

**An Exploratory Study of the Motivations, Attitudes and Behaviours of Bloggers participating
in sponsored brand collaborations.**

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Submitted to the National College of Ireland

30th August 2017

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ABSTRACT

This piece of research aims to explore the motivations, attitudes and behaviours of bloggers when participating in sponsored brand collaborations. Moreover, a secondary aim of the this project was to discover the thoughts and opinions regarding the exposure of sponsored content to their followers, thus the effect of this to their perceived credibility.

To gather these findings, this study took a qualitative case study approach, applying the Uses and Gratifications theory framework, six in-depth interviews with leading Irish beauty bloggers whom regularly participate in sponsored partnerships with brands was conducted. Once the analyses of the research findings were complete, it was evident that the primary motivation for a blogger to participate in sponsored collaborations was due to the potential enhancement success regarding their careers, due to increase in followers therefore gaining recognition from both brands and readers. Furthermore, the results stated the bloggers willingness to disclose paid for content, as bloggers want to maintain their credibility and transparency.

This piece of research contributes to the existing literature regarding blogging marketing motives. Furthermore, this paper acknowledges both variations of interests, as this paper aims to provide a greater insight and understanding to both marketers and brands to why bloggers choose to alternative brands to collaborations with to influence their followers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I was never an academic, it doesn't come naturally to me, after completing my level 8 degree I never imaged that I would be able to attempt nor achieve a masters degree, but yet the unimaginable becomes a reality – And this is thanks to OMD Ireland. OMD have offered me an opportunity of a lifetime and I will forever be grateful for this.

I would especially like to acknowledge and especially thank my boyfriend Dean, mainly for his patience for dealing with my sleep deprived mood swings, but also for the advice throughout the past two years, allowing me to remember 'its not the end of the world'.

Without realising it, the pressure of working full-time while study part-time has a knock on affect to family and friend relationships. I would like to give a huge thank you to my parents, siblings and friends for they're unconditional understanding and support through the past two years.

I would also like to thank the six very busy ladies who gave me their time and kindly agreed to take part in the interviews for this piece of research.

Last but certainly not least; I would like to thank my dissertation supervision, Fabian Armen, for his guidance and support over the past year. I greatly appreciated his invaluable advice.

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INTRODUCTION

“If you make customers unhappy in the physical world, they might each tell 6 friends. If you make customers unhappy on the Internet, they can each tell 6,000 friends.” (Bezos, 2016)

In advertising, the phenomenon that is social media has grown to become one of the most fundamental elements of a brand's media campaign (Glynn Mangold, 2009), as 74% of consumers trust Social Media to inform their purchasing decisions (Nielson, 2015). This growth in social media has had a direct effect to the increase in popularity of the blogging industry (Haenlein, 2010). According to the Digital Marketing Journal, two thirds of marketers say their company blog is “critical” or “important” to their business, thus when it comes to purchasing decisions, bloggers are actually more influential than popular social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, resulting in blogging becoming one of the fastest growing online sensations (2014).

Blogs have become a primary source for millennials to visit for various entertainment purposes, it is also the place which consumers can educate and inform themselves on a multitude of different brands and products (Armstrong & McAdams, 2009), this has led selected bloggers (also known as influencers) to become a key trusted source for consumers when deciding to purchase products. Due to the demand of beauty and fashion blogs in recent years, beauty bloggers have received a surge of new followers allowing them to convey their messages to an actively engaged mass audience on a daily basis (Kucuk, 2008).

Various advertising metrics such as Electronic Word-Of-Mouth and Brand Awareness has led bloggers to become marketers in their own right (Gummesson, 1991), they are essentially doing this by expressing their thoughts, decisions and recommendations on products or services via social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Furthermore, Kucuk (2007) also suggested that blogs have enabled consumers to tackle some of the power imbalances that consumers traditionally face regarding brand-relationships. Consequently, as blogger influence has evolved and developed, brands have become more aware of the advantages, such as communication opportunities with an more engaged and enticed audience, when using a blogger to enhance their marketing communications.

In previous years, the advertising field has been researched and studied many times, especially regarding the identification, motivations and effectiveness of advertising. Gummerus, Sepp and Liljander (2011) have carried out great volumes of research in the area of motivations becoming widely cited authors in this particular field of research. Conversely, Sepp et al (2011) acknowledge the current shortage of understanding of what motivates bloggers to participate in marketing exchanges with brands whilst Armstrong & McAdams (2009) equally call for further research on bloggers prospects and attitudes towards these marketing opportunities.

To do this, an examination of existing literature is required to gain a profound understanding of bloggers before exploring the key areas of blogger motivations. The author will also focus on Gratifications Theory and Electronic Word-Of-Mouth (eWOM) to formulate a deeper understanding as to what motivates bloggers to engage in marketing exchanges with brands and then apply these literature and selected framework to undergo primary research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will review the relevant literature available that is relevant to the proposed field of study, in this case, Advertising. To address the suggested research question, the paper will firstly must identify the role advertising has on consumer brand image development, in particular social media advertising. From this, the paper will narrow its literature to an segment of social media, for this paper that segment selected is blogging, therefor the author will review relent literature related to blogging and identify a framework which could be applied to this segment.

1.1 Advertising

According to Sanusi et al (2014), all brands want to adopt a relevant advertising strategy to present its product or service to multiple members of the public that form its target market. The success of the product or service is due to the level of acceptance by its target market. To achieve this public acceptance, various promotions strategies and marketing tools are created and implemented by the brand to ‘enhance product acceptance’ (Sanusi, 2014). The 4P Marketing Mix is one of the highest cited marketing tools used by marketers across the world (Kotler, 2000); the 4P’s consist of product, price, place and promotion. In short, for a brand’s product to become prosperous, all four P’s need to be addressed, Arens (2004) illustrated, “*No amount of marketing can sell a bad product*”. There are many advertising mediums, such as Television, Radio, Press, Out of Home, Digital Display, Search and Social Media. All mediums have standard formats, sizes and audiences that seldom change, with the exception of Social Media. Social Media is one of the newest forms of communications especially within the Irish market and it is constantly evolving, improving, expanding therefore, growing and changing (Burke, 2017). While television, radio and press, the audience have no obligation but to listen to advertisements, whereas it is a consumer's decision to consume sponsored content from a blogger, this is why social media is advertising differs as your audience comes to you.

Behaviour towards advertising as a whole has dramatically changed in the past number of years, with advertisers facing difficulties as consumers can now avoid major forms of advertising. The Television advertising industries are trying to combat behaviours such as fast-forwarding adverts, ‘Netflix binging’ and online VOD consumption. The radio industry has been hit with the increase of

music on demand such as Spotify, Apple music, podcasts and phone software that now allows you to sync your mobile device to your car. The press industry battling with online new consumption and the digital display industry is challenging in increase in app consumption (TGI, 2017). The Strategic Marketing: The thinking involved (2013) revealed that it is the Internet, especially Social Media, which is compelling this incremental shift in consumer media consumption. This book also states that consumers now want to be part of a ‘co-creating collaborative communication’ which can be driven by brand advocates (Influences/Bloggers), this want is driven as consumers feel they are becoming advocates themselves.

As online advertising has become highly congested, and consumer attention spans have dramatically decreased, blogging marketing has become an innovative and effective way for marketers to gain mass reach while reaching their relevant audience (Ballantine & Yeung, 2015). Tradition media requires passive listening, whereas now this media shift has led to the development intelligent algorithms, such as Facebook, twitter and blogging platforms, which allow for more relevant content to be delivered to the consumer. The data gained from social technologies allow marketers to place content in front of relevant consumers. For marketers, using blogger coinciding with these platforms, grants them this access to reach this audience in a more engaging manner (Lankinen, 2014).

1.2 Social Media and Social Influencers/bloggers:

Social Media advertising is defined by Cambridge English dictionary as: *“methods for advertising products, services, or brands using the internet, by attracting the interest of groups of people who discuss them, make suggestions about them online.”* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

A social media Influencer is also defined by Cambridge as: *“a person or group that can influence the behaviour or opinions of others: The influencer is the individual whose effect on the purchase decision is in some way significant or authoritative”* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

Nielson (2015) refers to social influencers as “*people with significant social networks (followers, readers and subscribers) who can speak about a broad range of products and services with the ability to sway opinions. Offers shared by trusted advocates convert at 4 -10X higher rates than offers sent by brands.*” (Nielsen , 2015)

1.3 Brand Advocates compared to Influencers:

Essentially the main objective for a brand advocate (also referred to as a brand ambassador) is to promote a product or service to the consumer. Research suggested brand advocates have been apparent for a longer period than influencers, this development from a brand advocate to influencer has evolve due to the use of social media, yet they both have the same objective (Irish advertising board, 2016). Influencers have grown at a rapid pace and have overpowered traditional advocates such as celebrities, this ‘Influencers’ term is a buzzword used in the advertising industry, thus these Influencers tend to have originally gained there social media following from blogging (2016). Influencers use multiple social platforms to communicate to consumers, whereas traditional advocates, such as high profile celebrities, may not be using social media at all. (Gary Vayner, 2016)

It is important to understand influencers and the tools they use, resulting in the reach they have to the consumer perception to fully understand the influence that influencers hold.

1.4 Brand Influencers/bloggers Perception:

Perception is defined by Belch (2009) as “*the process of which an individual receives, selects and interprets information to create a picture of the world*”. The role of an influencer is to do just that, create a positive image of the product or service to manipulate the consumer’s perception of the brand. It is obvious that the regulations surrounding influencers are insufficient. (Gary Vayner, 2016). Guy Kawasaki asked the question if the knowledge of paid promotion made evident on influencers promotion would the recall still be as strong (2014).

Andersson (2009) delved deeper into in the world of paid brand advocates. The research aimed to discover the effect that ambassadors had on tourist locations (Andersson, 2009). A key finding from this research outlined the perception of paid brand advocates as a communication channel as well as a

development resource, meaning the paid brand advocates were seen to '*enhance the general competitiveness of the location included*'.

From the brand ambassador's point of view, Andersson also found that the value of 'first hand information' regarding the location involved was far more significant to the consumers. In summary, the ambassadors had a massive potential to enhance perception of the location and the researcher observed ambassadors to be a key component for brand management. (2009)

It is clear that Influencers (bloggers) are an offspring development to the traditional brand ambassadors that occurred from the use of social media. To understand the origins influencers fully, this paper will now review relevant blogging literature.

1.5 Blogging Defined

In its original form, blogs are known as web-logs, in which a blogger will highlight their opinions and thoughts, using images and links in a reverse sequential order (Sepp et al, 2011). Previously to this, Chin & Hills (2008) defined a blog as a website which is frequently updated, arranged with the latest information always showing at the top. Others also recognise a blog in similar fashion, for example Singh & Singh (2008) agree that a blog can be a website which includes a personalised journal usually including hyperlinks provided by the journal, opinions and comments. Essentially, a blog is a website made up of opinion and fact, thus blogs can also develop a followership of like-minded individuals who surf the web.

As highlighted above these authors give legitimate interpretation as to what a blog is, however they do not cover or reference how interactive in nature blogs are. Baker & Moore (2011) notes the encouragement of the blogger to allow its readers to engage and provide feedback on topics discussed in the blog are a vital component of the overall blogging experience, this allows for chat-room styled conversation to occur. Ko (2012) has also debated on the interactive functions of blogs, in which they discuss trackbacks, recommendations, really simple syndication (RSS), blogrolls and quotation. The openness of a blog allows for many new and unexpected readers the opportunity to

contribute in the conversations. This two-way conversation plays a huge part to the motivations of blogger and reader, which will be mentioned throughout the paper.

Blogging has facilitated social movements as a way of communicating across social, national and age boundaries (Baker & Moore, 2011). There are no geographical limitations on blogs and can link similar people with mutual interests (Dutta-Bergman, 2006). Cox, Martinez, & Quinlan (2008) debate that blogs can be collaborative and encourage participations, the majority of blogs are single-voiced opinions that range from one author to a team of authors, sharing a common point of view or agenda. (Cox et al, 2008) explains that this narrative is the reason why users are disconnected from free-for-all discussion groups and web-boards.

1.6 Characteristics of Blogging

Following the previous section regarding blogging definitions, this section will continue to review blogger literature, in specific, the classifications of blogs and the characteristics found in literature.

Blogs have been classified into three fundamental categories suggested by Blood (2002), Filters, Personal Journals and Notebooks. Filters, report on outer world events and important online affairs. Personal Journals, opposite to Filters, feature inner world such as one's thoughts and Notebooks have been characterised as long articles which surround and individual topic (Ko, 2012).

Blogs are often associated with information sharing and the notion of dialogue, to clarify, this means the bloggers enjoy writing and communicating back and forth with followers (Baxter, Connolly, & Stansfield, 2010). The appealing aspect of blogs for the consumer is the conversational and opinion exchange aspect of the content, put forward by Park, & Hwang (2008). This type of content writing has promoted the concept of 'thinking by writing' (Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004) allowing one to logically arrange their thoughts, supporting reflection while also assisting in the sharing of tacit knowledge, which when articulated into a blog, that can be easily consumed by followers (Baxter, 2010).

It is argued elsewhere that blogs encourage like-minded individuals to form groups which participants may agree or disagree on the specific topics mentioned in the blog, resulting in initial one way conversation to become a multiple participant conversation (Kaiser, Kansy, Mueller-Seitz, Ringlsetter, 2010). Gunter (2009) reviewed the public versus private characteristics of blogging and suggests that while the majority of blogs are written as personal diaries for sharing amongst a closed network, some are written with the intentions of being deliberately shared to the wider community, to gain a larger following and promote themselves as opinion leaders (Gunter, 2009). It is unstated if the various types of documentation are key motives for a blogger creating a blog, or if one type has developed to another over time due to the popularity of the blog.

1.7 Who Are Bloggers?

According to the literature, there are three different types of bloggers that can be distinguished. The first of which are ‘General Consumers’, they will use blogging to reach other consumers with the intention to influence them. The second type of blogger can be considered as ‘Market Experts’ in one specific aspect of the market. Consumers will interact with their blog when looking for information on the specific market. The third is ‘Corporate Blogging’; these are bloggers who create content for companies.

‘The Megaphone Effect’ is put forward by McQuarrie, Miller, & Phillips (2012), this is in relation to fashion blogging. This is the process in which ordinary consumers with no professional experience become influencers of taste, with a large audience in which they will maintain relationships. Gunter (2009) states that blogging was initially more refined to those who were more technologically literate and able to exploit online sources more efficient ways than regular Internet users. In the time since, off-the-shelf blogging software, such as wordpress, ghost, movable type, has become available, according to (Gunter, 2009) this has allowed more regular consumers to enter the blogosphere and reach thousands of other like minded consumers (McQuarrie et al, 2012). These consumer bloggers gain mass audiences through publicly consuming, evaluating and engaging with brands and their products and posting their experience on their blogs (McQuarrie et al, 2012).

Thakur, Summery, & Joby (2013) have also suggested within the literature that through blogging, consumer bloggers can also become to be known as market mavens. Market mavens are those who consider themselves to be an expert in a certain aspect of the market. According to Goldsmith, Flynn, & Goldsmith (2003), market mavens are more connected in the marketplace and also more innovative. They tend to be eager to share their knowledge on the market with other consumers also (Clark & Goldsmith, 2005). Bloggers and market mavens are seen as being similar, they are both individuals who write and read blogs and they also view themselves as being a reliable and trusted source to a particular type of product or service information (Ailawadi, Nielson, & Gedenk, 2001; Feick & Price, 1987).

Market mavens and bloggers are also inclined to recommend and provide information about these products and services to others online (Feick & Price, 1987). It is suggested that if individuals viewed as market mavens believe that sharing knowledge would boost their reputation and self image in their social community, they would be more inclined and motivated to create their own shareable content (Thakur et al, 2013).

Corporate bloggers are those who create content on behalf of companies, blogs are a major online source of word of mouth activity (Lee, Hwang, & Lee, 2006) and over the last number of years have grown in importance for companies. Many firms will now look to exploit the value of corporate blogs that are becoming an increasingly popular trend (Lee et al, 2006). As mentioned above, bloggers that publish and manage blog content on behalf of organisations are defined as corporate bloggers (Lee et al, 2006) or alternatively a corporate blogger creates blog content that is relevant to the branding of a company and has an active role in establishing and maintaining stakeholders (Socble & Israel, 2006).

1.8 Spreading eWOM Through Blogs

As mentioned previously, the recent growth in blogging has led to incremental increase in the volumes of online word-of-mouth activity. When focusing on the social media community, personal blogs particularly, have become the central hub for people to share their personal content (Bronstein, 2013), for many social media has become their extended ideal self in cyberspace

(Chester, 2004), as by creating a desirable persona attracts others who have the same ideal self. It is also noted that social media can be used as a place where bloggers can quickly share information to mass audiences (Jones, 2009), resulting in bloggers building their own broadcasting channel to which users can follow (Kucuk, 2008) enabling bloggers to hold influence on their followers. This communication process from bloggers to followers and follower-to-follower is also known as electronic word of mouth (eWOM), this has led marketers to identify the importance of eWOM and now recognised the encouragement needed for the consumer-to-consumer eWOM (Kulmala, Mesiranta, & Tuominen, 2012).

Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler (2004) defines eWOM as any negative or positive feedback or opinion made by consumers about a company or product which is made available for others to view via the internet. This eWOM may be posted as organic or sponsored (Kulmala et al, 2012). Organic eWOM refers to feedback given by one person to others in a natural sense whereas sponsored eWOM refers to an agreement between marketer and a blogger to encourage the blogger to review the brands product or service.

Organic eWOM is not directed towards the company, the conversation occurs naturally between Internet users. Organic eWOM may involve bloggers also, yet this eWOM is when the blogger shares feedback at their own discretion, in their own personal style and is not in agreement with the brand (Thomas, Peters, & Tolson, 2007). This non-bias type of Organic eWOM used by a blogger is what made bloggers become as trustworthy and a credible source of knowledge for the consumers (Andreassen and Streukens, 2009), therefore leading the consumers to seek product and service advice from the bloggers (Kulmala et al, 2012). Merwe & Herrden (2009) suggest that the success of Sponsored eWOM using bloggers is based on the position of the content and the similarity of the Organic eWOM surrounding the Sponsored content. Overall, it is suggested eWOM is a more valuable updated version of traditional WOM, this emphasises the audience mass in which the audience bloggers promote products to, instead of telling one person, they are telling thousands around the world.

1.9 Blogging Sponsorships

Following the discussion regarding advertising and eWOM and its importance to blogging. This section will now discuss blog marketing as a powerful emerging tool for business.

Consumer's interactions with each other and product purchases have changed greatly with eWOM (Ballantine & Yeung, 2015). With the increasing ability to openly write about a viewpoint on different firms and brands, marketers have now recognised the need to influence and encourage the eWOM. Consumer bloggers opinions are now considered to have greater credibility in comparison to marketer-generated content (Kulmala et al, 2013; Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012; Libai, et al., 2010) this has meant that companies have been turning their attention to blogs as a way of reaching a larger audience (Jones et al, 2009; Wu, Kao, & Lin, 2013).

Blogs are a new platform in which they combine an online community with the marketer and consumer (Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2009). With this in mind, blogging is becoming a key factor within the wider marketing plan. Consumer-generated blogs are gaining a lot of attention from marketers, due to the number of followers which the bloggers hold (Corcoran, 2010) which means the commercial sponsorship of blogs has increased to promote their products and brands to a larger online audience. The sponsorships include a lot of money for the blogger from the brand in return for endorsements and publicity on their products. (Liljander, Gummerus, & Soderlund, 2014).

With the influence on followers, the followership statistics and the opportunity to communicate directly with these followers, is said to attract brands to bloggers and include them in their marketing plans (Magnini, 2011).

Balancing the needs of the reader is key to the success of blog marketing according to Liljander et al (2014). Brands will look for bloggers who consistently create interesting content for their audience, these bloggers occasionally accept company created material if it is in line with their own interests and organic blog content. Bloggers ability to monetise their work is also a key component to take sponsorship deals (Liljander et al, 2014). A reader's reaction to blog marketing is an

essential element on whether a blogger will work with a certain brand, if the general consensus of the brand is disliked by their followers, the bloggers will tend not to produce content regarding that brand (McQuarrie et al, 20130; Miura & Yamashita, 2007) this is because bloggers are heavily affected by their reader's feedback.

A brand who chooses to include blog sponsorships within their marketing strategy will look for positive response and reactions from the blog's readers, this is usually measured through increased sales and eWOM. A blog's credibility can be formed by their online recommendations, as these have a positive effect on the consumers attitude towards the blogger and they products which they are discussing, meaning the higher volume of positive feedback the more credible the blogger is deemed (Pan & Chiou, 2011), In order for brands and bloggers to work together, it is important that both understand how blog readers react to marketing within blogs. This will be discussed throughout the paper.

1.9.1 Blog Marketing Tactics

Liljander et al (2014) noted five main blogger-mediated marketing tactics. Product recommendation from the blogger was the first tactic distinguished. A blogger can fund their own product promotion with little to no compensation; this tactic is used by the blogger to attract interest from brands in the future for sponsorship possibilities. The second tactic is when a blogger receives free products from companies who would like the blogger to promote their products. Different brands will send through instructions on what they would like the blogger to do others will not, it is completely within the control of the blogger if they will promote the products. The third tactic is Commercial sponsorship, where a blogger is offered compensation by brands in exchange for product promotion and recommendations on their blogs, and other social media outlets. The fourth is when a blogger is paid by a company to direct traffic to specific website or point of sale. Brands will generally use this tactic with bloggers who have a significant number of followers to direct towards the aforementioned website of point of sale. Banner advertisements on blogs in which the blogger earns money is the final tactic as identified by Liljander et al (2014), out of all five tactics this is the only physically visual marketing message a blog reader can see. The previous four can be seen as either covert or overt marketing. Wu et al (2013) highlight that banner advertisements on blog's are the

only tactic the reader has the ability to filter out of view, if they so wish. This is considered an innovative function of blogs according to Wu et al (2013).

Common blog marketing techniques generally occur through product recommendations. The recommendations will be one of either Overt or Covert marketing tactics. Overt marketing is when the consumer is made aware of any commercial interest of the blogger, covert marketing is when a blogger will actively promote a brand or product without relaying any information that they are being paid by these brands, examples of this are #Spon and #Ad (Cwanepoel, Lye, & Rugimbana, 2009).

A recent study has found a statistical brand attitude reflux in overt marketing depending on the disclosure placement. Conductors of this study, Campbell, Mohr, & Verlegh (2013), stated that brand attitude towards sponsored content was not affected when announced before the advert, yet significantly decreased when announced afterwards. It was also found by Colliander & Erlandsson (2015), that a blogger who was being paid to recommend and promote products led to their blog being perceived to having lower credibility, however this led to an increase in brand attitude and purchasing intentions for the specific recommended products, meaning the bloggers likability was reducing whereas the product likability was increasing. According to (Liljander et al, 2014) this means there may not be direct correlation between a bloggers credibility and purchase intentions. Although readers are made aware when a blogger is being paid to promote a product, it is believed that the blog reader trusts the sincerity of the blogger; this means they have an already established relationship with the blog Colliander & Erlandsson (2015).

Colliander (2012) conducted another experiment to investigate the effects of sponsorship on blog readers. The results showed that the revelation had little to no effect on consumer attitude towards the blog, blogger credibility, purchase intentions or brand attitude. Whereas, according to a study by Wiener & Mowen (1986), '*the independent effects of trust and expertise*', suspicions can often arise on the argument if the can sense there are external reasons for it. Blog readers can still become suspicious of covert marketing even when not advised upfront of any, this is usually based on the way the blogger is presenting a product.

1.9.3 Covert Marketing & Blogger Credibility

Consumers today are becoming ever more aware of sponsored blog posts and products placement from bloggers (Lee, Sung, & de Gregorio, 2011). (Kelly, Kerr, & Drennan, 2010; O'Reilly, 2011) have stated that previous studies found that blog readers and consumers find the independence of a blogger to be critical.

Cwanepoel et al (2009) have conceded that the recognised credibility of the blogger is considered to be one of the primary motivations of the ensuing behaviour and has at time been linked to positive outcomes, such as positive brand attitudes and behavioural compliance (Chu & Kamal, 2008). According to Liljander et al (2014) bloggers need to be trusted and seen as credible within the specific industry selected in order to make recommendations that receive positive outcomes. Chiou, Hsiao, & Su, (2014) & Mackiewicz (2010) states that for a blogger to receive such credibility in the chosen subject, they must first show a display of expertise in recommendations and product reviews.

One of the most essential components for a bloggers is the trust their readers have in them (Rieh & Danielson, 2007). Hsu et al (2013) states that the trust in a blogger has also been shown to influence whether their recommendations are useful to the reader. In comparison to online product reviews, the connection between blogger and reader is greater as blogger will reveal more about themselves, resulting in them being more likely to care about the trust their readers have in them when giving recommendations (Liljander et al, 2014). From the consumer's perspective, frequently reading and interaction on a blog allows readers to familiarise themselves with the blogger and their content. This in turn is when trust is formed (Hsu et al, 2013).

It is common among young consumers, who are knowledgeable that popular blogs will at times attract sponsorships, to suspect bloggers are sponsored even if no recommendation is made states Liljander et al (2014). Liljander et al (2014) also found that suspected covert marketing was not representative of any negative effect shown in behavioural intentions or credibility of the blogger. It was also noted in the study that the younger generation are now so in twine and familiar to brand recommendations online that they are able to filter, thus reducing any negative effect. Meaning that

trust between the blogger and follower is vital, thus trust can overwrite any negative notions the followers may have of sponsored content.

1.9.4 Overt Marketing & Blogger Credibility

In previous studies the effect of overt marketing have had a largely negative approach. It has been found that consumers who are unaware of any company involvement are less likely to view a brand more negatively, however those who are aware, are more likely to have a negative opinion (Wei, Fischer, & Main, 2008). Liljander et al (2014) have also found that blog readers become less interested in blogs when overt marketing is involved. It also affects their intentions to respond to content by giving word of mouth recommendations. When blog sponsorship is involved recommendations are not considered to be genuine and consumers have been shown to have a more likely to respond negatively towards the bloggers yet still increases brand awareness of the product.

1.10 Uses and Gratifications Theory Applied To Blogging

Sepp et al (2011) describes the Uses and Gratifications theory, as an approach to understanding why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs. UGT is an audience-centered approach to understanding mass communication. It assumes that audience members are not passive consumers of media. (2011)

Looking at the relevance of Gratifications theory to blogging. Gratifications theory has previously been implemented to explain why we use the Internet (Courtois, Mechant, De Marez, & Verleye, 2009; Leung, 2003; Loonam & O'Loughlin, 2008; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Stafford, Stafford & Schkade, 2004), to producing content for online discussion brands (Nonnecke, Andrews & Preece, 2006). Sepp et al (2011) stated that is there a lack of research regarding consumer gratifications in regards to the user-generated content used in blogs, thus in the research, thus in their research applied the uses and gratifications theory applied, explains what motivates bloggers by investigating the gratifications bloggers gain by blogging.

As mentioned previously, eWOM has become an invaluable tool for bloggers and brands. It was also stated that bloggers have become a means of marketing, as their ability to reach a large engaged audience via eWOM is incremental (Smith, Coyle, Lightfoot & Scott, 2007). Yet, it is suggested that bloggers' motivations do not involve promotional agreements with brands (Kozinets et al, 2010), using the Uses and Gratifications theory, will allow for a deeper understanding of these alternative motivations.

The Uses and Gratifications theory identifies the psychological or gratification needs of the blogger (Blumler & Katz, 1974). This theory was first applied by Katz (1950), Katz suggested that the question of what people do with media has greater importance to what media does to people (O'Donohue, 1994), reflecting the various research studies which involve the consumers' motivations towards a new form of media instead of investigating the media's motivation using a uses and gratifications perspective (Elliot & Rosenberg, 1987).

In summary, the uses and gratifications theory studies the benefits and gratifications, which entices and grips the audience's attentions to multiple media outlets and identifies how that type of content fulfils their psychological and social needs (O'Donohue, 1994; Cantril, 1942). Sepp et al (2011) suggests that the theory person or individual uses a platform to satisfy motivations; in this case the platform or medium used is a blog. Stafford et al (2004) suggests that the uses and gratifications theory is a paradigm which give understand for the motivations for media usage. Thus Rubin (2002) comments that the uses and gratifications theory research has focused on only one of six areas.

1. Linking the media-use motives with media attitudes and behaviours
2. Comparing motivations across media forms
3. Examining the different social and psychological circumstances of media use
4. Evaluating the link or difference between gratifications sought (GS) & gratifications obtained (GO).
5. Exploring variations in backgrounds have affected behaviour and attributes.
6. Consideration of the method's reliability and validity of measuring motivations.

There has been various assumptions made of the theory, Blumler et al (1975) stated that the initiative to link the need gratification with media choice lies mainly with the audience member.

Moreover, Donohue (1994) suggest that the media is assumed to compete with other source variations of need satisfaction. Lastly, the gratifications used by the media include entertainment and information; these will vary depending on the social role of the audience (Donohue, 1994).

Theorists have criticised the methodology used when employing the uses gratifications theory, moreover they specifically highlighted the over dependence on the participants using non-quantifiable reporting to generate data (Severin & Tankard, 1988). Based on the complexity of human motivation, the theorists argue this approach is too simplistic with this in mind (Severin & Tankard, 1988; McLeod & Becker, 1981). To coincide with the above, O'Donohue (1994) also highlights the criticism this approach has received being non-theoretical and too vague, this is based opinion that it is no more than a list of reasons why a bloggers audience will interact with the media. There has also been more criticism on the approach as it is seen to assume that an active audience that is giving full attention to the media, however this is not always the case according to Lometti, Reeves, & Bybee (1977).

For the most part, the criticisms given argue that research of this kind is theoretically redundant and methodologically flawed. With the emergence of new media forms like the Internet, Rubin (2002) and Ruggiero (2000) state that this has produced a newly refreshed UGT perspective. The interactive nature of the Internet allows it to contribute to the UGT approach (Grant, 2005; Rubin, 2002, Ruggiero, 2000). Modern variations of media platforms, such as blogs are now deemed suitable for study through the UGT perspective.

1.11 Blogger Motivations

The Uses and Gratifications theory is widely considered to be an applicable approach to studies on blogging and the perceived gratifications obtained from it. Sepp et al (2011) break blogger motivations down into three dimensions; content gratifications, process gratifications (i.e. emotion management), enjoyment and escape. The gratifications mentioned are associated with the psychological benefits blogging provides, they are also an emotional benefit the blogger themselves gain from creating user generated content. Katz et al. (1974) state that a gratification is a goal-directed, subjective evaluation that can be assessed and self reported by the user or the active

audience. Stafford (2004) defines it as a paradigm that helps to assess consumer motivation for media usage and access.

Content gratifications are known as commenting, information sharing and life documenting. These gratifications indicate the reasons how and why a blogger will choose the specific subject of their blog. In comparison to process gratifications, content gratifications has a more long term value to the blogger as there is a direct benefit to them from having this content available from the moment the blog is uploaded (Sepp et al, 2011). Social gratifications are based on the bloggers interaction and connection to their readers; this is usually based on the reader's ability to give feedback, which is usually through a comment section within the blog itself (Sepp et al, 2011). The theory has been successfully applied for Internet research studies. Papacharissi & Rubin (2000) and Stafford, Stafford & Schkade (2004) applied this theory to Internet use in general, Grace-Farfaglia et al. (2006) applied it to online discussion board members, and Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) used it on social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace.

With this in mind, social gratifications can be defined as a number of the following, image management, communications, finding friends and receiving emotional support (Sepp et al, 2011). Below there are five studies chosen to investigate the motivations and gratifications of blogging.

Motivations for Blogging

Motivation	Nardi et al (2004)	Huang et al (2007)	Fullwood et al (2009)	Sepp et al (2011)	Fullwood et al (2015)
Commenting	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
Emotion Management	Yes		Yes	Yes	
Advertising & promotion				Yes	Yes

Life documenting	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Community	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
Identity management		Yes	Yes	Yes	
Articulating ideas	Yes		Yes	Yes	
Self-expression		Yes	Yes		

Source: Created by author

Evident in the table above, each author overlaps with another in regards to the identified gratifications. The gratifications will now to distinguish a better understanding of each.

Commenting involves the expression of the bloggers opinion to their followers (Nardi et al, 2004). Huang et al, (2007) also suggest that this commenting is a key motivation for bloggers as followers are keen to engage with this commenting creating a discussion. Fullwood et al (2015) to suggests that commenting is a form of motivation as it allows blogger to express themselves, echoing the previous notion that this allows them become their extended ideal self in cyberspace (Chester, 2004). Commenting was stated by four of the five authors.

Emotional management explained as a form of communication which the bloggers express their emotions, using their blogs as the medium (Nardi et al, 2004). It is also suggested that bloggers are motivated to share these emotions as a form of therapy solution (Sepp et al, 2011)

Advertising and Promotion refers to the bloggers writing reviews on various products or services in exchange for payment (Sepp et al, 2011). Sepp also suggest that bloggers who sell blog space for promotional purposes tend to select products, which reflect their taste preferences. Nevertheless Fullwood et al (2015) agrees with Sepp, yet recognises that type of advertising is a recent development that needs further consideration. This also reiterates the purpose of this research study as both Sepp and Fullwood call for further consideration into this type of advertising with bloggers.

Life-documenting, identified by all five authors, this is the most common motivation for bloggers as it is a medium for bloggers to update others on what they are doing, especially when travelling's (Nardi et al, 2004). This is done by the publication of text and images (Sepp et al, 2011).

Community, another element strongly identified, is also suggested as a key motivator for bloggers (Fullwood et al, 2015). This motivates bloggers as it give bloggers a sense of belonging, thus allowing bloggers to share with other like minded people within the same community (Nardi et al, 2004). Huang (2007) notes that are it the social aspect of blogging creates these virtual communities.

In regards to Image Management, Fullwood et al (2009) found that bloggers are aware of the importance of online self-image in regards to gaining followership, as it is the self-presentation that makes one blogger more favourable over another. Thus Sepp et al (2011) echo's Fullwood stating Image Management is a common tool used by bloggers to form their self-branding/presentation.

Articulating ideas, cited by three of the five authors, was referred to by Nardi et al (2004) as 'thinking by writing' and is found to improve the bloggers writing skills becoming a favourable past-time (Sepp et al, 2011). This 'thinking by writing' helps bloggers produce content, which may be blogged.

Self-expression was described by Fullwood et al (2009) as using blogs as an outlet for self-expression, especially for blogger, which find it hard to express themselves to others, face to face.

However Huang et al (2007) suggests that some bloggers require more that self-expression, yet some require feedback of reassurance from followers to feel satisfied.

1.12 Conclusion

In recent years consumer blogs have grown dramatically, there have been some interesting findings through this literature in relation to blog marketing tactics and blogger motivations.

Throughout this paper, there has been a review into what blogs are, who bloggers are and the characteristics of blogging. The information found has given a deeper understanding of the difference in the type of blogs there are, and an insight into the individuals behind the blogs and their reasons for creating them. Following this, the concept of eWOM was explored. The two components of eWOM amplified and organic and their relevance to blogging were also covered. Blog marketing and the different tactics used within blogs were also covered, also addressed was a study by Liljander et al (2014) looking into consumers reaction and attitudes toward on sponsored blog content. Interestingly, the findings of the study found consumers preferred to be notified and made aware of covert marketing tactics, and once notified consumers did not negatively evaluate the brand or the credibility of the blogger themselves.

A key theory for explaining blogger motives was Uses and Gratifications Theory, this was previously employed by Sepp et al (2011) during their study on private bloggers' motivations this was an important factor in the decision to include this in the literature review. From the literature reviewed, it is apparent that blogger motivations are a primary area for many theorists.

With completion of the literature review, many research gaps have arisen and overall there has been a thorough and sufficient knowledge of the topic area. This is based on the over research on blogger motivations and the relevance of Uses gratifications theory along with the concepts of eWOM, covert and overt blog marketing.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of the study is to investigate the motivations that have urged bloggers to participate in brand collaborations, thus this dissertation aims to observe the bloggers attitudes towards brands that encourage these partnerships.

The previous chapter focused on existing literature that enabled a better understanding of this topic. This literature examined what exactly a blog was, plus blogging/bloggers characteristics. Furthermore, the concept of eWOM was studied to include the use of eWOM for brands and this eWOM can be amplified using blogs. Attentively, the credibility of bloggers from a user's perspective was assessed, and how blog marketing can affect bloggers credibility, negatively or positively. Previous theorists (Sepp et al, 2011 and Fullwood et al, 2009) acknowledged the motivating considerations.

The chapter then looked to examine how the Uses and Gratifications Theory was connected to blogging, including the motivating factors for creating blog content which was identified by previous theories (e.g. Sepp et al, 2011 and Fullwood et al, 2009).

The conclusion then focused on the motivations and the gaps that exist regarding a bloggers' motivations to engage in blog marketing with brands.

Following on from the literature review, the focus for the research methodology will be on three area, attitudes, motivations and behaviours. By investigating these topics further it will give a greater understanding and insight behind the motivating factors and why Irish lifestyle and fashion bloggers engage in blog marketing. It will also look at the bloggers attitudes towards working with such companies and brands. The purpose of the methodology section is to state the research approach taken; following the steps discussed in the research process will do this.

2.2 The Research Process

The definition of the market research process is known as *'the systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of information relevant to marketing decisions'* (Hague, 2002). The research provides a direction to follow with allows for this dissertation to be completed in the most effective way (Hair, Money, & Page, 2007).

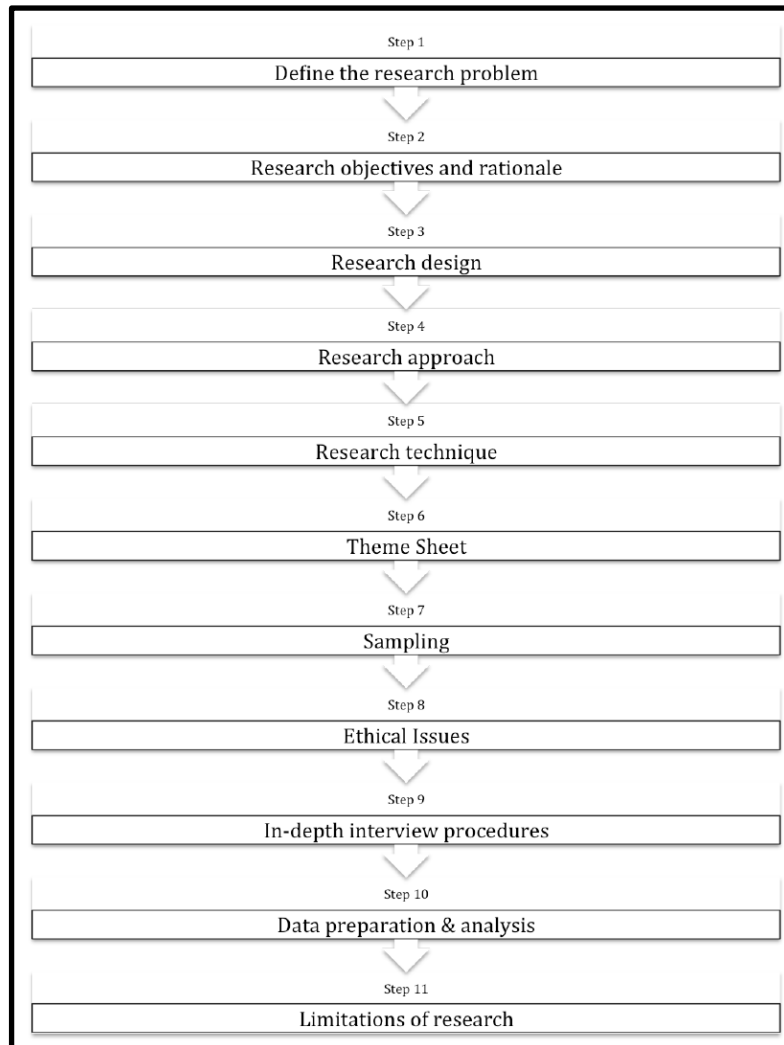


Figure 1.1: The Market Research Process Adapted from: Burns & Bush (2010)

According to Burns and Bush (2010), not all steps from the market research process need to be used. The eleven steps previously mentioned will assume that the researcher uses secondary data to begin and will then look to collect primary data (Burns and Bush, 2010). In chapter one of the literature review there was analysis carried out on the secondary data. Along with this there have

been more areas identified for further research. Identification of the research problem will now follow.

2.3 Research Problem

Identifying and developing the research problem is the first step of the research process. The problem definition is defined by (Hair et al 2007) as “*both existing problems in the current situation as well as the opportunity to pursue a more favourable situation in the future*”. As per research topics identified previously, has developed the research problem (Carson, Gilmore, Perry, & Gronhaug, 2001). The research topics will generally target two areas of marketing, the first would be an area that has received little consideration to date, or the topic could be on an area of marketing which has always had a question mark over it, however had never been fully examined afterward (Carson et al, 2001).

In the past when this research was conducted, the main focus of the studies would have been on the first theme of bloggers’ motivations to create blog content. Other research has focused on the consumer's attitude toward blog marketing, however there has been very little research done on from the bloggers perspective in relation to blog marketing and collaborations. As previously mentioned throughout the literature review, there have been many researchers who have identified the motivations for and reasons why bloggers create blog content (e.g. Fullwood et al, 2015 and Sepp et al, 2011). However there is still a gap remaining within the research in relation to the which brands bloggers should collaborate with, and the motivational factors to engage in such marketing tactics with brands. Within their research, Sepp et al (2011) recognise there is a real lack of understanding of a bloggers’ motivations for taking part in marketing activities and also on the blog readers confidence in the bloggers reliability. Consequently the research problem is:

What are the motivations for bloggers to engage sponsored marketing content, thus the attitudes and behaviours towards this sponsored marketing collaboration.

2.4 Research Objectives and Rationale

For this dissertation three research objectives have been identified. The objectives are as follows:

2.4.1 to examine the motivations to blog on a regular basis and the gratifications benefited from it

The objective of the following research will relate back to section 1.9 of the literature review, this is the section, which compared and discussed the motivations for blogging that were identified by published researchers on the specific topic. In total there are 9 prominent motives that have been identified, by a total of 5 authors who look to explain the reasons why people create blogs. The motives included bloggers wanting to articulate their idea, documenting their life, seeking to express themselves through their blog, as a method of identity management, to gain a sense of community, to manage their emotional state, for commenting and communicating with others, information seeking and finally as a method of advertising and promotion.

All five authors 'Life documenting' identified one motivation, whereas three identified identity management and two identified advertising and promotion as motivations for blogging. With the uplift in amount of bloggers who are actively taking up the opportunity of paid collaborations and sponsorships from companies, there is belief that by conducting this research into blogger motivations the motive of identity management and advertising and promotion will be more frequently identified. Along with motivations already covered throughout the literature review, there may also be more motivations uncovered which may not have been previously discussed, this could play out to be an interesting factor in research. As such, there will be further examination into bloggers motivations to create blog content.

2.4.2 to investigate what motivates bloggers to engage in blog marketing activities with brands

The focus of this research was chosen due to the recent rise in the number of sponsored blogs, and also the number of bloggers teaming up with different brands and companies on their blog. There is

a growing body of research looking into blog marketing and the motivations of bloggers to engage in the activities. There has been numerous research conducted looking at blog marketing and the blog readers attitude toward the subject, however studies focusing on the bloggers perspective are to and far between. Well known researchers such as Sepp et al (2011), have declared the need for further research in the area. For this reason, the research will focus on the motivation for bloggers to partake in marketing activities.

2.4.3 to explore the bloggers' behaviours and attitudes towards selecting brands to collaborate with

Blogs have become a popular source in which consumers gain product information and reviews, therefore blog marketing has become an attractive form of advertising for many brands. Over time many bloggers have created a large reader base and are known to be powerful influencers, this is another area where companies will look to capitalize on the opportunity.

Companies who look to collaborate with bloggers will look for them to recommend, review, endorse and discuss their products on the blogs. However, blogger reliability and trustworthiness has been called into question due to the blog marketing tactics. According to a study conducted by Colliander and Erlandsson (2015), a blogger who engaged in the paid promotion of a product, led to them having a lower recognised level of credibility and attitude toward the blog as a source of information. In modern times blog readers are far more aware and suspicious as to whether a blogger has been paid to promote specific products. As previously mentioned, there has been a number of studies from the blog reader perspective looking at their attitude toward these marketing tactics, while few studies have been done from the bloggers perspective on their attitude toward blog marketing. For this reason the research will look to explore this avenue and focus on the bloggers attitude toward blog marketing, the reasons they choose to work with certain brands and not others, and also their own credibility.

2.5 Research Design

'The research design consists of choosing the survey method to be adopted, the sampling technique, data collection, data analysis, interpretation and evaluation of findings and the presentation of research work to the client organisation' (Wright & Crimp, 2000). The research design that will be followed in this dissertation will be exploratory research.

Due to the fact that blog marketing and blogging as a whole are still relatively new and without sufficient research, the areas of interest in this study do not have a specific hypothesis. After reviewing the literature review, it is evident that the main focus of the research will explore the motivations of Irish lifestyle and fashion bloggers to engage in blog marketing, their general motives to create blog content on a regular basis, the gratifications they gain from creating such content and their behaviour and attitude toward brands when choosing to collaborate with them. In general terms blogging has been researched, however there is still no correct hypothesis. With this in mind exploratory research is the most applicable research design to follow for this dissertation.

2.6 Research Approach

The research approach for this dissertation will follow qualitative research rather than quantitative research. The focal point of quantitative research is on statistics and standardised data with the analysis consisting of statistics and diagrams. For qualitative research the focus is on the understanding of information over the measurement of data.

The definition of qualitative research is *'all non-numeric data or data that has not been quantified and can be a product of all research strategies'* (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007). The most common use of qualitative research is, as an exploratory tool, this is used when there is an uncertainty about the subject and the researcher is unsure as to what detailed questions they should ask (Hague, 2002:61).

Less Structure → More Structure

Interpretivist → Procedural

Inductive → Deductive

Qualitative Research Source: Saunders et al (2007:479)

As you can see from the table above, qualitative research can be structured and unstructured. Qualitative research can also be procedural or it can alternative rely on how the researcher interprets the data. In certain cases researched might start off inductively or deductively (Saunders et al, 2007).

The research for this dissertation will take a less structured approach. The research will illustrate the data gather and will include information from previous studies.

2.7 Research Technique

The research technique is the next stage of the market research process. Deciding on the most appropriate research technique is the first task, there are four techniques, which have been identified and can be used. The four techniques are; in-depth interviews, focus groups, ethnography and observation studies (Carson et al, 2001). With all possible techniques considered, the most appropriate for the research in this dissertation is in-depth interviews. The definition of an in-depth interview is ‘a set of probing questions posed one-on-one to a subject by a trained interviewer to gain an idea of what the subject thinks about something or why the subject behaves in a certain way’ (Burns & Bush, 2010:249). With the interview covering the subject in depth this allows for the interviewer to dig deeper with questioning, this results in the interviewee talking more freely and opening up about the true facts, motivations and perceptions discovered (Hague, 2002:66). As the characteristics relate to the information this research required the interviews will be semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The interviews will be conducted face to face using computer video software technology and the duration will be the recommended 30-60 minutes.

Generally, in-depth interviews don't follow a structured question sheet, this is because the main goal is to get open and honest responses that will directly reflect the interviewee's own opinion (Carson et al, 2001). The interviews conducted for this research will be semi-structured, this will allow the interviewer to explore the blogger's attitude and motivations in relation to the three themes discussed in sections 2.4.1 to 2.4.3. By conducting semi-structured interviews over unstructured interviews, this allows the researcher to direct questions more; this is done with probing questions with the view to gaining a more detailed feedback

A probing question is when 'a researcher delves deeply into a response to identify possibly hidden reasons for a certain behaviour' (Hair et al, 2007:201). Probing questions, also known as open-ended questions mostly start with words such as: who, what and where (Carson et al, 2001:74).

2.8 Theme Sheet

Theme sheets also known as topic guide can also be determined as a "script" which helps guide the dialogue (Hague, 2002: 147). The inclusion of the theme sheet will outline the different themes that have been chosen for this dissertation and will look to apply research questions for each different theme. A theme sheet will include an introduction that outlines how the objectives will be forward to the participant (Hague, 2002).

As discussed previously, the research chosen for this dissertation will be conducted under the following themes; the motivations behind why the participant engages in blog marketing activities with firms, the participants attitudes and behaviours towards selecting brands to collaborate with and motivations behind why the participant creates blog content on a regular basis and the gratifications gained from it. The chosen themes were finalised, following extensive research being conducted on existing studies on blogs and blogger motivations.

The objective of the first theme is to examine the blogger's motivations to regularly create blog content. The theme relates to whether this dissertation can identify any further motivations of blogger's to create blog content, based on the research discussed throughout, that varies from

motivations found in previous studies by different theorists. There is a direct relation with the second theme and the second objective where a research gap has been identified in the literature toward the motivations of blogger's when engaging in blog marketing. Part of the decision making process for the second theme was due to widely cited authors Sepp et al (2011) calling for research to be conducted in the area. The final theme relates to the third objective. This is where the research looks to explore the behaviour and attitude of bloggers toward companies and what considerations they take when choosing with brands and companies to work with over others. There has been research carried out in the past from a consumer's point of view looking at their attitude towards blog marketing, however, no research has been conducted from the bloggers perspective to examine their attitudes and behaviours, this is why this was chosen as the second theme. There are will be individual questions for each theme, the questions can all be seen in the theme sheet.

2.9 Sampling

The focus of this dissertation is on beauty, lifestyle and female fashion bloggers who have previously engaged in blog marketing activities with numerous companies and brands. In times beauty, lifestyle and fashion bloggers have been receiving a significant amount of marketing attention, and for this reason they have been chosen for this dissertation.

Convenience sampling was the chosen method for the research. When utilising convenience sampling, this involves the selection of participants who are able to provide the relevant information needed for the research, and can take part in the time frames they are required (Hair et al, 2007). The chosen sampling method is also easily accessible and relatively affordable for the researcher to conduct (Domegan & Flemming, 2003). The occurrence of 'Selection bias' has been recognised by Hair et al (2007) as a limitation, this is due to the researcher hand picking the participants.

As mentioned previously, the participants in this research will be beauty, lifestyle and female fashion blogger. Each participant has their own blog and has worked with different brands for blog marketing purposes. There will be 6 in-depth, one-to-one interviews with all participants. The

purpose of the in-depth interviews and the goal outcome is to gain in-depth knowledge of the bloggers attitude and opinion on the themes covered previously.

Below is a content profile of each participant:

NAME	BLOGGER NAME	FIELD	Facebook Followers	Instagram Followers	Total
Grace Mongey	Faces by Grace	Beauty/Lifestyle/Fashion	70,501	108,000	178,501
Joanne Larby	The Makeup Fairy	Beauty/Lifestyle/Fashion	115,517	117,000	232,517
Michelle Regazzoli	Mrs. Makeup	Beauty/Lifestyle/Fashion	44,617	55,400	100,017
Niamh Cullen	Behind The Braids	Beauty/Lifestyle/Fashion	7,912	59,300	67,212
Rosanna Davison	Eat yourself fit	Beauty/Lifestyle/Fashion/ Nutrition	54,534	144,000	198,534
Jennifer Rock	The Skin Nerd	Beauty/Lifestyle/Fashion/ Skin	58,374	37,300	95,674

Table Source: Developed by Author.

2.10 Ethical Issues

According to Saunders et al (2007) the definition of ethics is ‘the appropriateness of your behaviour in relation to the rights of those who become subject of your moral work, or are affected by it.’ Aligning with the Esomar World Research codes and guidance, all interviewees were notified of the nature of the data being collected, the processing purpose and how it will be used thereafter (Esomar World Research Codes And Guidelines, 2009). In advance of the interview, the interviewer waited until the interviewee consented to the recording of the interview. All participants were made aware that the interview would be transcribed on completion for research purposes. The

main focus of the research was the marketing aspect of blogging and the impact it has on blogger transparency, and taking into account that the blogging industry which for the most part, is self-regulated. In advance of the interviews, all questions were indicated to participants.

2.11 In-depth Interview Procedures

At the stage, six in-depth interviews are complete and will be discussed further in the following chapter. Interviews were conducted via online videoconference technology as this best suited the interviewees. This software selected was 'Zoom', and this allowed the interviewer to schedule the interview in advance and record the interview while taking notes.

The first interview occurred on the 26th of July and the final interview was conducted on August 5th. The table below illustrates full timings and durations of each interview. On average, the durations of the interviews were approximately 45 minutes.

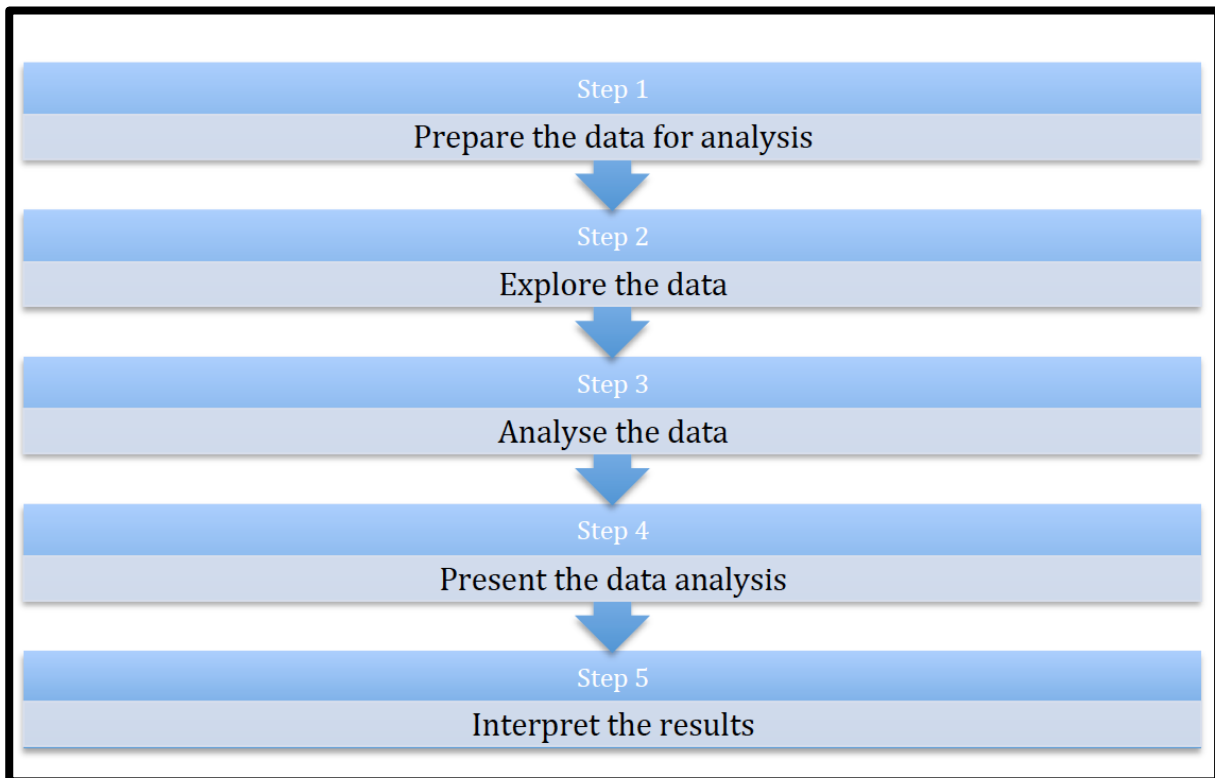
Blogger	Date	Time	Duration
Grace Mongey	26th July	5:30 PM	41 minutes
Joanne Larby	28th July	8:30 PM	39 minutes
Mrs. Makeup (Michelle)	29th July	9:00 AM	49 minutes
Niamh Cullen	1st Aug	8:30 PM	43 minutes
Rosanna Davison	3rd Aug	1:00 PM	61 minutes
Jennifer Rock	5th Aug	2:30 PM	48 minutes

Source: Developed by author.

Before commencing with the interview, all interviewees received a brief explanation on the topic of the interview thus the expected questions. Once all participants were happy to proceed, the recordings commenced.

2.12 Data Preparation & Analysis

Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011) have identified a five-step procedure when analysing qualitative data.



Source: Adapted from Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011).

In order to cohere with the first step, Prepare the data for analysis, all six interviews were recorded and transcriptions were prepared. Following this, the data was accessed and coded, the coding was executed by devising a colour-coded method to identify key points to extract for future review. As

there are three core research objectives, three colours were used to represent each objective. On completion of coding, all relevant information was extracted and assigned to the corresponding objective, this allowed for identification of any theme or commonalities. A list of all recurring or frequent themes were contrived, thus any compelling data which was not relevant to the objectives yet considered relevant in the interpretation of the data was noted. As illustrated above, step three refers to the analysis of the data, for this to be done; a catalogue of fundamental themes was assigned to each objective. The identification and discussion of these themes is acknowledged in the following chapter. The exhibit concludes with Interpretation of the results, this involves an inspection of the identified themes to determine if the objectives have been address, the findings are then compared to previous literature reviewed previously. The following chapter includes results and analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

3.1 Introduction

The focus of this dissertation was to examine what motivates and encourages beauty bloggers to consistently create blog content, what motivates them to take part in paid content and also looking at their behaviour and attitude towards the brands they choose to work with. Following the literature review, it was decided that the dissertations would be based on three research objectives; this was reviewed in the research methodology. Within each objective there are key themes covered also. The following will cover the findings gathered from the in-depth interviews.

3.2 Overview of Participants

There was six in-depth interviews conducted, each one lasted in the region of 45 minutes and all participants were established Irish female bloggers. Each of the bloggers had their own blog related to beauty, lifestyle and fashion and each one gave honest and insightful answers to each questions.

Each of the bloggers gave insightful and interesting responses to the questions relating to the first topic on their motivations to create blog content and also on what the benefits are that they gain from blogging. The second topic looked at their motivations to engage with companies, most of the responses here were similar and this will be covered later in this section. The final topic looked at their behaviour and attitude towards the brands in which they choose to collaborate with; in this section there was a range of different responses in relation to whether they would disclose to their readers paid advertisement and also on the effect these paid collaborations have with their trustworthiness and credibility with readers.

Due to their experience of doing recorded interviews, all of the participants seemed relatively comfortable during the interviews. By thoroughly listening to the participants during the interviews, this allowed the interviewer to use probing questions to gain a deeper insight when there was an interesting point made by the interviewee. When reviewing the interviews, a number of interesting

themes were uncovered, which highlights the success of the interview process. The themes mentioned, are covered in each of the research objective in greater detail, which is in the following sections.

The areas in which each objective will uncover:

- **Research Objective One: Motivation: To examine the motivations to blog on a regular basis and the gratifications benefited from it.**

- Interest in the Area
- Self-promotion
- The strive for success
- Life-documenting
- a sense of community

- **Research Objective Two: Motivation: To investigate what motivates bloggers to engage in blog marketing activities with brands.**

- genuine belief in the product
- Reluctance to give negative reviews
- Working with relevant brands
- Bloggers approaching the company
- Career Enhancing
- Money as a motivator

- **Research Objective Three: Attitudes & Behaviours: To explore the bloggers' behaviours and attitudes towards selecting brands to collaborate with.**

- Disclosing sponsorship to readers
- The bloggers' own credibility
- ASAI guidelines for blogger transparency

3.3 Research Objective One: To examine the motivations to blog on a regular basis and the gratifications benefited from it.

The following will delve into the common themes that arise during the interviews that relate to the reasons that each participant created a blog of their own and what they believe the benefits they have gained from it. The selected themes discovered within the research are below:

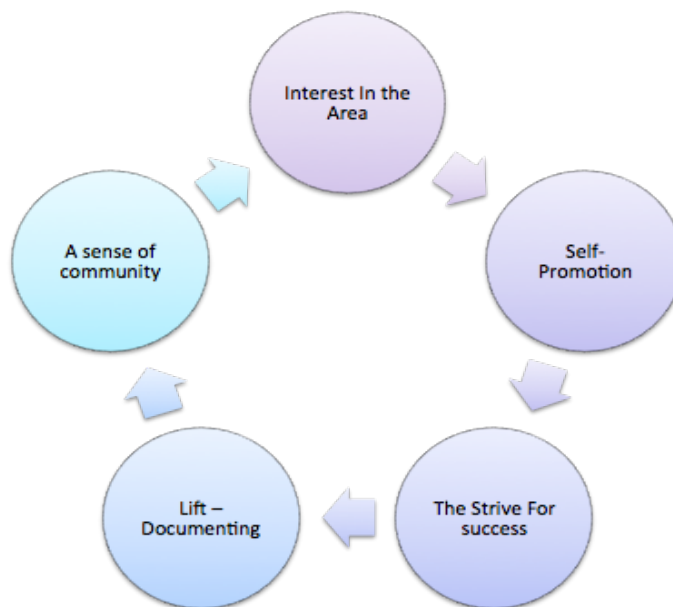


Figure: Subtopics of Objective One

3.3.1 Interest in the Area

As the interview commenced all participants were asked introductory questions about the blogging profession. The first question asked to the participants was regarding how long they have been blogging for. The length of time varied from participant to participant, with Grace being the longest blogger *“It will be 7 years in September, I began recording YouTube videos back then”* and Niamh being the newest at blogging *I have always kind of shared stuff across my socials. But to be exact just over a year now.*

Rosanna and Jennifer mentioned that they began to blog as a way of supporting their professions elsewhere, Rosanna states, *Well, I’ve had social media accounts for the last seven years, hmm I started my actual blog in 2015, April 2015, to tie in with the launch of my first book, eat yourself fit,*

later that year. Rosanna's blog was created to market her own brand, her cookbook this is interesting and a different approach from others, she continues, *So really I started the blog as way of reference for readers and really sell my brand ahead of the launch of my book. Blogging is a hobby rather than a business, and I used it to share my passion for healthy eating and that kind of thing.* Thus Jennifer reveals that it was also to support her current business *“started contributing toward articles 5 years ago in the professional industry trade magazines, I have always lectured and was encouraged to join social media by colleagues one year ago- My following grew so much more when I became known as a blogger so I think it was a good move, ...it’s just not the same clique of people”* this implies Jennifer was motivated to start a blog in hopes of becoming part of the growing group of Irish bloggers at the time.

3.3.2 Self-promotion

The reason behind why each participant decided to blog was similar, for each participant the blogging topic varied from makeup to fashion to fitness to travel, yet commonly all participants commenced blogging for two reasons, first to improve their profile and because they enjoyed the sharing nature of blogging. Niamh elucidated, *“I feel I just share things I love & feel passionate about. Like fitness, fashion & hair. It also helped me boost my profile and getting noticed by brands”* This statement also suggests that getting noticed by brands is a motivation behind her starting to blog, this conception echoed by Grace: *It was when I began to become a makeup artist and wanted to share my tips and tricks to increase my profile as a makeup expert.* This sharing nature of knowledge allows each blogger to become the figure of expertise within the selected area, improving their profile. This can be directly related back to the secondary research as both themes were mentioned also, ‘The Megaphone Effect’ is put forward by McQuarrie, Miller, & Phillips (2012), It was interesting to notice that both elements of sharing and increasing profile was mentioned by each participant. Joanne explains *“Initially I started blogging as a means to get my name as a freelance MUA out there while I was working as a teacher full time. I wanted to explore writing and continue my passion for beauty and fashion as a hobby.”* Jennifer and Grace emphasize at the time of their blog creation, they identified a topic which wasn't commonly wrote about, as Jennifer states, *In Ireland there are no media orientated skin experts, most skin talk was offered by peoples biased and paid for opinions from personal use,* again, there refers back to the

chapter one as bloggers were defined into three category's, one being the 'Market expert'. Grace mirrors this notion "*I watched UK and American bloggers but noticed it wasn't a thing in Ireland so I wanted to do it and try something different.*" It is obviously that self-promotion is a common motivation factor for all participants. It demonstrates to be a prominent theme as all six interviewees mentioned self-promotion as one of the benefits of blogging. Rosanna indicates that the purpose for blogging for her was "*for anyone who thought of buying the book, they could see what I was about, the content I was sharing, also information regarding buying the book. Asking questions etc. It's been a great tool over the past couple of years.*" She adds "*It is really so beneficial for bloggers these days who are trying to maintain a profile*". This statement illustrates how bloggers may be motivated to use their blogs as a tool to support other aspects in their professional careers. Rosanna implied that she considers her blog as a helpful tool in the promotion of her book.

Although all participants addressed the area of self-promotion, Rosanna acknowledged challenges and justifications in further detail, "*I think social media and blogging is really so beneficial for bloggers these days who are trying to maintain a profile or work with brands, it serves different purposes...It gives an insight into my personal life and what I'm up to.*" The statement from Rosanna, gives significant attention to the benefits of blogging compared to using traditional types of media, as Rosanna is the only blogger interviewed which didn't start her career as a blogger, as she is a former Miss Ireland/Miss World 2013. Rosanne comment on giving insight to her personal life, reflects back to chapter one when the types of blogs were disclosed, one of these types of blog types was referred to as a 'Personal Journal', these focus on the inner world, mainly the blogger's thoughts, while notebooks encompass both the outer and inner worlds. (Ko, 2012).

3.3.3 the strive for success

When asked if the bloggers had any expectations when starting to blog, all participants answered no, except for Joanne, "*I always wanted to be my own boss so I did have an end goal when I began creating my website and working tirelessly on all aspects, however I never expected to have a best selling book and beauty brand. Those things progressed naturally and became organic goals throughout the experience I gained.*" This statement suggested that Joanne did have a success goal when commencing her blog. The other participants stated various motivations, which allowed them

to achieve a particular objective of success, yet none of these objectives were motivational factors before starting the blog. Grace suggests that she did not have any goals or expectations “*No definitely not, I always looked up to others doing it and I had always hoped or wanted it to be a career for me.*” Likewise, Michelle comments “*At the time I started I really didn't have any expectations it was such a learning curve for me and still is!*” More over, Niamh also comments “*Myself no, as for me I just feel I'm sharing different aspects of my life with people.*” It is interesting to note, that only one blogger created her blog with the intention to achieve a particular goal. The remaining bloggers started to blog as they noticed it was a popular way to get the attention of brands and increasing their status, as mentioned in the section above.

3.3.4 Life-documenting

It was interesting to see that there was a significant amount of time spent on life-documenting daily. Grace notes that “*sharing my life is 24/7, yet may post about 2 posts a week on my blog which take 2-3 hours per day*” in addition to this, Niamh said “*I say at least 4 hours on working days, and possibly a full day on my day off*”. Joanne goes into greater depth in what is what is involved in the day to day of blogging which gave a better understanding of the level of time needed “*I probably only spend 5 hours a week actually blogging, so posting a full article on my website. However the many other facets of new age 'blogging' means taking and editing pictures, curating captions, replying to comments, posting snap chats and instagram stories can take up anywhere from 1-12 hours of my day depending on the time I can, and decide to allocate.*”

As mentioned in previous sections, the accessibility to share information about themselves and their professions was a key motivation factor to create a blog, an interesting these occurred when bloggers were asked about life-documenting and their thoughts surrounding this, it was interesting to learn that some bloggers are hesitant to share some information regarding her personal life.

Rosanna mentioned earlier in the interview that this life documentation was a motivation for creating a blog “*I suppose it useful keeping people updated with what I'm doing every day, giving an insight into my personal life and what I'm up to.*” Joanne also notes, “*I love the personal release, I adore my topic and my friends ban it! The interaction, the fact I learn daily, the fact*

people learn from me daily” This implies that the life-documenting motivation to blog also benefits the blogger as they enjoy being able to share their daily activities. However, a number of bloggers commented on the negative feedback they receive when sharing personal information, making life-documenting a major challenge. Grace comments, *“The backlash and negativity really impact on me because I’m not the kind of person who can brush it off so easily. I find it hard to ignore things and I take it to heart. Having to be so consistent and the workload can be overwhelming.”* Similarly, Niamh states that life-documents can create cause *“Begrudges and negativity.”* In opposition to other bloggers, who express enjoyment of life documenting, Grace and Niamh express concern of being negatively criticized, preventing both Niamh and Grace from sharing too much personal information.

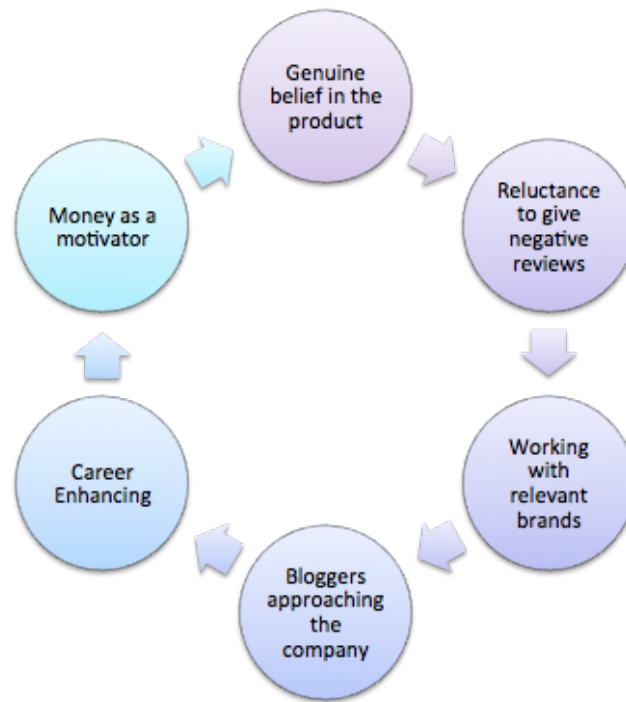
3.3.5 A sense of community

Research suggested that some bloggers considered wanting to feel like part of a community as a motivation to start blogging, although, others considered the community aspect as a perk gained from being a blogger. Surprisingly, a sense of belonging did appear to be another recurring theme for some bloggers, on the other hand, not for others. Grace conveys *“Definitely meeting and connecting with people I wouldn’t usually meet.”* while Michelle claims *“I definitely feel it’s a great benefit to share my experiences with products that I like or may not like, as I am fortunate enough to have so many followers people that like to see what I like and don’t like”* Michelle implies that she enjoys sharing her content to her followers as they are like-minded people and have the same interests and she does. Jennifer adds, *“Chatting to people who have similar interests as me is the most enjoyable bit.”* She also adds *“I have a niche and smaller yet loyal interactive and engaged audience as we are searching for a different purpose online.”* This implies that she considers this sense of community as being one of the greatest benefits she has gained since beginning her blog.

3.4 Research Objective Two: To examine what motivates Irish bloggers to engage in sponsored marketing and brand collaborations.

The following section will cover objective two, which looks at the primary themes that materialised

through the research which related to the blogger and their motives when engaging in marketing activities, the bloggers attitude toward paid collaboration, it also looks at the type of brand each blogger chooses to work with and how they conduct product reviews on their blog. The key themes are as follows;



3.4.1 genuine belief in the product

All participants, apart from one, stated that they will only review free products which they genuinely like, the general agreement between all bloggers was that they didn't want to be seen to always be reviewing free products as it diminishes their credibility. Grace states, *“Sometimes I talk about them and sometimes I don't because there can be a lot of product and I don't want my followers getting tired of me sharing all the free stuff. I much prefer to try out everything first for a few weeks, see how it works and if I love it then I will share it or recommend it with my followers while saying it was sent a few weeks back and thank the brand.”* Similarly, Joanne agrees, *“I will only ever promote and mention products I love. The ones that are sent I dislike won't be used or featured. I always email brands personally to let them know my thoughts regardless.”*

Interestingly, Niamh agrees with both Grace and Joanne, yet Niamh takes a different approach *“If I have seen another 8 bloggers has received what I have sometimes I’ll give it a miss for another day or maybe not exactly talk about it on my snaps or stories maybe just share a message mentioning a thank you.”* Jennifer totally disagrees, as Jennifer does not promote any gifted products. *“They do not feature, my channels are not to show off, unboxing lifestyle site, a product will only be referenced once trialed for 28 days and I have a greater understanding of it, or indeed if I try it while on social media I am upfront and say “ I do not know”. People invest heavily in what I recommend so I will never steer someone wrong, there is always a possibility it may not suit their skin or they bought unaware it wasn’t suited to them but as a product – only results driven efficient brands will be referenced.”* It was interesting to note that only blogger referred to what she does with products she doesn't like, Joanne. It is clear that the majority of blogger will only promotion free products when the genuinely like the products, as they take great pride in their recommendations, however none of the bloggers will express their opinion on products they dislike.

3.4.2 Reluctance to give negative reviews

As mentioned above, although bloggers are cautious to online review product in which they like, there was a common theme of the lack of acknowledgment of products they dislike. Bloggers also stated various brand types, which they refused to work with; Niamh said that she would not promote *“Any skinny tea, or anything that genuinely does not interest me. I will not just share something just because of the client. It genuinely has to be of Interest to me and has to relate to what I’m sharing.”* Jennifer also added that *“ No company wants to hear someone publicly slate their products.”* and Michelle stated that by negatively review a product would *“make other brands hesitant to send me any other products, which I could love”*, Michelle added *“I do not promote products that I haven't used or believe in - I have received products where I have broken out in a rash and wouldn't dream of promoting them for any fee - people know when you are genuine and credibility is really important”*. These statements conclude with this concept that bloggers do not want to give negative reviews, as they do not want to damage a brand nor jeopardies the volume of products they may receive in the future.

3.4.3 Working with relevant brands

From the outset, all participants stated that they wouldn't work with brands that they didn't agree with ethically. All interviewees revealed brands, which they would work with, and brands they wouldn't. Grace openly said that she would only work with brands, which were makeup/beauty related, but also *“some mother and baby brands as I am now a mother!”* Grace continued to express the types of brands she wouldn't work with *“A brand I didn't believe in, love or one which may be a gimmick, I would never ever just work with a brand for the money.”* Michelle discussed how she would only work with brands she has tried and tested in advance and Jennifer said she will only work with brands on an ongoing basis *“I tend to work on campaigns as opposed to one hit wonders.”* opposed to *“A brand with no ethics, mass marketing approach, no core values, fad based, no loyalty. It would dilute my own message, I would not be able to stand behind it.”*

Throughout the interviews, the author discussed with the interviewees the different brands they work with along with brands they wouldn't consider working with. The general consensus was that the bloggers' would only be open to collaborating with brands that fell in line with the prevailing content of their blog. Similarly, Joanne stated she would work with *“Beauty, fashion and lifestyle from skincare to travel, it varies.”* yet will not work with brands with *“any brands that promote things I don't agree with or take part in myself for example promoting alcohol or anything crude or inappropriate.”*

Joanne explains, *“I will only ever work with brands I genuinely love and have used for some time. I'm always humbled and excited to be paid for collaborations I would work on regardless because it shows the value in my work and the audience I've grown. The more campaigns I do the more I learn what works and what doesn't with my following and with brands.”* Joanne implies that the bigger your fan base is the more requests you may receive, Michelle echoes this *“the bigger you get the more and more requests for collaborations came through I had to be more selective with the products I chose to promote and companies approached me with collaboration packages”* Both Joanne and Michelle identify the growth in your followership allows you to become more selective with the brands you work with.

It is intriguing to discover that bloggers hold the power in terms of what collaboration they agree to, they do not feel obliged to collaborate with a certain brand. A common theme throughout the

bloggers responses was that each blogger takes a mindful approach to the brand of choice.

3.4.4 Bloggers approaching the company

The compelling factor of the interview data was the results regarding whether the blogger approaches the brand or the opposite way around. A Grace note that as time goes on, she gains more confidence to approach brands she particularly likes. *“For me it's mainly the company or brand approach me. A couple of times I have approached small brands or companies whom I love and would love to collaborate and they were delighted. I hope to get more confidence as the years go by!”* Niamh also said that she would sometimes approach the brand first, if she felt it was a right fit *“It depends it's generally the company but if you have a good idea you can always pitch it to the company that would like to work with. I would always say if you were to do that it needs to be real and relatable and relevant to what you're sharing.”* Michelle also said that she would approach brands first also, *“I am approached by small businesses, large PR companies and everything in between”*

Joanne, Roseanna and Jennifer said they have not approached any brand for collaboration purposes, Joanne suggested, *to this day I have never approached a company. Brands have always contacted me either directly or through my Irish and UK agency.* Jennifer address this in greater detail, *“I have not yet approached anyone, all approach me, that does not mean it won't change in the future but I am concentrating on my career and see the affiliations as networking but not my long-term goal or revenue stream, they assist cash current projects and in house developments. I have refused many mighty fine dollar figures, as my opinion cannot be bought for a hash tag.* “It is evident from the comments from Grace, Niamh and Michelle that they will only approach companies who are relevant and fitting with their own brand, whereas Jennifer and Joanna state that they have never approached a brand, yet may decide to approach a brand in the future.

3.4.5 Career Enhancing

All participants were asked how do they think collaborating with brands would affect their career. Grace identified the benefits of being self-employed, *“It made me grow as a person, doing it full time while having the freedom of being self employed. I don't have to be consumed by working for*

someone else everyday from 9-5pm. I can work on myself and grow my own brand!” Throughout the interviews, the participants expressed how working with different brands has been beneficial to their blogger careers for different reasons. Joanne considers collaborating to positively affect her career *“I think it boosts my career because I have a natural domino effect - the more brands I work with the more brands want to work with me, the greater my audience reach and so on. Once what I do is loyal to my following and true to myself it’s a win.”* Jennifer speaks about her hesitations, *“I was fearful at first but I do believe in mutual business relationships and if I have a medium, it’s a brand I endorse then I have no problem in working with a brand with a view to educating end users how to use, when etc.”* Niamh also expresses some concerns when collaborating and how it could affect her career *“You have to be so careful in that area what you put across and for me that’s a big one as what I share would be a lot of fitness. Sometimes it could be any brand you’re working with and some brand will approach you and see you are or have been working another brand before, could be a competitor or anything, and may choose not to work with you due to the fact you have worked with another or other brands before that may not suit them.”* Michelle’s comments suggest that companies are more enticed to want to work with bloggers who have previously worked with other recognised brands *“I think more people tend to approach me after I have done campaigns, I work closely with Andrea Roche influencers now for large campaigns such as the RSA and bBold”*. Michelle’s comment implies that working with well-known brands can improve your status as a blogger and attract more premium brands.

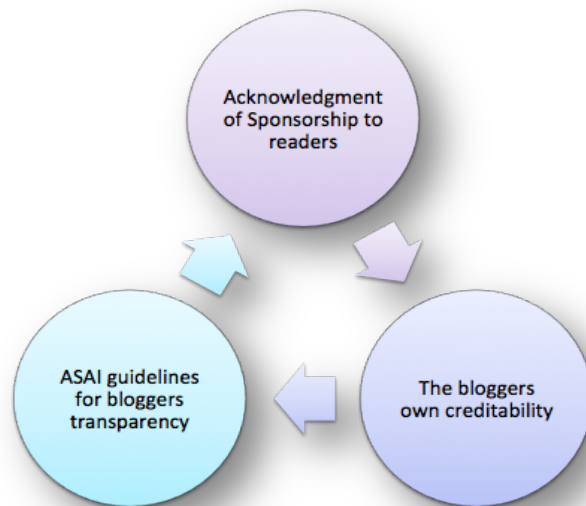
3.4.6 Money as a motivator

Throughout the interviews, bloggers were asked what motivated them to engage in paid promotions with brands, only two bloggers included the payment element of the partnership, Grace and Roseanna, Grace ascertained that payment contributes to her cost of living, *“I really wanted to work with brands I loved, the opportunities are amazing and it’s something very different to do. Obviously being self employed I have bills to pay, just like everyone else so when a brand I absolutely love comes to me and offers a collaboration I am thrilled to do so.”* Niamh states that she was more flattered by her work being noticed, *“It wasn’t motivation as such it was the excitement of people & companies admiring what I done. As for me I work full time so for being*

recognised and acknowledged by companies without being a full time blogger was exciting. I then guess yeah it motivated me to understand what I'm sharing is maybe good and relatable as sometimes in the loop of social media you tend to always second guess yourself so when companies have an interest I suppose it would motivate you.” It was surprising that throughout the interviews some bloggers avoided the topic of earning money from these collaborations and focused on the benefits of being associated with premium brands.

3.5. Research Objective Three: To explore bloggers’ behaviours and attitudes towards selecting brands to collaborate with.

This next section will explore the themes that arose from the interviews in relation to the last research objective. These themes relate to the bloggers behaviour toward whether they disclose paid content to their blogs readers and it will also look in depth at their attitude on how paid collaborations affect a bloggers credibility, this will be covered in greater detail.



3.5.1 Acknowledgement of sponsorship to readers

Participants were asked on their opinions regarding acknowledging whether their reviews have been

paid for by brands to their readers. The majority of bloggers answered immediately answered yes, including Grace, Yes, *“I always follow the guidelines and say I'm collaborating with a brand. I say it either at the beginning of Snapchat for example or at the end of blog posts. I also use the "#ad" or equivalent. I never want to hide the fact I'm working with a brand but as more people are doing it we are all learning how best to do it and let people know it's sponsored content.”* Niamh explains the importance of disclosing that she has been paid to promote a product or service. *Always, it's so important to me to share if I'm being paid I will always say beforehand! It's so beneficial for yourself to be honest. Personally with my readers I feel anyway have developed an honest trust and people you do watch and tune in know I am being honest. So when I do say yes I am being paid or collaborating I've tried it out I personally find it good reasons why. I feel they trust me and I always would say I don't exactly want to influence anybody but you know take what you like from it and always her for any questions.* Michelle was brief with her response and stats how it is now a requirement to disclose if you have been paid, *Yes I would inform readers if I have been paid - it's a requirement and the companies themselves actually request that it's mentioned also.* Joanne also gave a brief response, acknowledging the requirement *“Yes, always - it's a legal requirement and imperative.”*

On the other hand, Jennifer discussed in greater details both sides of this and comparing it to other forms of media. She explains, *“I have thoughts for and against. I suppose I wonder sometimes how magazines don't need to say this person is my friend so I wrote about it as it's a networking thank you/ I was sent this magazines and all channels of media are paid for, every radio ad, plug, brand ambassador deal, giveaway, TV commercial – this is the world we live in there are deals everywhere in every part of life I feel it should all be transparent and regulated.”* Jennifer never answered the question to whether she does disclose if she herself is being paid to promote a certain product or service.

It was interesting to find that the majority of blogger do currently disclose if payment was accepted for the promotion, as this is an area, which has come under great spotlight recently.

3.5.2 the bloggers' own credibility

Throughout the duration of the interviews, the bloggers referred to their strengths as a blogger as opposed to other bloggers, thus why brands approach them as opposed to alternatives. Grace mentioned, *“I think I earned my credibility as I'm just the girl next door, down to earth and my followers trust what I say and I pride myself in that. I talk about what I love. Brands mainly look at demographics and who they can reach so that's their main focus.”* When asked if she thinks her credibility would be affected by engaging in sponsorship collaborations *“Yes it is important, at the same time for me anyway it doesn't matter if I'm being paid or not because I will only ever talk about what I love. You need to be honest because people can get annoyed sometimes when they see sponsored content but if they know and trust the blogger it shouldn't be a problem. Generally they are happy for them to be furthering their career and do more while earning a living while doing what they love! Otherwise it's easy to lose trust in a blogger if it's only product placement and not genuine to the blogger. I've seen it happen but I pride myself in being authentic and always honest.”*

Michelle suggests that it is her genuine nature *“I guess brands knew that I was genuine and not promoting products for the sake of it”* Michelle was also asked if she thought not disclosing payment could affect her credibility, *“Of course it can but that's up to the blogger and their credibility - it's very clear that a €1 product is not going to be the same quality as a €20 product - so it's important to use your own judgment too”*.

Interestingly, Niamh focused on the brands' needs rather than her credibility, this could be as Niamh is a new blogger, *“my demographic would suit their audience”* when later asked more directly if she thought her credibility could be dismissed by engaging in sponsored content she continued by saying, *“Depending on the collaboration and client absolutely! I mean some fashion clients I am working with now I mean I am chuffed about it absolutely chuffed and because I'm so real I do say I'm so excited ok I am being paid but it's only because it's taking time out of usual work day to do it. I think in reflect to full time bloggers as it's seen they get paid for what they do as in fairness it is their full time job, I wouldn't want it to see it affecting their credibility but I think it comes down to the blogger herself/himself and if they being true to them and what they share on there and still being completely relatable”*

Joanne shared the thought that it is her level of experience, which gives her a high credibility, *“I began blogging at a time it was new and fresh so I was lucky in a sense, therefore I am one of the Irish bloggers known to be around a long time. I offer a variety of content from beauty to body confidence, try to keep things real and always reply to followers, which means they’re loyal and appreciative of what I provide. As a result of being in this industry for a long time I’ve been lucky enough to be commended for my work and won a lot of awards in my area which further grows my name and desire for brands to work with me.”* Moreover, Joanne was asked if collaborations could affect her credibility *“Initially when hash tag AD was introduced some people were shocked bloggers were being paid to promote things and worried we were being dishonest in relation to reviews etc. Over time people seem to understand it is a career and important we earn in the same manner any job would. Followers that are loyal trust what I have to say and know that it would only damage my own brand to act otherwise.”*

When Jennifer was asked if collaborations could affect her credibility, she passionately responded, *“the blogger opts not to think of a bigger picture and is seen to blatantly product hop, analogy to bed hop, yes of course, to adore product Y and hail it the be all and end all for one month then to adore competitor product X 4 weeks later also now the most ground-breaking product, that will dilute the message and only causes harm to the blogger, readers are savvy and deservedly so, they want truth, facts and reality! However this may be in the business plan of blogger, it is a tough industry, social media is a fickle false and non respected world yet it warrants much time effort, concentration, time, dedication and skillset to run it full time. I do believe more respect should be given, trolls should be managed, support for the industry or at least those that respect it.”*

3.5.3 ASAI guidelines for blogger transparent

Out of the six interviewees, four acknowledge the recent ASAI guidelines in relation to bloggers and sponsored content. The Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland or the ASAI are a self-regulatory, independent body whose sole purpose is to protect all commercial marketing activity and to ensure it is ‘legal, decent, honest and true’ (ASAI, 2015). The ASAI announced new

guidelines in 2016; the new guidelines are an effort to increase transparency on advertising through social networks, including blogging.

From a brand or company's side of the things, the Public Relations Institute of Ireland also released its own guidelines for working alongside social media influencers. According to the guidelines, it is unfair to promise of certain goods for influencers in exchange for favourable reviews. The PRII state, when influencers collaborate with brands, sponsored content must be clearly highlighted and distinguished from the regular content, this must be transparent to the blog's readers.

Although the participants were unaware as to what the repercussions were for failure to cooperate with the guidelines, the general consensus was that the guidelines were definitely beneficial to have. This would help to somewhat regulate the industry of blogging.

CONCLUSION

4.1 Introduction

The last and final chapter will look at the conclusion to this exploratory research study. The parts that follow were brought together with the objective of reaching a conclusion. By combining the information provided in the previous chapter, the research from the literature review in chapter one and the research methodology from chapter two, the conclusions and recommendations will be given. The key findings from the three original research objectives will be covered.

4.2 Research Objective One Conclusions

To examine the motivations to blog on a regular basis and the gratifications benefited from it.

Chapter one focused on the comparison of the findings from various researchers in relation to different blogger motivations and gratifications. The research conducted for this dissertation-supported research from other theorists on the area blogger motivations (Sepp et al, 2011 & Fullwood et al, 2015). The research found that blogging about predominant aspects of one's life for the purpose to relate to others, thus for general enjoyment was the primary motivation for bloggers. This life-documenting motivational factor was established early in this study and aligned with past research (Sepp et al, 2011; Fullwood et al, 2009). This research also found that the majority of participants relished the sense of community blogging presented, especially the communication with others of similar interests, this was referred as 'like-minded' in previous literature to which was disguised by Nardi et al (2007) and introduce in the literature review.

Three theme were identified for this piece of research to be carried out, the primary theme being the motivation to use blogging as a tool of self-promotion, thus to develop a profile. It was evident throughout the data analysis that building a profile or getting recognised by other was a key motivational factor among most bloggers. The bloggers intermittently mentioned the blogging helping other areas of professional success, therefore using blogging as a way of building larger

career opportunities. Another theme developed from the finding, which was not identified in previous literature, was the hesitation of producing some content due to the fear of receiving negative backlash from readers. Furthermore, it was also interesting to note that the blogs mentioned in this study stemmed from a particular pre-existing interest, with all bloggers commonly noting that idea of sharing content relating to this interest was a also a key motivation.

4.3 Research Objective Two Conclusions

To examine what motivates Irish bloggers to engage in sponsored marketing and brand collaborations.

The second aim of this research study was to uncover why Irish bloggers participated in sponsored marketing with different brands and companies and their thoughts towards this activity. A clear theme reviled as the passion for ‘genuine belief in the product’ was acknowledged, corresponding with the literature regarding eWOM. The research found that all bloggers heavily accentuated the importance genuine belief in the products which they endorse, most bloggers refused to promote a product which wasn’t try and tested in advance of promotion. The was found to related back to the literature as Kozinets et al (2010) suggested ‘amplified eWOM’ involved the manipulation of blogging content, yet this can conclusively be one by one eWOM individual, in this case the blogger themselves.

Another prevailing theme, which occurred throughout this section, was the bloggers consistency to work with relevant brands. This also reflected on what was reviewed previously regarding eWOM. Each blogger emphasised the importance of only working with relevant brands, in this case beauty brands, if the sponsorship didn't look natural they understood the effect this has on the follower’s perception of them. These relevant brands were stated to change as the bloggers developed into different life stages, i.e. Motherhood. This research mirrored the review of Kulmala et al (2012) research, as that research study suggested that only relevant products were likely to be incorporated into the blog content.

The final theme to unveil itself in this section was the bloggers motivation towards sponsored

collaborations. Interestingly, only two of the six interviews referred to payment as being the primary motivation here. The remaining bloggers stated that by participating in various sponsorships or collaborations boosted their profile status and allowed them to get noticed by more premium brands.

4.4 Research Objective Three Conclusions

To explore the bloggers behaviour and attitude towards selecting brands to collaborate with.

The research concluded with the objective to understand bloggers attitudes towards disclosing pay content to their readers, thus if these sponsorships affected their blogging credibility. The majority of the participants stated that they all disclose the fact they are being paid to promote a certain product, many of the bloggers explained they do this by using #ad. It was interesting to see the difference between the bloggers answers regarding paid sponsorships, some were quite brief, indicating that they did not want to speak much about this topic. Overall, five from the six bloggers agreed that they would not cover up the fact they were engaging in paid branded activity as it would reduce their credibility and reduce their transparency image to their readers.

The literature focused on the Overt and Covert marketing, this discusses how consumers are more likely to react to covert marketing thus bloggers consider this form of marketing to affect their credibility. Similarly, Colliander & Erlandsson (2015) found that this paid sponsorship led to readers having reduced perceived credibility towards the bloggers.

One participant stated that she finds it unnecessary to disclose payment received to her readers as no other forms of advertising state that payment has been disclosed. Moreover, most bloggers suggested being honest in their paid reviews would not affect their credibility. This idea was also found in the literature review as Colliander (2012) suggested that paid sponsored has no effect on the perception of the blogger, once the sponsorship is disclosed in advance.

4.5 Limitations

It is acknowledged that limitations are expected with most exploratory research studies. Ideally a

wider sample size would have been used, yet due tight restrictions and the re-scheduling of multiple interviews this was not achievable. Finalising interviews with six high Irish profile bloggers was a positive success, yet in hindsight the author would have liked to interview less established bloggers and it's felt they might have been more open to answering questions regarding payment as it might have led to different attitudes on blog marketing.

4.6 Future Research

It is called for future research with a wider interest type of bloggers, this research looked at the beauty category only yet as this industry is growing at a rapid rate, there is a need for research focusing on Irish blogging within a different category. It is also recommended for future research to the wider blogging development such as influencers and creators, as these are new forms of blogging using video content and social media platform.

4.8 Overall Conclusion

The attitudes and motivations of Irish beauty bloggers towards sponsored collaboration have been identified and investigated. Various themes have emerged through the research process, which have been explored in further depth. The research concludes with the indication that the motivation of these beauty bloggers to blog originates from the idea to enhance their professional career and recognition of expertise from peers and especially premium brands.

Because of their investment in blog promoting, bloggers need to consider how this influences their apparent believability among readers and embrace a transparency when revealing supported products.

While the interviewees showed a hesitance to exclude disclosures of paid content to their followers, they agreed that full disclosure of sponsored content ought to have no negative impact on their transparency, trustworthiness, reliability and credibility.

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APPENDICES

6.1 Transcription

Transcription: Rosanne Davison

Interviewer: How long have you been blogging?

Interviewee: Well, I've had social media accounts for the last seven years, hmm I started my actual blog in 2015, April 2015, to tie in with the launch of my first book, eat yourself fit, later that year. So really I started the blog as way of reference for readers and really sell my brand ahead of the launch of my book. Blogging is a hobby rather than a business, and I used it to share my passion for healthy eating and that kind of thing.

Interviewer: you touched on my second question there, which was why you started to blog, which as you said, was to link to the release of your book, as a reference point.

Interviewee: Yes, pretty much. It was for anything who thought of buying the book, they could see what I was about, the content I was sharing, also information regarding buying the book. Asking questions etc. It's been a great tool over the past couple of years.

Interviewer: What benefits you find you receive from blogging and social posting?

Interviewee: Hm, It's definitely hard work and it definitely feels like a job in itself. I think social media is really so beneficial for bloggers these days who are trying to maintain a profile or work with brands, it serves different purposes, I suppose it useful keeping people updated with what I'm doing every day, giving an insight into my personal life and what I'm up to. I can share information about my books and what I am doing. It's useful in so many ways and I think it gives an individual a platform in a way that traditional media can't. It is harder to control what is put about in traditional media whereas your own media you can control everything.

Interviewer: Do you feel like there are many challenges to blogging?

Interviewee: I think the challenge is to separate yourself from social media or blogging, and I've gotten much better at that than I used to be. I'm much more aware of keeping it a small part of my life, and this doesn't in any way represent my whole life, at the minute it only takes up about 5% of my day, and you need to be careful with what you share, I was brought up in a family that was really well known and my dad being someone who was in the public eye meant that privacy was important for the family, so I am very much taking that on board with what I put on Social Media. I try not to show too much of my private life and family life on Social media. So I think that, if you're someone who has an awareness and not wanting to cross the line, know that if you put it out there, it's hard to get it back, so I do try to keep my social media very much about just business and what I am at when out and about.

Interviewer: Did you have any expectations or goals when you started the blog to use the platforms more?

Interviewee: No, it was very much organic, I didn't really know myself, I don't think anyone really knows what to expect. It was just a case of putting information out and seeing what people enjoyed, but I don't live my life by it, I don't care too much about how many followers or likes I get, I actually don't even check my analytics anymore. It's just something I do as a hobby, when you take into account how small Ireland is in comparison to the rest of the World, when you look at influencers and bloggers in the states, they have millions of followers so I wouldn't really compare myself to them, I just do what I enjoy and makes me happy. I think this could be as I am in my thirties now as opposed to my twenties so as you get older these things are less relevant.

Interviewer: How much time do you spend promoting yourself online rather than just using the tool, and how much time would you spend doing it a week?

Interviewee: It depends on the day really, like last year was really busy, I released my book and I was doing a lot of workshops all over the country. So I spent a lot of time promoting that business stuff online, this year has as well, I became an investor in Volkswagen, contractually there is a certain amount I have to do to talk about them online, I'm doing a Renault workshop in April, selling tickets, I really rely on social media for selling tickets. Much more so than appearing, I find it much more effective than radio or TV shows. Again Snapchat is a great tool for helping to send tickets, I was sort of sharing my followers what the prizes and goody bags will be etc. But I'm not actively promoting anything at the moment. It's a quiet month. Although I try not to do too much over self-promotion, as it's really easy for the followers and readers if you're doing that, and I think it dilutes the impact, it's better to show the more personal side of things, without crossing the line.

Interviewer: When did companies start to contact you about doing paid content?

Interviewee: I would say really in the last two to three years, before that it was maybe growing, but it has really exploded in the last couple of years. Companies approach me directly or else they will go through my agency. I think it's reached a peak though, it's hard to know how much more marketing can be done, but in the same way I think blogging will soon be overtaken with just social media. I've even noticed that myself, there's nothing that I can put on my blog that I can't put on social media so I think, why would people click on your blog when they can just as easily go onto your Insta story. I'm even at the point of changing over to a website that isn't a blog, but gives me an opportunity to blog, but not regularly.

Interviewer: Who normally approaches you, in your case it is generally the brand who approaches you?

Interviewee: Yes, definitely I think I would have the nerve to approach a company.

Interviewer: Why do you think they would be more keen to work with yourself over any other bloggers? Do you think it may be due to your main audience or because you're more established and you're well known?

Interviewee: Yes, I've actually said this in interviews before, that I started my career before blogging and Social media, so I seen myself as more known or worked more in the real world, and in the online world it is a side effect to my previous work. This is why my main focus is my career outside of social media. I have so much respect for those who can build their brand online as it is so difficult to do as it just takes the next person to come along and the demographic is smaller. If you can become known across all demographics it can do more for your brand.

Interviewer: What motivated you to start engaging with these companies on sponsored content?

Interviewee: It's a way to build your brand and online following and connect your followers to brands that mean something to you and them. I would be more aware of working with brands that actually mean something to me and I tend to turn down more brands than I work with because some come to me that wouldn't necessarily reflect what I'm about and my followers would see straight through it and that's not something I would want to be associated with.

Interviewer: So you've answered the next questions which was what type of brands would you work with, that reflect what you're about? But moreover what brands would you not work with?

Interviewee: The main ones for example, is a health food that isn't necessarily healthy maybe contains a lot of sugar, preservatives or chemical ingredients. Or health food supplements that aren't the healthiest for you. As I studied nutrition, I am very much about the natural approach, so I wouldn't be working with brands that don't support my approach.

Interviewer: How do you think your followers look at you when they know you're promoting a brand?

Interviewee: I think again it is just about having good morals about what you put out, I think if people think every post you put up is you promoting a brand they will stop following you. I think it's good to have a mix. What I do is, when I promote a brand I will try and put something up the next time away from this about what I am up to or about fashion. I think it's important to be someone who isn't always just about the money or followers, it's good to show you're a real person too. The 80/20 approach is best.

Interviewer: How do you typically respond to products you receive?

Interviewee: I think it's about being really authentic and sharing products I do use myself. I do hold back from sharing what products I use everyday as I don't want people to feel that they have to go out and buy the ones I use or what make-up I use. I don't want people to think they have to go out and spend a fortune on the same products, and I also feel people's skin will respond differently to products, and I have made the mistake of buying what an influencer has suggested and I reacted

differently. I am very much about what works for you and not individually because we all have different interests, I would feel awful if someone went out and bought a foundation and it gave them a rashor didn't react well with them. So for the reason I do hold back on what I share. Unless I know they are going to be 100% for everyone, for example if something is 100% organic I would be able to promote. The ethical side is huge, I do feel I have a responsibility to people and I don't want them buying products they think they have to.

Interviewer: Do you inform your readers when you have been paid to promote a certain product?

Interviewee: Yes, absolutely, that's been a huge issue in the past year. You have to say when it's a promoted post. I think there's a grey area if you've just been given something for free, I think people are more aware of that by now. If they don't say it's sponsored well then they probably have just been sent it. I feel I need to show my gratitude to a company that is very generous to me. I don't to do it on my main instagram page but I do tend to post in on snapchat or other platforms, just to say I'm grateful.

Interviewer: Do you think it is as important as it has been made out to be for Bloggers or influencers do disclose to their readers when they are showing a brand they have been paid for, or do you think it's an over reaction of some people?

Interviewee: I do think it is important because it does go with consumer laws. Advertisers on tv have to show, and I do think this important that everyone should have to show this. If you're reader of blogger you also need to be aware that what you see is not what you always get.

Interviewer: Do you think that paid sponsoreships can or will effect the credibility of the business?

Interviewee: yes, it depends how you look at it, it would make people not be as keen to read blog post or follow a particular person if they feel they are being duped. I'm sure it can, but like everything else it's business and people need to make a living, so it's just following the same patterns

6.2 Interview Consent form, Theme Sheet & Timetable

Interviewee Consent Form

To explore the Motivations, Attitudes & Behaviours of bloggers when commencing brand collaborating.

Mollie Fearnon, MSc Marketing, National College of Ireland.

I, (name of participant) confirm that I understand what this research project entails and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I agree that my participation in this research study is voluntary and that I can withdraw my consent at any time without reason.

I give permission for my interview to be audio recorded, analysed, and agree to the inclusion of quotes to be presented in the researcher's study.

I give permission for the following information to be included in the publication of this study.

Please tick all that apply.

Interviewee signature _____ Date _____

Interviewer signature _____ Date _____

6.3 Theme Sheet

Opening Section

In order to facilitate the busy lifestyle of the bloggers, all interviews are scheduled at convenient time them, interview were all conducted via computer conference call application called Zoom. Before the interview commence, the interviewer explained the purpose of the research study and the objective of the research, including the motivations for blogging, gratifications received from blogging and the behaviour and attitudes towards brands when collaborating. Once both parties are happy to continue, the recording of the interview commences.

Objective 1 - To explore the motivations behind why Irish fashion and lifestyle bloggers create blog content on a regular basis and the gratifications gained from it

Motivations

1. How long have you been blogging for?
2. Why did you start blogging?
3. What do you feel are the benefits of blogging?
4. What do you feel are the challenges of blogging?
5. Did you have any expectations when you started blogging?
6. How much time do you spend blogging?

Objective 2 - To investigate what motivates Irish bloggers to engage in sponsored content or brand collaborations.

Motivations

1. When did companies first start contacting you with regard to providing you with free products/paid sponsorship/collaborations?
2. Who approaches whom? The blogger or the company?
3. Why do you think these companies sought your blog to collaborate with?
4. What motivated you to engage in marketing activities with these companies?
5. What type of brands do you work with?
6. What type of brands would you not work with?
7. How do you think collaborating with brands affects your blogging career?
8. How do you typically tend to respond to the products you've received?

Objective 3 - To explore the bloggers' behaviours and attitudes towards selecting brands to collaborate with

Attitudes & Behaviours

1. Do you inform your readers of when you've been paid to talk about a product or if you have received a product for free? Why/why not?
2. Do you think that it's important for bloggers to disclose to their reader when they've been paid to collaborate with a company or if they've received certain products for free?
3. Do you think that paid sponsorship and collaborations can sometimes affect the credibility of the blogger?

6.4 Interview Timesheet

30-60 minutes	Date	Time	Email Address	Facebook Followers	Instagram Followers	Total
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Grace Mongey	26th July	5:30 PM	grace.mongey@yahoo.ie	70,501	108,000	178,501
Joanne Larby	28th July	8:30 PM	themakeupfairpro@gmail.com	115,517	117,000	232,517
Mrs. Makeup (Michelle)	29th July	9:00 AM	michelleregazzoli@gmail.com	44,617	55,400	100,017
Niamh Cullen	1st Aug	8:30 PM	behindthebraidsblog@gmail.com	7,912	59,300	67,212
Rosanna Davison	3rd Aug	1:00 PM	rosiedavison@gmail.com	54,534	144,000	198,534
Jennifer Rock	5th Aug	2:30 PM	Jennifer@cleanseoffmitt.com	58,374	37,300	95,674