't go out and buy that dress themselves and spontaneously promote it. Yet it still impacts what you end up browsing on Instagram when you see a blogger or celebrity looking really good in something and then tagging where they bought it - you're going to end up clicking on the brands page to have a browse.

Participant 2 – Instagram definitely - it's so easy to see an outfit you like and go onto the shop and buy it.

Participant 3 – Instagram because you get to see how the clothes fit/styled and what they are worn with

Participant 4 – Would have to be Instagram it's the social media I use most out of them all and the realistic street styling encourages me to purchase more than say an editorial in a mag if that makes sense?

2.Do you feel viewing a blog post has any effect on your behaviour afterwards? E.G. – go on to buying any products you've seen? Or view another blog?

Participant 1 – Yes viewing a blog definitely has an affect on my behaviour afterwards - if a brand has been endorsed or particular product that I like I would end up subconsciously ending up on the site of the brand. Maybe not always buying the product but sometimes, and I would say would definitely have an impact on future purchases when I am then out shopping on the high street, when looking and relating items of clothing back to those I have seen on Instagram etc. without even really noticing I'm doing it.

Participant 2 – yeah, sometimes. If I see a blog post I really like, it either makes me look for similar items, or go on to that blog to see more.

Participant 3 – It depends on the product or the blogger. If I like the style of the blogger, then I will go on to look at other blog posts to see if I like anything else that I see

Participant 4 – Not really I'm not that easily influenced I guess if I see something that catches my eye I may search the brand specifically and see what other products they have on offer.

3.Do you think companies are maybe using blogging as a way so market their products subliminally?

Participant 1 – I think companies are definitely using blogging as a way to market their products subliminally. And I don't think that it can ever really be that subtle, because the way online behaviour is these days, everything ends up being so transparent i.e. with previous mentioned girls in the press online for exposing their Instagram accounts for what they really were. And for example when a blogger is say waxing lyrical about yet another item from boohoo and it's every other item it becomes slightly suspicious.

Participant 2 – Yeah, in my opinion I think some do - since bloggers have a massive influence on younger generations, as they are easily influenced. However, when you're looking at an item of clothing a blogger you like is wearing, you don't really care if they're promoting it – if you like it you tend to look past that and probably end up purchasing it anyway!

Participant 3 – Maybe but then I think it depends on the product because if it's something that the company are really wanting to sell then they are going to want bloggers to shout about it and not do it as subtle

Participant 4 – Yes, most definitely companies know that blogging is an effect way of marketing. I think it just makes it seem more accessible for the consumer as in they can picture themselves more easily in those products when it's on a “real” woman in her bedroom on the street or whatever.

4.As consumers have you ever brought a product you've previously seen on a blog/vlog etc?

Participant 1 – yes

Participant 2 – I've bought an item that's similar to what I've seen on the blog, but not exactly the same.

Participant 3 – Yes, especially clothing

Participant 4 – Nope

5.Have you ever had a thought that some bloggers reviews on certain products may be slightly biased as they might be sponsored by that brand? - If so, how does this make you feel?

Participant 1 – Relating back to my previous answer in question 3, definitely! Bloggers are making money by endorsing products which is fair enough, it's how they make a living, and I think to a large degree I expect it. However, I'd rather like to think that its products that they actually would buy themselves. For example, if there was some sort of disclosure from them like yes I'm getting paid to promote products because I am sponsored by a particular brand however I'm only endorsing products that I genuinely value then I think I would have more respect for them and people would be more trusting maybe.

Participant 2 – Some bloggers reviews are definitely biased, but the lesser known bloggers I feel are more genuine so I would listen to their opinion more.

Participant 3 – Yeah definitely, this isn't a blogger as such but when all the towie people started posting pictures of them using coco-white the teeth whitener it was obvious that they had been paid to write that review and share it on their social media. It makes me feel like I don't trust them and their reviews as much as they or the company want me too

Participant 4 - I feel like if you've been following a certain blogger for a while now you can see through them when they're not being genuine. However, most of the blogs I follow, I follow them because they're truthful when they're reviewing products.

6.Do you feel like word of mouth reviews sway you towards purchasing specific products?

Participant 1 – Word of mouth reviews can only sway me to a certain degree. If I don't like the product then I'm not going to buy it, end of. However, if it is something that I would pick up and try on when I was out shopping then yes definitely.

Participant 2 – definitely, if a friend has recommended something and it looks good I will definitely go out and buy that product.

Participant 3 – Yeah definitely because if you hear enough good reviews about the product then you will want to purchase it to see for yourself

Participant 4 – Yes, definitely word of mouth recommendations I think influences my buying significantly.

7.The same product is..

1. Pictured in a magazine spread but not reviewed

2. On a favourite blog of yours and the blogger has reviewed the product positively

...which one of these would have influenced you the most to then purchase the product (i.e. blogger because you follow them and you trust their opinion or magazine because you like the magazine company)

Participant 1 – I would begin by saying that if a product was in a magazine spread and I already knew and trusted the brand then that would have more of an impact that if it was a brand I didn't know or trust. With blogging however I think there is far more scope for marketing brands to an audience that maybe haven't previously heard of the brand before and because it's got that element of human connection there with being able to market the product its far more influential. So for that reason I'd have to go with no. 2. I would be far more likely to be influenced to purchase a product that appeared on my favourite blog and even if you love and trust the magazine you're reading I would say it doesn't have the power to sell you a brand you aren't already aware of which blogging does.

Participant 2 – Both! But more so the blogger - as the bloggers I follow have the same taste and opinion I do, so I would trust them more!

Participant 3 – Both because its good to see a product being posted in other ways such as in magazines because that then builds up a background for the product and 1000's of people are going to read that magazine and see that product in there where as if you read magazines and not follow blogs you aren't going to see that review.

Participant 4 – Definitely the blogging option.

Appendix E

Blogger Interview transcriptions

Bankè - astylediary_ 15K followers

1. How do you feel your blogs influence consumers, do you think it affects their purchasing behaviour? (i.e. do they then go on to purchase products online or view more blog posts etc?)

Yes, now that there are ways of tracking the behaviour of your readers, you can see what the patterns are like. Using affiliate links also helps, you can see how many sales you make from the link you share.

2. Do you think companies are using blogging as a way to market their products subliminally?

It's no longer subliminal, brands now understand the role bloggers play in the industry, they are quite clear with what they want most of the time, it's all about brand awareness and potential conversion to sales.

3. If so, do you feel it is beneficial for brands to use blogging as a cost effective way to market their products compared to other normal marketing techniques?

It is ok for brands to use all possible marketing streams and avenues to market their products, using bloggers may not necessarily be cost effective per say because it's a little hard to measure the value of impressions etc. Using bloggers in my opinion is all about creating brand awareness therefore, normal marketing techniques may be more effective which is why many brands still use this method though it may be expensive.

4. Who do you consider your target audience to be?

women who have their day jobs and a bit of disposable income, a "sort of" busy lifestyle but need a fully functional wardrobe and some fashion and lifestyle inspiration.

5. If you were sponsored by a company – would you say your review on their products might be slightly biased?

I personally don't believe in posting any kind of negativity on my blog, every blogger has different ethics. I will rather decline than give a dishonest opinion.

6. Do you feel blogging has cut through the hierarchy in fashion industry? Is it a new way of industry approval for brands?

Blogging hasn't finally cut through the hierarchy in the fashion industry, but a few bloggers have done this. What I mean is this; you are likely to see a brand publish an item that has been seen on a very popular blogger with no reference to their blog. Yes, I believe it is fast becoming a new way of approval from brands.

Bankè

Founder & Editor

A Style Diary

www.astylediary.com

Appendix F

Blogger Interview transcriptions

FLEUR DE FORCE 716k followers

1. How do you feel your blogs influence consumers, do you think it affects their purchasing behaviour? (i.e. do they then go on to purchase products online or view more blog posts etc?)

It definitely affects purchasing behaviour, but obviously this can be difficult to track and varies for different influencers, and different consumers. Most of the links I use are tracked, so I can see who purchases directly from my videos, however with beauty it can be more about brand and/or product awareness. Especially for lower-end products which are readily available and accessible on the high street. I see a much larger number of people clicking through and purchasing if the products are exclusively sold online, but it definitely affects purchasing activity. I've seen products sell out in a few hours following being featured in my content.

2. Do you think companies are using blogging as a way to market their products subliminally?

Do you mean subliminal for the brand, blogger or consumer? If you're talking about the consumer, I think yes originally (from a PR point of view) but now when it comes to marketing, most of the branded content is fully disclosed, and the audience are savvy to it regardless. I also think it's not as different or 'new' as some people think, as consumers are usually not aware of the effect PR relationships or advertising placement affects the content and brand inclusion in glossy magazines. I certainly wasn't before I worked in the industry!

3. If so, do you feel it is beneficial for brands to use blogging as a cost effective way to market their products compared to other normal marketing techniques?

For 'bigger' vloggers it's moved past this point as for the most part both parties are aware of the fact that sponsored content is now commonplace for digital content in the same way it is for traditional media. Digital content is young, but it's not 'new' any more. It's quickly establishing itself as an industry and therefore while the rates may be lower at the moment, I think that gap will close over time and it will become not so much about the cost difference, but about the strength of influence on the audience. Especially in the case of video content, as it's much more personal and (if produced well) can be a much more powerful form of marketing than some traditional ways/platforms.

4. Who do you consider your target audience to be?

Females, aged 18-34 (who make up around 80% of my audience)

5. If you were sponsored by a company – would you say your review on their products might be slightly biased?

No, but some influencers might be. I'm very particular about who I work with as I'm very well aware that authenticity is everything when it comes to digital content. The audience are savvy, and sponsored content (mine at least) is always disclosed. Many of my viewers have been watching me for years so they know my style, and what I like. I have to be honest and only work with brands I genuinely love, and promote products I really believe in as not keeping standards high when it comes to brand partnerships would most likely result in loss of viewership over time, rather than growth, as they lose trust.

6. Do you feel blogging has cut through the hierarchy in fashion industry? Is it a new way of industry approval for brands?

Could you clarify 'industry approval'. As the quality of fashion blogs has improved over time, I think there is still a compatible hierarchy between blogs themselves, so it's more of a shift in media platform rather than change in hierarchy.

Appendix G

Blogger Interview transcriptions

Jodi Young – 1399 followers

1. How do you feel your blogs influence consumers, do you think it affects their purchasing behaviour? (i.e. do they then go on to purchase products online or view more blog posts etc?)

- I do think it influences consumers to an extent. Look at the big bloggers like Zoella etc., she wears something and it immediately sells out. I think every blog has the effect to a degree- I know certainly that I have purchased due to an Instagram post etc- and I know that others have because of mine.

2. Do you think companies are using blogging as a way to market their products subliminally?

-I think they would like to- however increasingly readers are becoming aware of sponsorship etc and can lead to disconnect and mistrust between blogger/reader. The Londoner for example used to be a far more reliable source of opinion, however when you're jetting off around the world courtesy of British Airways, you have to wonder how in touch with her readers she really is (i.e not very).

3. If so, do you feel it is beneficial for brands to use blogging as a cost effective way to market their products compared to other normal marketing techniques?

-Of course, companies expect smaller blogs (like mine) to photograph, wear, write about and edit posts for basically free (or for an item in return). Vogue wouldn't publish their adverts pro bono so why should there be a level of expectation that small-time bloggers should?

4. Who do you consider your target audience to be?

- Predominantly females- between around 15-35? It's difficult to judge as some are lifestyle posts which appeal to a wider audience- however beauty posts will naturally attract a different crowd.

5. If you were sponsored by a company – would you say your review on their products might be slightly biased?

- Yes and no. I try to remain impartial and give a fair review however naturally this may be clouded by preconceived ideas about the remuneration or image of the brand.

6. Do you feel blogging has cut through the hierarchy in fashion industry? Is it a new way of industry approval for brands?

- It's a new way of making brands 'cool'. Look at Burberry, it was almost solely reinvented by celebrities and blogger endorsement. 'And Other Stories'; made cool by firstly being H+M's little sister and also courtesy of Vivianna Does Makeup and Lily Pebbles. I do think for subsidiary's of bigger brands it's easier to get bloggers attention as they have a name to fall back on and can offer more in return- however for small, start-up brands? How on earth do you stand out and get Tanya Burr to make you famous? If you can't afford to pay her a fortune or fly her to Paris- will she care about your infant brand?

Appendix H

Blogger Interview transcriptions

Aine Tagon -

1. How do you feel your blogs influence consumers, do you think it affects their purchasing behaviour? (i.e. do they then go on to purchase products online or view more blog posts etc?)

Only consumers that really read blogs may be affected to some extent. I think they may try something that their favourite YouTuber or blogger loves or look at opinions before purchasing but at the end of the day it's their decision. It's also a good way if you have purchased something to see ways to style it or use it etc as well.

2. Do you think companies are using blogging as a way to market their products subliminally?

No, well not subliminally because most blogs often have a disclaimer if they have been gifted something or if the post is sponsored therefore making it clear to the reader. I think they are used to market certain products as they are more relatable for consumers. They often have large followings to promote the product sharing how they would use it, their opinion and the end result. It's interesting to see it in pretty pictures, a tutorial form and so on because it makes you see how it could be mirrored in your own life.

3. If so, do you feel it is beneficial for brands to use blogging as a cost effective way to market their products compared to other normal marketing techniques?

People and brands obviously value their opinion and if they are true to themselves and their beliefs then it should be just like another blog post or video. For some people it's their career and that is the only way they can make money so it has to be done for them to continue making content.

4. Who do you consider your target audience to be?

My stats tell me 18-24 year old females the biggest followers of my social channels.

5. If you were sponsored by a company – would you say your review on their products might be slightly biased?

As long as there is a clear disclaimer I don't see the issue. To be completely honest being sponsored doesn't affect my content at all, I will always give my honest opinion. If something isn't working for me I don't feature it and I will contact the brand to ask if there is anything else I could try instead as I don't want to write a negative review. Other than the fact I actually spend more time and effort on a post to ensure they are beautifully presented and I'm 100% happy that it is sponsorship worthy then it can go on my blog/YouTube channel.

6. Do you feel blogging has cut through the hierarchy in fashion industry? Is it a new way of industry approval for brands?

I think blogging is more of a personal hobby for most rather than a job. It's more about portrayals of a clear representation of myself, products I wear, use and love. So I personally don't think it has changed the fashion industry from a hierarchy point of view. To add to this there are different levels of blogging and it has its own hierarchy depending on your level of success.

Fashion Student | Blogger

Aines Wardrobe

APPENDIX I

FOCUS GROUP - DATA CODING DOCUMENT

CODES:

Instagram being the most influential social media

Seeing how the clothes are styled and how they fit on Instagram impact the purchases

Visit further blog posts after viewing a particular blog

Visiting the brands website after seeing products on a blog - to see more of that specific brands products

Agreeing that companies are now using blogging as a way to market their products subliminally

Bloggers or blogs are influential

Consumer are aware that some bloggers reviews might be slightly biased

Is WOMM Word of Mouth Marketing influential

1. Which social media platform do you consider to be the most influential to your fashion purchases? And why?

Participant 1 – I would consider **Instagram to be the most influential to my fashion purchases**. I am always finding new independent fashion labels on Instagram that I wouldn't have previously heard of and I like the fact that often these labels are cheaper than say a high street brand like Topshop, and that you can't find them on the high street so, whether it's the case or not, it does feel slightly more unique. Various bloggers, MUA's and z list to a-list celebrities that I follow on Instagram definitely have an impact also; I think that the items of clothing that they're sponsored to wear and endorsing definitely have an impact on my fashion purchases. In light of recent news with girls telling the press how much time they spend taking one picture in a dress that they're being paid to wear I think nobody's totally blind to the fact that they didn't go out and buy that dress themselves and spontaneously promote it. Yet it still impacts what you end up browsing on Instagram when you see a blogger or celebrity looking really good in something and then tagging where they bought it - you're going to end up clicking on the brands page to have a browse.

Participant 2 – **Instagram definitely** - it's so easy to see an outfit you like and go onto the shop and buy it.

Participant 3 – **Instagram** because you **get to see how the clothes fit/styled and what they are worn with**

Participant 4 – **Would have to be Instagram it's the social media I use most out of them all** and the **realistic street styling encourages me to purchase more** than say an editorial in a mag if that makes sense?

2. Do you feel viewing a blog post has any effect on your behaviour afterwards? E.G. – go on to buying any products you've seen? Or view another blog?

Participant 1 – Yes viewing a blog definitely has an affect on my behaviour afterwards - if a brand has been endorsed or particular product that I like **I would end up subconsciously ending up on the site of the brand**. Maybe not always buying the product but sometimes, and I would say would definitely have an impact on future purchases when I am then out shopping on the high street, when looking and relating items of clothing back to those I have seen on Instagram etc. without even really noticing I'm doing it.

Participant 2 – yeah, sometimes. If I see a blog post I really like, **it either makes me look for similar items**, or **go on to that blog to see more**.

Participant 3 – It depends on the product or the blogger. If I like the style of the blogger, then **I will go on to look at other blog posts to see if I like anything else that I see**

Participant 4 – Not really I'm not that easily influenced I guess if I see something that catches my eye **I may search the brand specifically and see what other products they have on offer**.

3. Do you think companies are maybe using blogging as a way so market their products subliminally?

Participant 1 – **I think companies are definitely using blogging as a way to market their products subliminally**. And I don't think that it can ever really be that subtle, because the way online behaviour is these days, everything ends up being so transparent i.e. with previous mentioned girls in the press online for exposing their Instagram accounts for what they really were. And for example when a blogger is say waxing lyrical about yet another item from boohoo and it's every other item it becomes slightly suspicious.

Participant 2 – **Yeah, in my opinion I think some do - since bloggers have a massive influence** on younger generations, as they are easily influenced. However, when you're looking at an item of clothing a blogger you like is wearing, you don't really care if they're promoting it – if you like it you tend to look past that and probably end up purchasing it anyway!

Participant 3 – Maybe but then I think it depends on the product because if its something that the company are really wanting to sell then they are going to want bloggers to shout about it and not do it as subtle

Participant 4 – **Yes, most definitely companies know that blogging is an effective way of marketing**. I think it just makes it seem more accessible for the consumer as in they can picture themselves more easily in those products when it's on a "real" woman in her bedroom on the street or whatever.

4. As consumers have you ever brought a product you've previously seen on a blog/vlog etc?

Participant 1 – **Yes**

Participant 2 – **I've bought an item that's similar to what I've seen on the blog**, but not exactly the same.

Participant 3 – **Yes, especially clothing**

Participant 4 – Nope

5. Have you ever had a thought that some bloggers reviews on certain products may be slightly biased as they might be sponsored by that brand?

- If so, how does this make you feel?

Participant 1 – Relating back to my previous answer in question 3, definitely! **Bloggers are making money by endorsing products which is fair enough**, it's how they make a living, and **I think to a large degree I expect it**. However, I'd rather like to think that its products that they actually would buy themselves. For example, if there was some sort of disclosure from them like yes I'm getting paid to promote products because I am sponsored by a particular brand however I'm only endorsing products that I genuinely value then I think I would have more respect for them and people would be more trusting maybe.

Participant 2 – **Some bloggers reviews are definitely biased**, but **the lesser known bloggers I feel are more genuine so I would listen to their opinion more**.

Participant 3 – Yeah definitely, this isn't a blogger as such but when all the towie people started posting pictures of them using cocowhite the teeth whitener it was obvious that they had been paid to write that review and share it on their social media. It makes me feel like I don't trust them and their reviews as much as they or the company want me too

Participant 4 - I feel like if you've been following a certain blogger for a while now you can see through them when they're not being genuine. However, most of the blogs I follow, I follow them because they're truthful when they're reviewing products.

6.Do you feel like word of mouth reviews sway you towards purchasing specific products?

Participant 1 – Word of mouth reviews can only sway me to a certain degree. If I don't like the product then I'm not going to buy it, end of. However, if it is something that I would pick up and try on when I was out shopping then yes definitely.

Participant 2 – definitely, if a friend has recommended something and it looks good I will definitely go out and buy that product.

Participant 3 – Yeah definitely because if you hear enough good reviews about the product then you will want to purchase it to see for yourself

Participant 4 – Yes, definitely word of mouth recommendations I think influences my buying significantly.

7.The same product is..

1. Pictured in a magazine spread but not reviewed

2. On a favourite blog of yours and the blogger has reviewed the product positively

...which one of these would have influenced you the most to then purchase the product (i.e. blogger because you follow them and you trust their opinion or magazine because you like the magazine company)

Participant 1 – I would begin by saying that if a product was in a magazine spread and I already knew and trusted the brand then that would have more of an impact that if it was a brand I didn't know or trust. With blogging however I think there is far more scope for marketing brands to an audience that maybe haven't previously heard of the brand before and because it's got that element of human connection there with being able to market the product its far more influential. So for that reason I'd have to go with no. 2. I would be far more likely to be influenced to purchase a product that appeared on my favourite blog and even if you love and trust the magazine you're reading I would say it doesn't have the power to sell you a brand you aren't already aware of which blogging does.

Participant 2 – Both! But more so the blogger - as the bloggers I follow have the same taste and opinion I do, so I would trust them more!

Participant 3 – Both because its good to see a product being posted in other ways such as in magazines because that then builds up a background for the product and 1000's of people are going to read that magazine and see that product in there where as if you read magazines and not follow blogs you aren't going to see that review.

Participant 4 – Definitely the blogging option.

CODE	MEANING OF CODE	TIMES CODE OCCOURED OUT OF 4
Instagram being the most influential social media	Participants agreed that Instagram was the most influential social media platform when it came to purchasing products.	4/4
Seeing how the clothes are styled and how they fit on Instagram	Participants mentioned that they preferred Instagram to other platforms as they can see imagery and get a look at how certain clothes were styled and their fit.	2/4
Visit further blog posts after viewing a particular blog	Participants stated that they tend to view further blog posts after seeing a particular post.	2/4
Visiting the brands website after seeing products on a blog - to see more of that specific brands products	Participants mentioned that they usually go on to the brands official website to view their products after they have seen blog posts incorporating the specific brands products.	4/4
Agreeing that companies are now using blogging as a way to market their products subliminally	Participants stated that there are aware that certain bloggers may be promoting products via their blog for some branded companies.	3/4
Bloggers or blogs are influential	Participants mentioned that they have brought a product after viewing a blog posts and that bloggers are very influential.	3/4
Consumer are aware that some bloggers reviews might be slightly biased	Participants mentioned that they are well aware that bloggers reviews might be slightly clouded when it comes to specific products they are reviewing. This is due to sponsorship; consumers are savvy especially when it comes to bloggers they religiously follow. They can clearly see when the blogger is not being genuine.	3/4
Is WOMM (Word of Mouth Marketing) influential	Participants mentioned that WOM is heavily influential and that they would act on a recommendation from a friend or family. This then relates back to trusting the bloggers opinion more than the brands themselves as they are real people giving real reviews.	4/4

APPENDIX J

BLOGGER INTERVIEW - DATA CODING DOCUMENT

Bloggers can track sales to see which products sell well

Blogs are affecting consumer behaviour

Bloggers are no longer trying to hide the fact they are promoting certain products – normally a disclaimer

Consumers are aware of bloggers promoting sponsored products

Blogging is used as a cost effective way to market for companies

Target audience – women from 18years old – 35years old

Bloggers try their best to stay true and genuine when reviewing products

Blogging is a way to make brands look good

Bankè - astylediary_ 15K followers

1. How do you feel your blogs influence consumers, do you think it affects their purchasing behaviour? (i.e. do they then go on to purchase products online or view more blog posts etc?)

Yes, now that there are ways of tracking the behaviour of your readers, you can see what the patterns are like.

Using affiliate links also helps, you can see how many sales you make from the link you share.

2. Do you think companies are using blogging as a way to market their products subliminally?

It's no longer subliminal, brands now understand the role bloggers play in the industry, they are quite clear with what they want most of the time, it's all about brand awareness and potential conversion to sales.

3. If so, do you feel it is beneficial for brands to use blogging as a cost effective way to market their products compared to other normal marketing techniques?

It is ok for brands to use all possible marketing streams and avenues to market their products, using bloggers are cost effective, however, it's a little hard to measure the value of impressions etc. Using bloggers in my opinion is all about creating brand awareness therefore, normal marketing techniques may be more effective which is why many brands still use this method though it may be expensive.

4. Who do you consider your target audience to be?

women who have their day jobs and a bit of disposable income, a "sort of" busy lifestyle but need a fully functional wardrobe and some fashion and lifestyle inspiration.

5. If you were sponsored by a company – would you say your review on their products might be slightly biased?

I personally don't believe in posting any kind of negativity on my blog, every blogger has different ethics. I will rather decline than give a dishonest opinion.

6. Do you feel blogging has cut through the hierarchy in fashion industry? Is it a new way of industry approval for brands?

Blogging hasn't finally cut through the hierarchy in the fashion industry, but a few bloggers have done this. What I mean is this; you are likely to see a brand publish an item has been seen on a very popular blogger with no reference to their blog. Yes, I believe it is fast becoming a new way of approval from brands.

FLEUR DE FORCE 716k followers

1. How do you feel your blogs influence consumers, do you think it affects their purchasing behaviour? (i.e. do they then go on to purchase products online or view more blog posts etc?)

It definitely affects purchasing behaviour, but obviously this can be difficult to track and varies for different influencers, and different consumers. Most of the links I use are tracked, so I can see who purchases directly from my videos, however with beauty it can be more about brand and/or product awareness. Especially for lower-end products which are readily available and accessible on the high street. I see a much larger number of people clicking through and purchasing if the products are exclusively sold online, but it definitely affects purchasing activity. I've seen products sell out in a few hours following being featured in my content.

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For 'bigger' vloggers it's moved past this point as for the most part both parties are aware of the fact that sponsored content is now commonplace for digital content in the same way it is for traditional media. Digital content is young, but it's not 'new' any more. It's quickly establishing itself as an industry and therefore while the rates may be lower at the moment, I think that gap will close over time and it will become not so much about the cost difference, but about the strength of influence on the audience. Especially in the case of video content, as it's much more personal and (if produced well) can be a much more powerful form of marketing than some traditional ways/platforms.

4. Who do you consider your target audience to be?

Females, aged 18-34 (who make up around 80% of my audience)

5. If you were sponsored by a company – would you say your review on their products might be slightly biased?

No, but some influencers might be. I'm very particular about who I work with as I'm very well aware that authenticity is everything when it comes to digital content. The audience are savvy, and sponsored content (mine at least) is always disclosed. Many of my viewers have been watching me for years so they know my style, and what I like. I have to be honest and only work with brands I genuinely love, and promote products I really believe in as not keeping standards high when it comes to brand partnerships would most likely result in loss of viewership over time, rather than growth, as they lose trust.

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Could you clarify 'industry approval'. As the quality of fashion blogs has improved over time, I think there is still a compatible hierarchy between blogs themselves, so it's more of a shift in media platform rather than change in hierarchy.

Jodi Young – 1399 followers

1. How do you feel your blogs influence consumers, do you think it affects their purchasing behaviour? (i.e. do they then go on to purchase products online or view more blog posts etc?)

I do think it influences consumers to an extent. Look at the big bloggers like Zoella etc., she wears something and it immediately sells out. I think every blog has the effect to a degree- I know certainly that I have purchased due to an Instagram post etc- and I know that others have because of mine.

2. Do you think companies are using blogging as a way to market their products subliminally?

I think they would like to- however increasingly readers are becoming aware of sponsorship etc and can lead to disconnect and mistrust between blogger/reader. The Londoner for example used to be a far more reliable source of opinion, however when you're jetting off around the world courtesy of British Airways, you have to wonder how in touch with her readers she really is (i.e not very).

3. If so, do you feel it is beneficial for brands to use blogging as a cost effective way to market their products compared to other normal marketing techniques?

Of course, companies expect smaller blogs (like mine) to photograph, wear, write about and edit posts for basically free (or for an item in return). Vogue wouldn't publish their adverts pro bono so why should there be a level of expectation that small-time bloggers should?

4. Who do you consider your target audience to be?

Predominantly females- between around 18-35? Its difficult to judge as some as lifestyle posts which appeal to a wider audience- however beauty posts will naturally attract a different crowd.

5. If you were sponsored by a company – would you say your review on their products might be slightly biased?

Yes and no. I try to remain impartial and give a fair review however naturally this may be clouded by preconceived ideas about the remuneration or image of the brand.

6. Do you feel blogging has cut through the hierarchy in fashion industry? Is it a new way of industry approval for brands?

Its a new way of making brands 'cool'. Look at Burberry, it was almost solely reinvented by celebrities and blogger endorsement. 'And Other Stories'; made cool by firstly being H+M's little sister and also courtesy of Viviana Does Makeup and Lily Pebbles. I do think for subsidiary's of bigger brands its easier to get bloggers attention as they have a name to fall back on and can offer more in return- however for small, start-up brands? How on earth do you stand out and get Tanya Burr to make you famous? If you can't afford to pay her a fortune or fly her to Paris- will she care about your infant brand?

Many thanks,

Jodi

Aine Tagon 1481 Instagram followers

1) How do you feel your blogs influence consumers, do you think it affects their purchasing behaviour? (i.e. do they then go on to purchase products online or view more blog posts etc.?)

Only consumers that really read blogs may be affected to some extent. I think they may try something that their favourite youtuber or blogger loves or look at opinions before purchasing but at the end of the day it's their decision. It's also a good way if you have purchased something to see ways to style it or use it etc. as well.

2) Do you think companies are using blogging as a way to market their products subliminally?

No, well not subliminally because most blogs often have a disclaimer if they have been gifted something or if the post is sponsored therefore making it clear to the reader. I think they are used to market certain products as they are more relatable for consumers. They often have large followings to promote the product sharing how they would use it, their opinion and the end result. It's interesting to see it in pretty pictures, a tutorial form and so on because it makes you see how it could be mirrored in your own life.

3) If so, do you feel it is beneficial for brands to use blogging as a cost effective way to market their products compared to other normal marketing techniques?

People and brands obviously value their opinion and if they are true to themselves and their beliefs then it should be just like another blog post or video. For some people it's their career and that is the only way they can make money so it has to be done for them to continue making content.

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My stats tell me 18-24 year old females the biggest followers of my social channels.

5) If you were sponsored by a company – would you say your review on their products might be slightly biased?

As long as there is a clear disclaimer I don't see the issue. To be completely honest being sponsored doesn't affect my content at all, I will always give my honest opinion. If something isn't working for me I don't feature it and I will contact the brand to ask if there is anything else I could try instead as I don't want to write a negative review. Other than the fact I actually spend more time and effort on a post to ensure they are beautifully presented and I'm 100% happy that it is sponsorship worthy then it can go on my blog/youtube channel.

6) Do you feel blogging has cut through the hierarchy in fashion industry? Is it a new way of industry approval for brands?

I think blogging is more of a personal hobby for most rather than a job. It's more about portrayals of a clear representation of myself, products I wear, use and love. So I personally don't think it has changed the fashion industry from a hierarchy point of view. To add to this there are different levels of blogging and it has its own hierarchy depending on your level of success.

Fashion Student | Blogger
Aines Wardrobe

Appendix J

5 Reasons Authenticity Is Vital For Bloggers

JUNE 4, 2015

Authentic according to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary is defined as...

: real or genuine: not copied or false

: true and accurate

: made to be or look just like an original

I have learned that people want me to be authentic. My husband, my family, my friends, they all want me to be who I was created to be, they want me to be Jen. They want me to be real and accurate, genuine. I want this too. I want to be who I am, not someone I have to pretend to be for the approval of others.

I have also learned that with blogging there is no difference. People who read blogs want to know they are connecting with a real person, with me. In fact, my ability to be transparent and authentic on my blog happens to be the number one compliment and praise I receive from readers. I believe being authentic with who I am has contributed to the growth of my readership and it is responsible for helping get my book *The Unveiled Wife* published.

Authenticity is contagious. When you are authentic, it gives others the freedom and courage to be authentic!

So whether you are interacting with your spouse, a friend, or online, I urge you to be authentic, because that is what people desire and expect. This should be encouraging to hear. You are unique and you should embrace who you are!

I began this year of blogging with a goal to encourage others who are blogging, so...

Although being authentic is important for every aspect of life, I want to specifically share with you 5 reasons authenticity is vital for bloggers:

1. Authenticity produces consistency, cohesion, and a clear purpose.

When a blogger determines to be authentic in their writing, all of their articles reflect the true heart of the blogger. Laced throughout each article, regardless of the topic, reveals a sense of cohesion where a reader comes to learn the clear purpose of why the blogger is so incredibly passionate to share his/her story. Readers love predictability and love to know they can trust any site they are following. As you prepare and publish every article with the intention of being authentic you will win readers hearts and support.

2. People are craving the truth.

We live in an era where people feel undervalued in many ways. They feel taken advantage of and lied to. People are craving truth in every facet of their lives, including the blogs they follow. Due to the high volume of blogs on the internet it takes time to establish trust with a loyal reader. Your authenticity will benefit you and your readers as it builds trust in your relationship with those who visit your blog. The truth you share will be satisfying to you as you share yourself openly and honestly and it will satisfy the craving your readers have for truth.

3. Copying others adds to the noise.

There are many blogs and social platforms that regurgitate the same information, they share the same style encouraging graphics, they talk about the same topics in the same way, all hoping to get a piece of the online readership pie. The internet is littered with people who aim to have a blog to generate traffic solely for the purpose of driving revenue. I am not opposed to making money from writing, but I do want to address it for your sake. If you are a blogger who desires to connect and engage with a community that understands your heart and there is a reciprocal support system between you and your readers, then don't aim for income first, aim for authenticity! What I learned is that authenticity can often lead to a profitable blog. As your readership grows, so will your opportunities to gain an income from blogging. Do not copy what is already out there, instead take the time to consider what You have to bring to the online table.

4. You are an expert with your story.

It would be challenging to try and share truth on your blog with topics you do not have personal experience with. So stick to what you know. This does not mean you only have to dive into one specific topic or one portion of your story that really affected you. Although, you may notice it is those ones that add emotional gravity to your writing, it is still your blog and you have the freedom to cover many different areas of life. But you must stick to what you know if you want to be an authentic blogger. For example, I would consider myself a "Marriage Blogger" as I tend to write about experiences from my marriage. However, after four years of covering this topic I felt compelled to address the bloggers online, so I am using my experience as a blogger to do just that. Occasionally you will see me publish an article such as this one where I share based upon what I know, what I have learned through experience. You are the only one who has lived your life, and sharing your story, the experiences you have encountered, is what makes your blog unique maintaining authenticity as you publish articles and engage with people about your message.

**Note: Just because you are sharing truth does not mean you should write unfiltered. Meaning there may be specific details of stories that you withhold for the sake of your privacy or the privacy of others. For example, if a story you share involves another person get their permission first. Use a filter when you write. This does not decrease your authenticity, but it does reveal your maturity and awareness of the responsibility and influence you have as an online voice.

5. It will inspire people and change the world.

Although our culture craves truth, people have a very difficult time being real with who they are, especially online. People fear rejection and judgement. If you can 1.) accept the fact that you will receive negative comments from time-to-time because of your transparency 2.) read them with grace 3.) consider their words but never pick them up as an offense...you will be able to continue sharing authentically, unashamed of who you are or what you are sharing. Your transparency with who you are will give your readers the courage to embrace transparency in their relationships as well. They will be inspired to live authentically because they have seen it exemplified, through you!

CODE	MEANING OF CODE	TIMES CODE OCCURED OUT OF 4
Bloggers can track sales to see which products sell well	Bloggers can see which products created most sales and it allows them to see patterns that are emerging within the industry.	2/4
Blogs are affecting consumer behaviour	All interview participants agreed that blogging does affect consumer behaviour to a certain extent – especially the consumer who follow blogs religiously.	4/4
Bloggers are no longer trying to hide the fact they are promoting certain products – normally a disclaimer	Bloggers mentioned that it is no longer subliminal marketing, consumers are well aware of the promotional methods that go on and bloggers now have to have disclaimers on the posts stating the brands they've used.	3/4
Consumers are aware of bloggers promoting sponsored products	Bloggers mentioned that the consumers are savvy to this regardless and more consumers are increasing becoming aware of this	2/4
Blogging is used as a cost effective way to market for companies	Blogger participants agreed that it is a cost effective way for companies to market products compared to traditional marketing techniques	3/4
Target audience – women from 18years old – 35years old	It is clear that the typical fashion blogger of today has a specific target audience – typically women ages 18-35 years old	4/4
Bloggers try their best to stay true and genuine when reviewing products	Bloggers were very concerned that the reviews had to be genuine and truthful. They make a conscious effort to be transparent as their followers are well aware when their favourite blogger is being anything but genuine.	3/4
Blogging is a way to make brands 'look good'	One of the participants stated "Its a new way of making brands 'cool'" brands are well aware that blogging is a new innovative way to give their companies a bit more 'street cred' on the market	2/4

