



In Ireland, do Bloggers influence Consumer Behaviour  
from a Millennial perspective.

Jennifer Gordon  
MSc. Marketing  
National College of Ireland

Submitted to National College of Ireland, August 2017.

## **Abstract**

The background of this study elaborates on how consumer behaviour is consistently evolving. The Millennial generation have grown up in a digital era. This ultimately can effect how consumers make their purchase decisions. The aim of this study is to investigate if bloggers have an influence on consumer behaviour within the Irish market from a millennial perspective. Traditional marketing methods have become less effective especially to the millennial target demographic. Due to mass media overload consumers are looking for new methods to gain credible information for their purchase decisions. The main focus areas of this research include advertising, sponsored content, trust and credibility and purchase behaviour. The method of this study was conducted through qualitative methods, by conducting an in-depth focus group. The data collected from the research was disseminated through grounded theory to highlight reoccurring patterns and themes throughout the data. The results gathered from this research gave in depth knowledge on the effectiveness of bloggers within Ireland. The key findings from the research include the increasing interest in video content from bloggers. The millennial participants gave insight into sponsored content and from their perspective bloggers should be more selective in the products that they are promoting. The research concludes with some recommendations from the millennial consumers on what they feel is effective from bloggers for the future.

**Keywords:** Millennial consumers, bloggers, video content, advertising, purchase behaviour, trust, and sponsored content.

## Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

National College of Ireland Research Students Declaration Form  
(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

Name: Jennifer Gordon

Student Number: 15045641

Degree for which thesis is submitted: MSc. Marketing

Material submitted for award

(a) I declare that the work has been composed by myself. (b) I declare that all verbatim extracts contained in the thesis have been distinguished by quotation marks and the sources of information specifically acknowledged. (c) My thesis will be included in electronic format in the College Institutional Repository TRAP (thesis reports and projects) (d) Either \*I declare that no material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award. Or \*I declare that the following material contained in the thesis formed part of a submission for the award of

MSc. Marketing

(State the award and the awarding body and list the material below)

Signature of research student: Jennifer Gordon

Date:

Submission of Thesis to Norma Smurfit Library, National College of Ireland

Student name: Jennifer Gordon Student number: 15045641

School: National College of Ireland Course: MSc Marketing

Degree to be awarded: MSc in Marketing

Title of Thesis: In Ireland, do Bloggers Influence Consumer Behaviour from a Millennial perspective.

One hard bound copy of your thesis will be lodged in the Norma Smurfit Library and will be available for consultation. The electronic copy will be accessible in TRAP (<http://trap.ncirl.ie/>), the National College of Ireland's Institutional Repository. In accordance with normal academic library practice all theses lodged in the National College of Ireland Institutional Repository (TRAP) are made available on open access.

I agree to a hard bound copy of my thesis being available for consultation in the library. I also agree to an electronic copy of my thesis being made publicly available on the National College of Ireland's Institutional Repository TRAP.

Signature of Candidate:

Jennifer Gordon

For completion by the School: The aforementioned thesis was received by \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

This signed form must be appended to all hard bound and electronic copies of your thesis submitted to your school

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. April Hargreaves for all her guidance and support throughout this process of completing this dissertation.

I would also like to thank my family, as none of this would have been possible without them.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Declaration.....	3
Acknowledgements.....	5
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction .....</b>	<b>8</b>
1.1 Background of study .....	8
1.2 Problem Statement.....	9
1.3 Purpose of research.....	10
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review.....</b>	<b>12</b>
2.1 Overview.....	12
2.2 Blogs as a new phenomenon.....	12
2.3 Trust.....	13
2.4 Consumer Behaviour.....	15
2.5 Advertising.....	16
2.6 Further Research.....	18
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology.....</b>	<b>19</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	19
3.2 Research Philosophy.....	19
3.3 Research Design.....	21
3.4 Sampling Overview.....	22
3.5 Research Instruments.....	25
3.5.1 Questionnaire.....	25
3.6 Method of data analysis.....	27
3.7 Ethical considerations.....	27
3.8 Limitations of study.....	28
<b>Chapter 4: Findings.....</b>	<b>29</b>
4.1 Introduction.....	29
4.2 Millennials usage on social media platforms.....	30
4.3 Bloggers influence on purchase behaviour.....	31
4.4 Millennial brand awareness and impact of credibility of bloggers.....	33
4.5 Millennials thoughts on engagement of blogs.....	35

4.6 Millennials viewpoint on sponsored content.....	36
4.7 Millennials perspective on the benefits they receive.....	37
4.8 Connection to the blogging community.....	38
4.9 The popularity of blogging.....	39
4.12 Future predictions of blogs.....	41
<b>Chapter 5: Discussion.....</b>	<b>42</b>
5.1 The bloggers influence on purchase behaviour.....	42
5.2 Millennials brand awareness.....	44
5.3 Trust and Credibility of a blogger.....	45
5.4 Sponsored content.....	47
5.5 Limitations of the study.....	49
<b>Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations.....</b>	<b>50</b>
6.1 Summary of findings.....	50
6.2 Future Recommendations.....	51
6.3 Future research possibilities.....	53
<b>References.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Appendix.....</b>	<b>60</b>
Appendix 1: Consent form.....	60
Appendix 2: Application form.....	61
Appendix 3: Focus group questions.....	63

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the study

Consumer behaviour is fundamental to marketing in order to understand consumers. Dennis et al. (2004) stated that the research for e-consumer behaviour is growing importance in recent years. The research examines the influence of bloggers on the Millennial demographic specifically the ages ranging from eighteen to twenty-four. The Millennial generation was chosen due to this demographic being more digitally focused and advanced compared to previous generations. In recent years, traditional advertising methods have become ineffective with targeting this generation due to mass media overload. Due to the increase of bloggers in recent years electronic word of mouth also known as e-word of mouth has become more prominent. Bloggers sharing their personal thoughts and reviews online, which has a correlation to the influence of their readers. Lee et al. (2006) defined blogs as a public accessible personal journal. Bloggers have emerged as a powerful platform for companies to use as a marketing tool. In the current modern marketplace becoming a market leader is very competitive and companies reaching a younger demographic poses as a challenge for many businesses.

Ebenkamp, (2000) and Merrill, (1999) stated that the millennial generation are market savvy and less receptive to brand images. Businesses need to understand this specific age demographic values in order to target them correctly through marketing methods. Therefore, if applied these messages will resonate with the consumers and essentially make a company's marketing efforts more successful. Bloggers have encouraged consumers to share their experiences of products, brands and services to help other consumers with their decision-making. Word of mouth influences brand image, associations and perceptions that consumers gather about a particular brand, product or service. Ultimately, this can affect future purchases and success of brands within the Irish market. Belk (1988) put forward the theory of the Extended self, which is discussed throughout the study. Bloggers can represent a version of a desired self to consumers. This desire enhances a consumer's purchase experience and attitude to their purchase behaviour



both online and offline. Bolter (1996) reinforced this concept by sharing that the Internet became more visual through virtual worlds consumers are leading to *“new constructions and definitions of the self”* (Bolter, 1996, p. 481). This purpose of this study is reinforced by the lack of previous studies focused on the influence of bloggers on millennial consumers within the Irish marketplace.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

This research aims to examine the influence of bloggers in the Irish Market from a millennial consumers perspective. The problem statement is In Ireland, do bloggers influence consumer behaviour from a millennial perspective. The study will elaborate on the effectiveness of bloggers as a marketing tactic and how millennial consumers respond to these efforts. The main focus of the research emphasized what method of research should be conducted. The chosen method of data collection was qualitative by conducting a focus group on eight millennial participants. The millennial consumers delved into topics such as trust, credibility, brand awareness, engagement, and purchase behaviour. The primary findings emphasized these topics reinforcing the purpose of the research. The evidence provided supports the hypothesis that bloggers affect the consumer behaviour of the millennial generation. There is a gap in the literature, which showcases that some previous studies are focused on a bloggers perspective. This study aims fill the gap in research focusing on blog readers of the millennial consumers and to investigate the effectiveness of bloggers from this demographics perspective due to their digital nature.

### **1.3 Purpose of the research**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between bloggers and consumer behaviour. Previous literature emphasizes that there is a limited amount of studies provided on blog readers within Ireland. Thus, this research will contribute to the literature gap. This reinforces the need for further exploration. The research is worthy of study due to the increase of bloggers within Ireland and the lack of studies to highlight their benefits to a marketing strategy for businesses. The theory of the extended self by Belk (1988) provided a useful account for the connection that millennial consumers have towards bloggers. Recently, there is a renewed interest within the marketing industry to investigate if bloggers are beneficial as a marketing tool for companies. It is evident that research has not been consistent in this area and needs further development. This study further examines the relationship between the millennial consumer and bloggers while investigating the different ways bloggers affect their consumer behaviour.

The research explores if traditional marketing methods are still relatable and effective for this demographic and highlights the key insights into beneficial marketing tactics. The study provides evidence into how bloggers can assist and reinforce a brand's image, associations and equity within a marketplace. The advantages that have been highlighted within this research showcase the benefits that a business can receive from utilising bloggers within their marketing campaigns. Consumers seek product knowledge through reviews and the influence of online word of mouth is more powerful in recent years due to consumers not having much disposable income. Bloggers help consumers complete their research when purchasing products or services. The information posted can help narrow down the brands that a consumer may consider in their evoked set. If a brand is resonated in a customer's evoked set half of the challenge is achieved, this is when marketing and brand awareness play a large role in purchase behaviour. Thus, reviews from influencers correlate to millennial consumers purchase behaviour as this generation grew up in a digital era. Millennial consumers are extremely influenced by their peers and online influencers due to social acceptance. Millennial consumers want to be constantly updated with the newest product

on the market. As marketing and advertising is constantly evolving it is essential for companies to realise what is the current trend and to move with the trend. Bloggers have been a recent trend to the Irish market that has become successful. Few companies have adapted to this trend and incorporated influencers into their strategies. This strategy is seen to be successful abroad and with the rise of influencers within Ireland this research aims to prove that bloggers are effective within the Irish marketplace.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Overview

To date, most studies in this area of marketing research have only focused on the bloggers perspective of the industry rather than a consumer's viewpoint. Herring et al. (2004) defined a blog as a webpage that is frequently updated and arranged in reverse chronology. Interestingly, the Technocratic Media 2013 Digital Influence Report stated that blogs came third in ranking closely followed by retail and brand sites for when consumers plan to make a purchase these were the sources they used to gather information.

To investigate the influence of bloggers the literature is mainly focused on the area of consumer behaviour in general. Blogs have become a very popular form of social media among consumers in recent years as a form of user generated content. McQuarrie et al. (2013) put forward the theory that blogs allow normal consumers to become influencers and gather an audience to which they can maintain loyal relationships. Therefore, companies have started to use blogs as a form of promotion since this user-generated content is viewed as credible. Previous research such as Kelly et al. (2010) indicates that young consumers rely on online product recommendations for their purchases rather than traditional marketing methods. There is limited secondary data available on the influence of blogs and bloggers as a promotional tactic.

### 2.2 Blogs as a new phenomenon

Blogs have become a new information source for consumer decision-making. This source of information has been described as a "*new sphere of communication*" combining online communities with marketers (Palmer and Koenig-Lewis, 2009, p. 611). There has been a huge increase in bloggers who share their experiences with brands and products by posting relatable content. Furthermore, companies that wish to engage bloggers into their marketing strategies receive positive feedback such as sales increase. This correlates to a blogger being a method of promotion through spreading positive word of mouth. Hsu and Lin (2008) shared that bloggers can draw attention to their site, which participates in e-word of mouth. Similarly, Magnini

(2011) suggested blogs have become popular with firms is due to reader visits and numbers as well as the influence these bloggers can have on their loyal readers. Presumably, consumers feel that blogs are a more authentic way of collecting product information rather than traditional advertising. Brands use bloggers to attach a personality to the company. Many firms find it difficult to reach a younger demographic such as 18-24 year old demographic with traditional marketing methods.

Therefore, many companies started using bloggers as a promotion method to reach these younger audiences. Lu and Lee (2010) stated that the difference in age demographic, quality of the blog and social influence affect blog stickiness. This demonstrated that gender, usage, student status and blog experience reflected blog stickiness. Blog stickiness refers to engagement on a blog post by readers. Wright, Claiborne and Sirgy (1992) presented that consumer behaviour emphasizes a symbolic meaning as it is affiliated with idealized people. This relates to Belk's (1988) philosophy as consumer behaviour links to self-identity and personal values. Consumption can perform a role as an expression of a personal identity.

### **2.3 Trust**

Consumers trust bloggers for genuine product reviews and recommendations. However, according to the literature by Wehmier and Raaz, (2012) the two theorists stated that bloggers should be encouraged to disclose what product mentions are sponsored to avoid the risk of misleading their audience and damaging the reputation that they have built. Social relationships have always been the forefront of blogs. Due to these interpersonal relationships that blogs have gained over time the development in their relationship has caused their global popularity. If bloggers want to develop strong relationships with their readers, a blogger must advertise or state that a product mentioned to a paid promotion from a company or have an affiliated link. Furthermore, Doney and Cannon (1997) described trust as the credibility perceived by consumers and reliability. This statement describing trust is demonstrating the trust of consumers in an online buying situation. Perceived trust and reducing risk along with cognitive dissonance has become a key factor for influencing

consumers in recent years. Cognitive dissonance is when a consumer experiences conflicting feelings towards a purchase they have made such as a high involvement purchase. To elaborate, Solomon et al. (2006) Lake (2009) Telci (2011) and Lancaster and Massingham (2011) shared that cognitive dissonance is a concept that refers to a consumers post purchase. Following a purchase, consumers can experience dissatisfaction when comparing their expectations to the actual product performance. Lake (2009) stated that intense cognitive dissonance could lead to buyer's remorse and the customer becoming unsatisfied with their purchase.

On the other hand, Fukuyama (2001) viewed trust differently as the expectation of honest cooperative behaviour based on common values on a regular basis. The characteristics of bloggers are the qualities of the bloggers that is perceived by blog readers to assure them that the blogger can satisfy their topic needs. Xia and Bechwati (2008) stated that online message such as e-word of mouth becomes a source of information as it can reflect the trustworthiness of a blogger. Colquitt et al. (2007) stated that consumers make a judgement on a blogger's benevolence as it showcases their intentions for the readers. Online reviews have an effect on future consumers whether the reviews are positive or negative. Lee et al. (2008) put forward that negative reviews have a correlation to negative consumer product or brand attitude, which is known as the conformity effect. Reviews reflect brand attitude and associations, which is essential for a good business. Hence, bloggers can create good associations and brand attitude for a brand.

Another aspect of consumer behaviour literature that relates to the trustworthiness of bloggers is Aaker (1997) 'Dimensions of Brand Personality'. Brand personality is described as "*the set of human characteristics associated with a brand*" (Aaker,1997, p.347). Bloggers can act as a personification for a brand as the characteristics can translate to a brand, which is seen a lot in the fashion industry as bloggers are used to showcase new collections from clothing brands. McCracken (1989) maintains this concept as this theorist suggested that the personality traits of the people associated to the brand are shifted to the brand. In the creation of trust millennial consumers can attach a

personality to a brand making the brand become easily categorized and measured for the consumer.

## **2.4 Consumer Behaviour**

To further emphasize the advantages of bloggers Nardi et al. (2004) put forward that the power of communication is dependent on both the blog and the readers, since blogs are co-created providing rich content as well as loyal readers interacting by adding comments on a regular basis. Therefore, Lin and Sun (2009) suggested that customer's e-satisfaction is related to higher e-loyalty. User-generated content has quickly become the newest trend in today's modern marketing technique. Blogs have become influential to young adults as well as having the ability to construct attitudes and beliefs about a product or brand.

Therefore, a blogger who has a large number of loyal readers tend to be more accepting of any information or reviews posted by the blogger. This can be due to the perceptions the consumer has on a blogger to elaborate the blogger can be seen as relatable. This can be linked back to Belk's theory (1988) of the Self Concept, which consists of the ideal self and actual self. The ideal self is the perception of how consumers want to be compared to their actual real self. Belk's theory discusses how products have a symbolic meaning to one's self-image. Similarly, Schau and Gilly (2003) put forward the opinion that a connection between a consumer and a brand derives from self-image congruity. Consumers choose products based on the identity that these products give to them. Thus, Solomon (2010) stated that bloggers have the capability to manage their digital identity, as this creates a new version of the extended self.

In addition, it can be argued that bloggers create their own personal brand to which consumers or readers relate their own self-image with the image that the blogger presents. Accordingly, Sirgy et al. (2006) put forward that the self-concept has a vital impact on consumer's decision-making process as well as product choices. Fernandez, (2009) similarly stated that generation Y customers tend to make purchasing decisions often based on the influence

and opinions of others. Blogging is the new method of gathering information compared to older traditional consumer decision-making process. In addition, Nelson (2010) shared that comments posted online play a large role in a customer's decision-making process. Therefore, companies need to learn how to utilize any mentions of the brand online. Consumers have started to use blogs for information purposes on products and services because as consumers they are irritated by the commonly used mass media techniques and traditional methods are perceived as less trustworthy. Hence, to justify this Porter and Golan (2006) stated that 65% of customers are overwhelmed by the amount of advertisements they receive. In addition, Hann et al. (2008) reinforced this statement by commenting due to consumers being overwhelmed with advertisements they try to avoid them. Interestingly, a theory was put forward highlighting that if a new product launch campaign starts by generating exciting word of mouth it creates more awareness than traditional advertising methods. Verhoef, Nelsin and Vroomen (2007) highlighted the marketing concept of 'research shopping' this concept is gathering information from one source such as online sources and purchasing in another. Consumers research high involvement purchases before committing to a purchase. To elaborate, bloggers aid consumers in their search for the perfect brand or product to suit their needs.

## **2.5 Advertising**

In the era of co-creation, the shift of power is moving from brands to consumers, companies are consistently innovating new ways to meet customer's needs. Interestingly, Sheth et al. (2000) predicted this shift in power a decade ago and this shift is now evident in the modern marketplace. Over recent years companies are trying to reach younger demographic through new engaging experiences to promote products. In today's competitive environment blogging has been one way to achieve this. Therefore, Sinha (2011) stated that blogging is turning into an organizational tool for brand propagation and because of blogs ability to interact with customers a large amount of companies have launched corporate blogs to speak to their target audience and try to improve the relationship with their readers who are often their customers. Companies need to choose the right



blogger to promote their product based on the bloggers audience. However, there is a disadvantage with using bloggers as a marketing tool because if the blogger does not like the product in review they can spread negative word of mouth. This bad publicity can affect all the loyal readers' perceptions and future purchases towards that brand. In contrast, Wolin et al. (2002) stated that users who have positive outlook of online advertising tend to have a better attitude to online reviews.

Similarly, blogging became more accessible to all members of the general public enabling it to be persuasive. Therefore, as discussed companies will be affected by the consequences of what is being discussed about the brand. It can be argued that bloggers are often described as market mavens as Goldsmith et al. (2003) put forward that these are individuals who consider themselves as an expert in that particular industry of the marketplace. Hence, these market mavens are craving to share their knowledge and opinions with the online world. On the other hand, Cotte et al. (2006) argued that consumers also gain utilitarian benefits from blogs such as time saving qualities and effort. Nevertheless, an audience is usually sceptical about the credibility of advertisements or traditional methods. This can be due to mass media communication methods bombarding customers on a daily basis. However, bloggers are more centred on word of mouth or also known as electronic word of mouth being perceived as more credible since the blogger or as a consumer of the brand is sharing their experience of a product or service. Accordingly, Wang (2012) stated that if a blogger is an expert in an industry for example the beauty industry, consumers are more likely to trust the information provided on the blog because since the blogger has previously worked or currently works in the industry the information is seen as a credible source. However, this also ties into consumer behaviour theory of product involvement. If a consumer has high involvement in a product the customer will conduct lots of research and is more interested and receptive to any information provided.

Thus, if a consumer has low involvement with a product they tend to do little research. These products usually consist of low cost goods whereas high

involvement generally means the product is of value in price or is being purchased for a specific reason to the customer. Lin and Huang (2006) interestingly found that visual photographic information online draws the consumer's attention and inspire them to respond to a call to action. In addition visual content should be posted along with the written information to enhance the readers experience such as their comprehensiveness of the topic. These experiences such as product related content "*affect the cognitive processes that occur before an overt behavioural response*". (Brucks, 1985, p.1) These studies clearly indicate the relationship between bloggers and consumer behaviour.

## **2.6 Further Research**

The present research explores, for the first time the effects of bloggers on consumer behaviour. The gaps within this research topic that I would wish to highlight are the advantages for companies using bloggers as a marketing tool. Thus, there is a lot of research previously done on how bloggers and social media have changed the game in terms of marketing. However, there hasn't been a lot of research done on how bloggers in particular influence consumer behaviour as well as consumer purchases. The ability bloggers have to influence is connected to Russell Belk's Theory (1988) of the Extended Self. There is a lack of previous research emphasizing the need for further investigation. In order for companies to learn how to adapt to the consistent changing marketing environment there needs to be an urge or incentive for marketers to do so. Hence, if companies knew how much bloggers could influence their target demographic especially the younger generation, the business could benefit from using this resource. The aim is to meet the boundaries of traditional marketing with the new trend of bloggers. To conclude, the research is focused and contains relevant up to date material. There is a gap into some aspects of the research topic. Thus, this suffices in deeming the research topic worthy of study since there are more aspects that justify further exploration.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The methodology chapter will elaborate in depth on the methods that were utilized to gather the information for this study. This chapter will present the rationale for the method chosen. A range of topics will be discussed in this chapter including the research philosophy, theoretical reasoning for chosen methods, and an overview of the research design and a full description of the sample that was targeted for this study. Other areas of discussion include the research instrument, data analysis. Lastly, any ethical considerations and limitations of the methods used are discussed. The main objective of this study is to answer the research question, which states in Ireland, do bloggers influence consumer behaviour from a millennial perspective.

### **3.2 Research Philosophy**

The first section of this chapter will examine research philosophy. Bryman and Bell (2011) defined theories as 'observed realities'. To elaborate, the two theorists state that what researchers see and accept can be abstract or practical, this portrays the increasing importance of the correlation between research and theory and cannot be undermined. This study undertakes the challenge to discover the reason why and how a phenomenon exists but also to establish its importance in today's modern marketplace. Multiple scholars such as Walshaw, (2012) stated that the use of theory is an additional instrument to interpret data beyond a level of description. Also, Matthews and Ross (2010) elaborated that the main objective is to uncover a causal relationship. This is also supported by Quinlan (2011) who reinforced that research is about uncovering new knowledge that is developed on a basis of judgements of what is known and how it is known. The research philosophy is dependent on a rational mind set.

A common method of looking at research philosophy is to study the research onion, which was created by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007) (Figure 3.1). The four main aspects include pragmatism, positivism, realism and

interpretivism. It is important to refer to the research question, as some methods can be better than others to answer a research question. It was stated “*theory is of the most fundamental importance to research*” (Quinlan, 2011 p.108). Therefore, there are two aspects of research philosophy these include ontology and epistemology. Firstly, ontology is the knowledge that is created by social and contextual understanding. These understandings are then either seen as objective or subjective. Thus, epistemology is the other forms of knowledge of reality, which details that this outlook on research is more focused on feelings rather than hard facts.

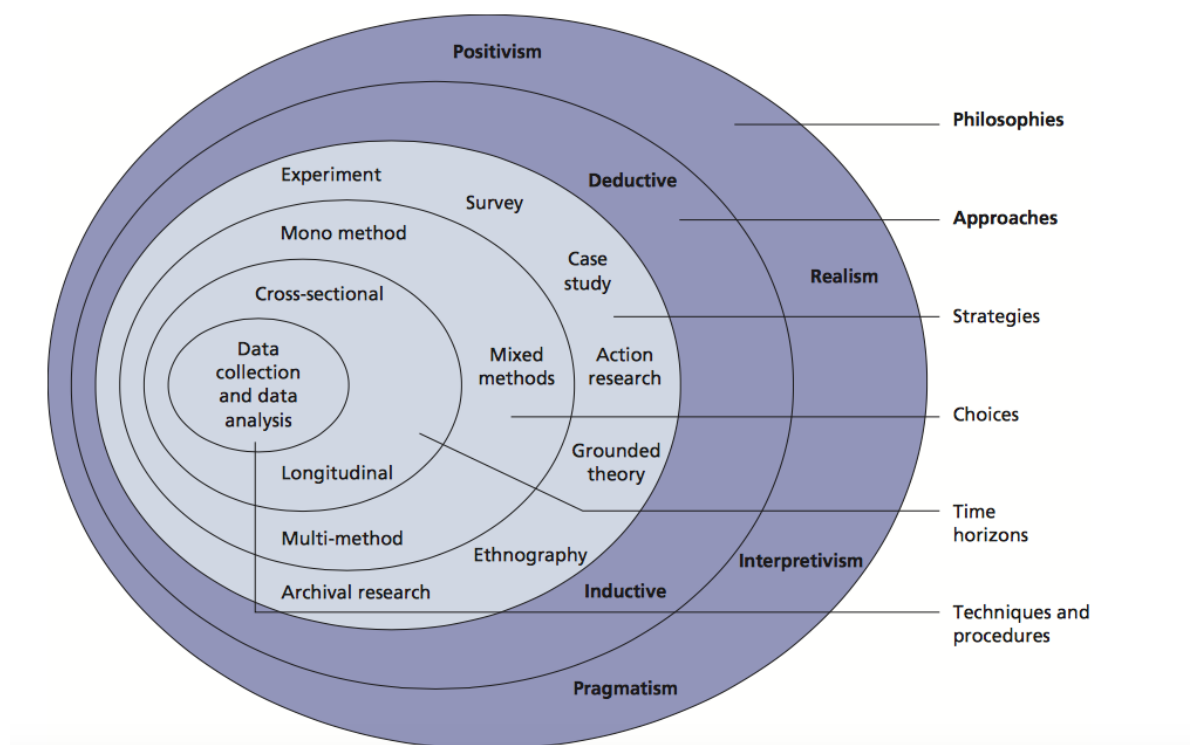


Figure 1: The research ‘onion’

Source: Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2008).

Previous research has established that objectivism is the social phenomena and the meanings that the phenomenon has an existence. However, positivism is that the phenomena and knowledge can be measured and observed by the senses. In contrast, subjectivism is the social phenomena and the meanings being constantly revised. However, qualitative research adopts interpretivism, which is the reality that is constructed through the meanings that are created by the general public.

According to Edmondson and McManus (2007) stated that any approach to research whether it is qualitative or quantitative is dependent on the research and the questions or objectives that arise from the study being conducted. Furthermore, the research is reliant on the structure or the design of the study. Thus, Walshaw (2012) had a similar viewpoint that the collection of data and the input of theory within research is an annular process. According to previous research such as Hunt (1994), Hanson and Grimmer, (2007) notably stated that there was an increased interest in constructivism, relativism, subjectivism and interpretive research in order to discover phenomena within different aspects of marketing and consumer behaviour. In contrast, according to Hanson and Grimmer (2007) there was a shift in using mixed methods rather than purely qualitative or quantitative. This research will adopt a positivism approach as existing theory was used to create a hypothesis. Thus, the research design that was deemed appropriate for the study is discussed in the next section of this chapter.

### **3.3 Research Design**

Many previous researchers have used qualitative research to measure marketing phenomena's. Qualitative research was deemed appropriate for this study, as the research needed was exploratory. Qualitative research is "*diagnostic exploratory nature*" (De Ruyter and Scholl, 1998, p.8) Therefore, it is essentially invaluable in the evolution of developing new concepts within marketing theory and practice. Exploratory research originally begins more broad but as the research progresses the key focus of the study becomes more defined. The rationale for using qualitative include exploration of a new phenomenon, identification when little previous research has been conducted on this phenomenon, description of various dimensions or the importance of the phenomenon and explanation of how and why the phenomenon exists.

Therefore, Kvale (1996) discussed the certain qualities that a qualitative researcher should possess in order for successful data collection. These qualities include subject knowledge on the study without attempting to influence his or her view. Another quality is being structured, which includes

introducing the purpose of the study and maintaining the focus of the study throughout the data collection process. Being a clear communicator posing short, simple and clear questions is also extremely important. The research should also be unobtrusive and sensitive to engage in active listening. Openness is crucial to highlight which aspects of the interview topic is important for the participant. Another important quality is to be critical and to test reliability and validity of the participant's statements. Interpretation of the data to extend the meaning of the interviewee's statements is vital for successful data collection.

Qualitative research would be the best approach as the research would discover participant's meanings and uncover the relationships between the correlation of bloggers and millennial consumer behaviour. The aim was to build up a rapport with participants. The setting for qualitative research is in a natural setting and is unstructured. There are many strengths of qualitative research such as describing the phenomenon, the research is dynamic, flexible and gathers more in-depth knowledge. The main objective is to capture participant's experiences and to understand the topic of discussion from their perspective. Hence, through observation of participant's behaviours and interactions helped in conjunction with the discussion, which provided rich descriptions of the topic explored.

### **3.4 Sampling Overview**

The first step in the research process was to identify the sample. This was a time consuming process to ensure that the sample reflected the study and provided a deeper understanding of the subject. A sample provides a study with unknown information about a population. The defined targeted population for this study would consist of eighteen to twenty-four year old students. The reason for this chosen demographic is due to accessibility of this specific target. It is widely accepted that this demographic is more influenced by social media for their purchase decisions. Thus, bloggers have the potential to be more relevant to this age group over others due to their digital advancement. Howe and Strauss (2000) put forward that what made the millennial

demographic exceptional is mainly how technology affected the millennial generation is over others.

The sample was a purposive sample in order to meet specific criteria. A purposive sampling is a form of non-probability sampling with the aim to gather respondents in a strategic manner ensuring that the sample is relevant to the research question. Thus, the criteria emphasised the shared characteristics that the participants needed to be a part of the study. This criteria included that all participants must be within the millennial age group as detailed, must be a student and have an interest in bloggers of any kind. This sample was deemed appropriate for the study because the millennial generation is the most influenced by social media that would have a correlation to the generation's consumer behaviour.

Consent plays a critical role in the maintenance on ethics throughout the study. A consent form was sent when recruiting respondents for the study detailing all the requirements and necessary information that any participant would need to be informed on. The document was sent to student database within the college and also by a snowball effect. Farnsworth and Boon (2010) stated that group dynamics are always present in a group of strangers or acquaintances. Barbour and Kitzinger (1999) put forward that it is up to the researcher to encourage and maintain group interaction to ensure successful research is being gathered. However, the sampling for this study falls into the category of convenience sampling because the researcher had access to the sample. Students are of interest because this demographic is heavily influenced with social media. This has a causal relationship with their purchases. Previous research has discovered that endorsements were effective within marketing. Keller (2013) put forward that perceptions such as celebrity endorsements often transfer to the evaluation and feelings of the person to the endorsed brand.

The backgrounds of the participants was diverse, although the respondents had similar characteristics such as all being students and within the millennial age group. The first participant was male, aged twenty-two. This participant

was studying business and finished his undergraduate degree this year and is currently working full time. The second participant was male aged twenty-one also finishing his undergraduate degree in marketing this year. Both of these participants had a personal interest in fitness bloggers. The third participant was female, aged twenty-two, full time student studying science. This participant was a daily social media user and read blogs daily. The fourth participant was female, aged twenty. This participant is a student studying HR and works part time in retail. This participant was particularly interested in fashion bloggers as this topic correlated to her work life. The fifth respondent was female, aged twenty three, works part time and is completing a undergraduate degree in digital marketing. This participant was interested in blogging as her hobbies include horse riding. The sixth participant was female, aged twenty-two. This interviewee is a full time nursing student and works part time. This respondent was specifically interested in bloggers for her profession. The seventh participant was male, aged twenty. This participant is a full time culinary student. This respondent uses blogs to inspire ideas for college assignments and to learn new techniques. The final respondent was male, twenty-two studying an MSc in Finance part time and is working in the finance sector. This participant was not interested in blogs on a regular basis but used blogs to help make purchase decisions or for travel purposes. Refer to table X in chapter four for further information on participants.

Thus, the sample size was determined taking into consideration the variables such as the risk of no shows. To avoid this problem the recommended solution is to invite more than the respondents needed to conduct a focus group to avoid no shows on the day of conducting the research. However, even though qualitative research methods does not reach the same magnitude of people as quantitative research can. Therefore, it is recognised that the sample is not representative of the thoughts and opinions of the whole millennial generation as the sample is small in comparison to quantitative data. The research studied only a strata of the population but that population provided enough invaluable and in depth knowledge to conduct the study due to time constraints.



### **3.5 Research Instruments**

The research instrument that the researcher chose for this study was to conduct a focus group. A focus group is defined as *“a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment upon, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research”* (Gibbs, 1997 p.1)

Focus groups are a version of a group interview. The interview can have several participants typically between seven to ten participants and a moderator. However, for the purpose of this study the researcher recruited eight participants and performed the moderator role. Therefore, once the chosen method for data collection for the study was decided the process for formulating the questions began. The chosen questions would then be used for the focus group.

#### *3.5.1 Questionnaire*

The questions used for the data collection performed the role as a guideline for the focus group to uncover the respondent's true thoughts and opinions on the research topic. The questions used were developed from previous academic studies such as the Academy of Marketing Studies Journal and other academic sources to ensure, reliability and validity. However, two questions were created to put forward a particular topic within the research. This was completed because no previous questionnaire has been formulated for this specific research topic. To ensure reliability two pilot tests were conducted on five individuals. The results from the first pilot test revealed that two questions were causing confusion. Hence, the problematic questions were reworded to suit this specific study. The second pilot test was conducted on the same individuals to ensure that the questions were comprehensible and easy to understand. Following the pilot tests the questions were then finalised and used on the day of the data collection. Each question was picked specifically for this study to guarantee the right information was being gathered from the respondents.

Furthermore, focus groups create a discussion of a specific topic in a more informal conversational tone. The interaction between group members including body language and facial expressions was included in the analysis process. Thus, there are many benefits of conducting focus groups as it can save time and money. However, focus groups can be difficult to organise, as the researchers should over recruit in anticipation for the risk of no shows. However, Zikmund (1997) defined the benefits of focus groups as the '10 Ss'. The advantages included synergy, snowballing, serendipity, stimulation, security, spontaneity, specialisation, speed and scrutiny. Furthermore, Gibbs (1997) suggested adding another aspect to the benefits by adding saliency. To elaborate, saliency in focus groups enables the researcher to extract why a particular phenomenon is salient. Therefore, amongst these benefits the researcher also needs to perform the role as moderator to ensure an insightful and true representation and interpretation of the data collected. Hence, the group synergy aspect is a major benefit as participants of the focus group can interact with each other views, opinions and contrast and challenge each other's points. This can enable the data collected to uncover a wider range of knowledge of the research topic. Gubruim and Holstein, (2001) stated that there are many different forms of interview methods in order to utilise the gathering of insights into a phenomenon such as focus groups and in-depth interviewing.

Thus, for the purpose of this study eight participants were recruited to participate in a focus group, which took place on the 15<sup>th</sup> of April 2017. The participant's met the necessary criteria as outlined previously and there was an equal male and female ratio in order discover both gender viewpoints equally. The data was recorded on a digital audio recorder, which recorded for one hour and the data was transcribed to highlight the reoccurring themes and patters within the raw data. The focus group began by each respondent filling out the consent form and introducing themselves to the group to ease any nerves that the participants may have had. Following this the focus group began by introducing the study and an explanation of the research. A primary concern was ensuring the participants that their responses are anonymous and that at any given point the respondents could withdraw consent.

Thus, anonymity has provided higher response rates and more valid information as respondents become more open throughout the study.

### **3.6 Method of Data analysis**

The method used for the data analysis for this research is thematic analysis. One form of thematic analysis includes grounded theory. Grounded theory is "*the discovery of theory from data*" (Glaser and Strauss, 1976, p.1). Thematic analysis focuses mainly on key words and themes that arise from the raw data. Thus, the researcher is able to discover patterns from the data and group key themes that emerge. Hence, these themes are gathered from the participant's feelings and opinions from a consumer perspective. These themes are then obtained from the analysis and grouped together. The most frequent or commonly occurred theme or concept will be used to answer the research question. It's important to establish the effort researchers must go through to compress the in depth data that is gathered through qualitative methods into "*illustrative, descriptive, explanatory and theory inducing text*" (Black, 2006 p. 361). Over many years researchers have tried to undermine the effectiveness and reliability of qualitative research. However, De Ruyter and Scholl (1998) stated that the reliability of qualitative research could be assured by the systematic operation at the researcher encounters at the research design stage of the research process.

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

One of the main obstacles within any research is to follow ethical guidelines. Due to the nature of the study the main ethical consideration was anonymity. No other major ethical issues occurred. As the research topic involved question on consumer behaviour and purchase patters each individual participant was reassured that their participation within the study would be entirely anonymous and the respondents were free to withdraw consent at any stage. All respondents were comfortable with sharing his or her personal opinions and thoughts on the research topic. All participants was aware of the purpose of the study and that their permission would enable any quotes and statements that the respondents made to be used within the study. This

encouraged confidence and openness within the data collection process, as there is an element of trust established.

Therefore, all respondents were required to complete a consent form, which detailed all the necessary information that the participants needed to be aware of. Each respondent was aware of the voice recording and was ensured that no other person would have access to the recording and that the recording would be deleted once the study has been completed. A reasonable approach to avoid any ethical considerations was to ensure complete confidentiality and anonymity for all participants.

### **3.8 Limitations of the study**

The research topic is a relatively new phenomenon and has really only seen significance in the market over the past five years. No prior research was developed had been carried out in Ireland on how the blogging community affects consumer behaviour. Due to the time frame that was assigned to this dissertation a longitudinal study was not feasible but a cross sectional study was efficient. The questionnaire that was used for the study had not been validated as a whole as the questions were individually chosen from multiple academic sources.

## Chapter 4: Findings

### 4.1 Introduction

The findings chapter presents the key results from the focus group, which was carried out on eight participants. The respondents provided a wide range of information, which is discussed under the themes that were highlighted from the data gathered. The participants can be seen broken down into the necessary categories in table X.

Table X: Breakdown of participants.

Participants	Gender	Age	Occupation	Interest in bloggers
Participant 1	Male	22	Working full-time. Finished undergraduate degree in Business.	Yes, Fitness bloggers.
Participant 2	Male	21	Undergraduate Student	Yes, specifically fitness bloggers
Participant 3	Female	22	Science undergraduate Student	Yes, daily user
Participant 4	Female	20	HR student, works part time in retail	Yes, fashion bloggers
Participant 5	Female	23	Digital marketing undergraduate student	Yes, horse riding blogs.

Participant 6	Female	22	Nursing student, Working part time	Yes, medical blogs.
Participant 7	Male	20	Culinary student	Yes, culinary blogs to inspire new ideas.
Participant 8	Male	22	MSc Finance student part time	Not regularly only for purchases

#### **4.2 Millennial's usage on social media platforms**

The participants began the data collection process by discussing what platforms they used most often and why. This topic began the flow of the conversation, which led to the main topic of bloggers. This information narrowed down what social media platforms would be the most influential in terms of bloggers for this generation. The platform that kept reoccurring within the data was the popular social media platform Instagram. The data gathered revealed that the main topics of the blogs that are generally read by this age demographic include beauty, fitness related blogs, work related and niche hobbies such as one participant mentioned horse riding. However, as the focus group progressed the respondents developed this concept further by elaborating on the reasons why Instagram was their most used platform. Participant two stated the following opinion sharing why social media was a necessity within their daily lives.

*“Em ... well to really keep in the know and updated on things, promotions and that kind of stuff.”*

Thus, the participants unveiled that Instagram allowed them to keep updated with bloggers. It was uncovered that bloggers post promotional codes on this social media platform, which encouraged the participants to follow their preferred bloggers loyally. The participants shared that keeping updated with their preferred bloggers made them feel updated with social media.

### **4.3 Bloggers Influence on purchase behaviour**

The next section of the study focused more on the millennial generation's purchase behaviour. One theme that was prominent from the data collected was awareness, which will be discussed in more detail in the next section of the chapter. All of the opinions and thoughts that were shared by the respondents highlighted that bloggers created brand awareness for the millennial age group. The data collected emphasised on how bloggers demonstrate brand awareness for their audiences and the participants drew attention on some of the preferred methods. Participant three shared this insightful quote:

*“I would use it a lot cause I work in retail like if I see something someone is wearing in the store that I work in that doesn't look nice on the hanger but if I see it on a blogger on Instagram, I am definitely going to buy it and it always sells out. If any blogger wears something it is guaranteed to sell out”.*

Further commenting on purchase behaviour interviewee two reinforced this statement by commenting the following...

*“ Bloggers like all the brands that I would never of heard of that they would tag them. I would then go follow that page and then buy their stuff from that but I would never of known that brand other than the blogger. The links and tag help me find other brands.”*

Thus, the results shared emphasised that bloggers create brand awareness through sharing content online. Hence, followers of these bloggers are exposed to a lot more brands and companies that they previously were not

aware of. This enables brands to first establish awareness then encourage this audience to purchase from the brand that has been exposed.

Furthermore, this resonates with the millennial generation not just with high involvement purchases but low involvement purchases as well such as the food and beverage industry. Participant six gave insight into their purchase behaviour stating the following:

*“Even like coffee shops if you see someone on social media with a coffee in their hand like you wouldn’t even know that coffee shop was open which makes you more inclined to go there. Anything like new restaurants would influence me to go there.”*

The respondents highlighted that when bloggers share their location through the maps feature on social media this age demographic found that type of information helpful. One respondent shared that through the influence and awareness that bloggers have established in the Irish market it has encouraged consumers to purchase products further abroad than they would have even considered before. Participant three discussed this aspect of behaviour, which indicated the potential bloggers have to not only promote brands in Ireland but across the world.

*“Yeah like even stuff in the clothes shops in Australia and now I see loads of like bloggers wearing stuff from Australia so it makes you buy even further than you thought to even buy like even the same with American brands.”*

Respondent eight shared a different insight, this emphasizes the concept of research shopping also known as show rooming, which is discussed a lot in marketing literature specifically.

*“ I would want to see product in person I rarely buy expensive stuff online but if a blogger tagged them I might not buy that actual product but I would look at the brand.”*



One concern expressed by participant eight was regarding high involvement purchases such as expensive products or technology products. These categories are not often purchased online. However, these types of purchases encourage consumers to avail of their own research on the product before purchasing. Thus, as the respondent stated above bloggers help consumers in their research and can narrow down the product to specific brands, which will be discussed in the next section.

#### **4.4 Millennial brand awareness and impact of credibility of bloggers**

This aspect is concentrated on brand choices and if bloggers affect the brand choices for millennial. A common view amongst the interviewees was that as consumers follow their preferred bloggers religiously their opinions subconsciously affect the decisions consumers make. The respondents highlighted throughout the focus group how bloggers are an easy way for smaller businesses within Ireland to promote their products as can be seen below. Participant seven discussed how from a company's perspective that availing of bloggers is influential.

*"It's easy marketing for a brand to use a well known blogger"*

However, participant seven reinforced this concept further by stated that the subconscious influence that this type of advertising achieves is due to the fact that even if a consumer does not purchase the product marketed, the awareness of the brand has been accomplished and can be accessed for a future purchase.

*"Regardless the brand receives a benefit from you seeing that post. If you buy it or not they still made an impact and are inside your head."*

Therefore, as the theme occurred throughout the focus group the interviewees elaborated on their thoughts further. The respondents described how bloggers came across to them as a consumer themselves. Each participant shared a different opinion on this topic. However, the opinions were summarised

through participant's one statement as this response that stood out within the data, the statement is shown below.

*“Well yeah cause you would value their opinion cause essentially they come across as an everyday person so if they think its good well then that’s like a good review or an expert review.”*

A recurrent theme that emerged from the data collected was trust. The researcher was eager to discover how consumers of the millennial generation determined the trustworthiness of a blogger and the credibility. This question seemed to be difficult for the respondents to answer but after debating a few ideas the general consensus was that if bloggers were selective on what they were promoting that it would generate more impact to the audience. A contrast of this aspect included for a blogger to avoid creating a “fake reality” as one respondent described it. To clarify, the respondent was stating that the blogger must fit the image of the product that they are promoting as it can become ineffective and in genuine. Participant eight and participant three stated their viewpoint on the subject.

*“Like if the blogger is promoting gym products but doesn’t fit that image it wouldn’t make sense.”*

*“I think if they actually bought it and reviewed it rather than it being sent to them would be more credible”*

To summarise, this aspect of the study concluded that these bloggers within the Irish market easily influence consumers who follow bloggers. Therefore, availing of bloggers as a promotional method is extremely helpful and beneficial for smaller businesses that are finding it difficult to establish their place within the marketplace. This can be reflected through participant three who discussed that more established brands could be affected by the publicity that bloggers can offer smaller brands. Participant's three statement shared how bloggers can influence low involvement purchases and decisions in their daily life.

*“I never go to a Starbucks now anymore I only go to new places I’ve found now through influencers”.*

To conclude this section of the data the results clearly provide evidence that bloggers do have an influence on millennial consumers within an Irish market but the challenge is for bloggers to earn the trust of these millennial consumers given that bloggers can become a huge phenomenon over the last five years.

#### **4.5 Millennial’s thoughts on engagement with bloggers**

This aspect of the study is directed to engagement. All respondents shared that each individual would spend a lot of time reading and engaging with bloggers. All participants stated throughout the focus group that likes and tagging their friends to read blog posts was part of their daily lives in terms of social media interaction. Participant three commented the following insight.

*“I think I would definitely be daily probably spend like a hour daily.”*

However, another participant shared a valid perspective that engagement would depend on the individual’s interest and what exactly the consumer was researching. Participant four introduced this aspect by sharing the following.

*“Depends on your interest as well like travel and stuff spend a long time unless planning something like once a week or once a month or fitness or food or fashion.”*

This section of the findings follows onto the next aspect, which entailed how bloggers promote themselves and their blog posts. Therefore, majority of the data collected detailed how consumers found bloggers through social media accounts as mentioned previously Instagram. The millennial consumers shared that bloggers promoting through social media created a more visual experience for the consumer as can be seen from participant’s one comment. Participant one commented on the visual aspect of blogs and how it can be

more affective when promoting specific products or experiences such as a holiday.

*“Its more visual as well because some people would find it hard to visualise what someone was talking about as well.”*

Participant three reinforced this concept introduced by participant one by sharing the insight of video content, which is discussed further.

*“Like travel for example like if you had a big block of text about somewhere like the Maldives or if you watch a video of someone in the Maldives the video even like 10 seconds long is going to sell that way more than a block of text.”*

As discussed in Chapter Two, visual content has become increasingly important to consumers in recent years. Primary research discovered that visual aid and live streams were more effective in selling a product or promoting a blog post.

#### **4.6 Millennial’s thoughts on sponsored content from bloggers**

This aspect of the data is centred on sponsored content from bloggers from a millennial perspective. A variety of perspectives were expressed in relation to sponsored content from bloggers. One topic discovered detailed if sponsored content was effective to this age demographic. This data would provide evidence to uncover if companies use bloggers as a marketing method if it is impactful to the targeted demographic. Respondent four stated the following.

*“Yeah it just seems in genuine but then like if a fashion blogger or whatever like I follow but she doesn’t really give codes or anything if I see something nice on her she just recommends like where you can buy it. I would think that is definitely more genuine.”*

This perspective shared from the respondent stated that if a bloggers were selective about the products and consumers would perceive brands that they are promoting as genuine. However, participant two had a different viewpoint.

Although, following participant two statement, respondent four shared an insight into sponsored content.

*“What’s also really good is when they start doing Instagram live or Facebook live and they start showing you what its like on which I think is really good. Showing their a real person behind it. Makes them more relatable.”*

*“I think they should post whether is sponsored or not because it gains them better credibility for future posts.”*

Together these results collected emphasize that Millennial’s focus on the actual speed of how fast they can obtain the information that they are looking for. This provides important insights into bloggers posting reviews, as content of product demonstrations and how to use it is more impactful from a millennial perspective. As mentioned in the quote from participant two above the live feature on social media platforms to a good method for bloggers to showcase their personality and get the information across to the consumer in the fastest form.

Therefore, from a consumer’s perspective a blogger promoting a product or brand showcases that the blogger is taking a risk to promote the product to their audience as the bloggers business relies entirely on trust. The results from this section indicate that bloggers should post more video content such as a vlog so consumers can see their life for a day. This type of content makes a bloggers more relatable to a consumer of the millennial generation ensuring trust.

#### **4.7 Millennial’s perspective on the benefits they receive**

The data collection progressed the research to discover what benefits the millennial consumers receive from following bloggers. The main theme that appeared from the data was that consumers follow bloggers mainly because it is habitual. As previously mentioned consumers from this age demographic focused a lot on reviews to influence their purchase decisions. This is evident from a statement made by a participant below. Participate one shared this statement.

*“I think the reviews on YouTube on very important like I would look up something before I was going to 100% put the money to it depending on what it was like if it was something quite expensive I would want to know if its good quality if its going to do the job that it is tasked with”.*

However, as the conversation developed the respondents realised that the bloggers that they individually follow reflected their ideal state, which refers to Belk (1988) theory of the extended self. This is reflected in participant six shared the following statement.

*“Fashion the bloggers I follow have the same style I would like and are posting content that I am interested in”*

These views surfaced mainly in relation to the reoccurring theme of trust as mentioned previously within the chapter. The findings strengthened the concept that the millennial generation develop trust with the bloggers that they follow. Participant four shared this insight of purchase behaviour.

*“If you like follow someone for a while you would trust their opinion rather than doing your own research.”*

This aspect of the data correlated to the next section of this findings chapter, which elaborates on the connection to bloggers from a millennial perspective.

#### **4.8 Connection to the blogging community**

Throughout the focus group it was uncovered that the millennial consumer felt connected to their preferred blogger on a personal level. As previously mentioned the major themes that have emerged from the data emphasized some of the main theories within the literature review of this study. From a millennial perspective bloggers should showcase their personality more as it attracts a loyal following. Thus, bloggers can perform an inspirational role for consumers to reach their end goal, which is particularly evident within the fitness industry. Therefore, some of the quotes stated by the participants

reinforced this theme within the data analysis process. Participant four shared the following statement.

*“Yeah you get a sense of their personality as well and if you relate to them you’re going to follow them.”*

Hence, bloggers often gather a loyal following due to the fact that the person comes across as relatable and sincere compared to other bloggers. This makes bloggers an effective marketing tool, as readers trust their opinions and recommendations. However, participant one voiced another perspective stating the following opinion.

*“They would be inspirational but I wouldn’t live my life by it like if I see a product that’s working for someone I would think that makes sense.”*

Another aspect of the role bloggers play within the industry is inspiration as mentioned. Relating to consumer behaviour theory consumers often follow bloggers as they represent a goal or a version of themselves that they would like to be. Thus, participant three and seven also reinforced this theme of connection through their quotes, which stated.

*“ They are relatable to me and my end goal that’s why I follow them.”*

*“I feel so connected to them because I met a blogger I follow in work and I felt like I knew her.”*

The statements gathered from the raw data emphasized that bloggers sell more than just products and brand to consumers. Bloggers relate with their audience on a personal intimate level. This makes a blog post impactful and emphasizes the reason why many companies use bloggers at the forefront of their campaigns, which allows consumers to relate to the brand more.

#### **4.9 The popularity of blogging**

The study aimed to discover is the popularity of blogging over recent years, which is due to social acceptance and congruity. The respondents concluded that blogging became a trend and was widely influence in popularity due to social media. Although, another perspective was mentioned by a respondent that peers influenced the popularity of bloggers through recommendations. Thus, blogging has become a huge aspect of the millennial generations decision-making process as the reviews and opinions posted online about a brand or a product can often lower a consumers perceived risk for purchases. Therefore, participant six of this study shared the opinion that the trend of blogging is reinforced through peers influence. To elaborate, participant's insight reflects the influence of peers for the blogging community.

*"I would agree like if my friends like something then I would go look cause we would have the same tastes and if she likes it I will most likely like it as well."*

This quote states that peers influence the choice of blogger to follow as well. This is evident within the blogging industry in Ireland, popular bloggers have organised events such as workshops where their followers can purchase tickets to attend and meet their favourite blogger and learn about fashion, beauty, fitness and lifestyle being the main topics. However, another respondent had a different viewpoint that social media is the causal effect for the popularity of blogs. Respondent two stated the following.

*"Social media is so big, which allowed them to spread more awareness and it's a trend."*

The respondents gave insight into how social media has given bloggers and consumers a platform to connect and engage with one another. The advancement in technology and the integration of social media into every individual consumers daily life makes it inevitable for mass media to be ignored by the public due to overload. However, the result from the data gathered stated that companies using bloggers as a marketing tactic enabled a brand to be recognised and allowed consumers to attach a personality to a



brand. However, this is particularly useful for smaller brands within Ireland or brands targeting a niche demographic.

#### **4.10 Future predictions of blogs**

The last section within this chapter is focused on the future of blogs. The data gathered includes some suggestions or improvements that blogs will undertake in the future from the millennial generation perspective. All respondents came to a final conclusion together that video content is the progression that bloggers need to make to be recognised within a competitive industry. Participant two shared this opinion

*“Yeah you can definitely see that everything is moving to video content especially with advertising.”*

The participants all agreed that video content would benefit the industry and would influence their purchase decisions more regularly. In contrast, participant three comments differ as the respondents did contrast on the reasons for this recommendation.

*“It’s a lot difficult to big up a video rather than photos, which are all edited now to make them look nicer, which is harder to do with a video. There is a lot more clarity in that aspect.”*

The statements made by the respondents clearly provide evidence that video content is more persuasive for promoting products within the marketing industry. However, instead on traditional methods such as television and radio, advertising has now advanced to viral videos and online campaign, which now include the use of bloggers as the face of some campaigns. Furthermore, many opinions were shared within the data collection process but one theme that stood out was the brand awareness aspect as discussed previously within this chapter.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

This chapter will highlight the key themes that emerged from the data analysis correlating to the literature review to reinforce the salient topics within the presented study. The discussion chapter reinforces the key findings and the practical implications of this study as well as addressing any limitations of the study.

### **5.1 The bloggers influence on purchase behaviour**

The empirical findings of this study provide a new meaning to the world of blogging. The primary findings emphasized that bloggers increase brand awareness within the Irish market. Surprisingly, Irish online influencers also create awareness for brands abroad. The participants shared that promotional codes and discounts were ineffective. The key finding revealed that millennial consumers felt a personal connection to bloggers reinforcing the concept of trust. These findings reinforce the concept that bloggers have an influence on purchase behaviour from this demographic. Many companies nowadays struggle to build customer based brand equity. Customer based brand equity is defined by Keller (1993) as the effect if brand knowledge or the response a consumer has to the marketing of a brand. This concept has a correlation the brand image, which is the associations that consumer retain in their memory. Bloggers relate to these concepts because if an online influencer has good associations with a brand it can stimulates brand recall for a consumer. This stimulation can be recalled anytime a consumer reads a blog post from a particular influencer. Consumers are able to retrieve the brand of a product category that has been marketed to them through the blogger such as the fitness industry. Relating to previous literature Keller (1993) discussed how it is vital for brands to develop strong customer based equity to build positive brand associations. If a blogger has positive associations with a specific

brand it will often transcend to the consumer adopting the same associations for that brand. Keller (2003) put forward a brand reinforcement strategy. This concept aims to reiterate a brand's attributes in order to significantly increase brand awareness and loyalty. Bloggers help brands to gain brand awareness and can reinforce their position within a market.

According to Starr and Rubinson, (1978) this is a benefit for businesses, as consumers will pay premium prices for the brand. As the primary research clearly indicates that bloggers who vlog or post video content make a more convincing sale compared to other bloggers. As Belk (1988) presented the theory of the Extended Self, it was concluded from this study that the products that consumers purchase have a link to a desired version of themselves or an end goal they would like to achieve. The findings thus far highlighted that millennials follow bloggers that represent a desired self. Hence, the products that bloggers choose to promote must have a strategic fit with their image and message to their readers. A broader perspective that was mentioned in the research gathered suggested that all bloggers should be more selective about the products they are promoting, as paid promotions are often ineffective compared to a blogger who purchases the products themselves. Loyal readers will be easily influenced by a blogger than a new audience, as trust needs to be established among readers. One theme that emerged from the data collected was the importance of visual content. Nowadays, majority of bloggers present themselves as a brand and promote themselves across many social media channels. From the millennial consumer perspective there is a large increase in the amount of bloggers within the Irish market in recent years. Thus, visual content will make consumers perceive a blog as more attractive and to increase interaction through sharing with their friends online. The participants shared that visual content can sell a product or service along with written information. The findings from this study shared the insight that in a retail environment items sell out quickly due to a blogger promoting a product online through social media and blog posts. Another participant shared that even if a consumer decides not to purchase the promoted product brand awareness has been achieved. This correlates to the customer's evoked set, which establishes the brands that a consumer first thinks of within

a product category. As discussed within Chapter Two these concepts relate to a brand achieving positive associations among their target audience.

## **5.2 Millennial brand awareness**

Brand awareness is essential for any company to gain loyal customers and to maintain a consistent business. As discussed in the findings chapter the reoccurring opinion from the participants emphasized that bloggers often subconsciously effect the respondents purchase decisions stimulating brand recall for consumers. Another concept that bloggers help establish for companies is their brand personality. Brand personality is also an essential aspect for companies to gain purchase intention and eventually build on loyalty. Thus, bloggers help consumers to relate to brands because a blogger is essentially an opinion that a consumer trusts and respects rather than traditional advertisements. This is due to a blogger being perceived as an expert in their industry. To elaborate Morgan (1988) and Aaker (1997) put forward that brand personalities, which are human associations consumers make to elicit the brand as a metaphor. Aaker (1997) further elaborated this concept stating that the purpose is to enable brands to be characterised to allow comprehension and measurement by using dimensions. This enables consumers to categorise brands when evaluating them according to their needs.

The information that was gathered from the data collection process reinforced the topic that consumers became more aware of brands through bloggers especially within an Irish market. The data discovered that millennial consumer found bloggers extremely useful for finding smaller brands. Modern day consumers are overwhelmed with advertisements, which results in many being ignored. Bloggers create a new perspective of advertising in a more subtle, genuine and captive way. Primary research emphasized that millennial consumers perceive bloggers as essentially an 'everyday person'. To clarify, a blogger is perceived as a consumer as well. This gives strength to their promotions, as it is perceived as more convincing compared to traditional

methods. If a blogger is perceived as an expert in their field such as a personal trainer having a fitness blog it makes the blog content a lot more credible for readers. Overall, user generated content is perceived as credible compared to traditional advertisements. This is evident as the widespread of online word of mouth becoming a key factor in consumers information search during their decision making process.

The primary research gathered illustrated that bloggers influence both high and low involvement purchases. As discussed in Chapter Three all participants of this study agreed that bloggers increased their brand awareness within an Irish market. However, surprisingly millennial consumers also gave insight that bloggers have expanded their purchases to countries such as Australia, which they would never have considered purchasing from such a distance before. Consumers will pay premium prices if the value of the product justifies the purchase such as brand image. This is evident from the respondent's example because this purchase from Australia would solely rely on the bloggers opinion, which emphasizes the trust aspect of this study. Bloggers stimulate a call to action for millennial consumers such as researching a new product or using promotion and discount codes to encourage purchases. This method of promotion from influencers can often prompt impulse purchases. This relates to the section, which focuses on the impact of trust.

### **5.3 Trust and credibility of a blogger**

Trust is defined as “*a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence*” (Moorman et al., 1992, p.1124). Primary research showed that the millennial consumers heavily relied on trust and the credibility of the bloggers that they choose to follow. These two aspects correlate to the effectiveness of a blogger, which is vital when promoting products and brands. Trust is the fundamental base to any online purchase for millennial consumers. As Crosby et al (1990), Berry (1995) and Michell et al (1998) observed the concept that consumer trust in a brand is one dimension of brand associations, which is vital for the success of a brand. Essentially, trust will often influence a customer's satisfaction with a brand and whether a

relationship can develop between the consumer and the business. Establishing a relationship with consumers either with a brand or a blogger is important for loyalty and future purchases. Aaker et al. (2004) put forward an aspect called self-connectedness, which reinforces the connection between the consumer and the brand. This correlates to the millennial consumer's desired self. Brands often represent an image to consumers, which causes customers to choose one brand over a competitor in some occasions. A consumer can feel as if a brand represents their desired end goal. To elaborate, a blogger could mainly focus on designer purchases. Hence, that blogger's audience would be interested in purchasing the designer brands themselves in either their current or desired state. This argues that designer brands can represent an image of wealth and luxury to the consumer. Participants of this study discussed how bloggers could often create a 'fake reality' as one respondent described it. This insight demonstrated how bloggers should fit the image that they are promoting. Influencers need to achieve a strategic fit in the marketplace, which makes a blogger more relatable as the content would meet the consumer's requirements to their desired self state.

Bloggers have become a new phenomenon within marketing as brands constantly send PR packages containing the newest product for the blogger to review if they choose to do so. However, from conducting primary research respondents of the millennial age demographic felt that bloggers within the Irish market should review products that they have purchased themselves rather than being sent products for free. As Doney and Cannon (1997) suggested trust is described as perceived reliability, as discussed in Chapter Two. One major concern for millennial consumers is to reduce perceived risk from both online purchases and offline purchases. However, perceived risk is equivocal to each individual consumer. Each consumer has a different level of trust and level of satisfaction that they will tolerate. This can lead to a consumer experiencing cognitive dissonance for their purchases. Cognitive dissonance is described as a consumer experiencing conflicting thoughts following a purchase. E-Word of mouth has become a prominent influence in consumer decisions over the last few years. Thus, bloggers have become a

platform for consumers to source information, watch product demonstrations and engage by asking questions to bloggers to find out more information. This was not available to consumers before, which reduces any conflicting thoughts for the consumer. Consumers are able to share and voice their opinions online, which was never the norm for consumers before. Consumers feel that they have a moral duty to share their experiences good or bad with consumers to either prevent or encourage other customers encountering the same experience. The millennial consumers shared that if they follow a blogger for a longer period of time they would trust their opinion without any doubt for purchases. The bloggers personality has a correlation to the consumers as these millennial consumers feel that they relate to the blogger, which reinforces the trust element of their consumer behaviour.

#### **5.4 Sponsored Content**

The Millennial generation have grown up in an era of technology. Previous research such as Ciminillo, (2005), Engebretson, (2004) and Pesquera (2005) stated that this generation are not influenced by mainstream media unlike previous generations and are more resistant to general advertisements. Hence, companies have used bloggers as a new method of promotion to reach this age demographic. Millennial consumers can be more receptive in this way than traditional methods. Katona and Mueller (1955), Bucklin (1965), Udell (1966) and Thorelli (1971) reported that the percentage of consumers finding use of advertisements are between 15 to 30%. As discussed previously, consumers have been bombarded with advertisements on a daily basis but consumers can recall little of these marketing efforts. This relates to the purpose of this study as customers have become more receptive to online influencers. The respondents of this study shared their personal thoughts on visual content as a promotional tool. These millennial consumers prefer bloggers who promote across social media and share their blogs through these platforms. From the primary research it was concluded that visual content enticed consumers to click on a blog post to find out further information on the promoted product or service. The findings concluded that video content provided more clarity and was more persuasive from a millennial consumer perspective.

Sponsored content is effective if a blogger has gained the trust and credibility from their audience. Otherwise, bloggers can be perceived as in genuine. The respondents stated that they felt promotional codes are not effective. However, one aspect on how bloggers should promote brands is through more product reviews and live stream demonstrations on popular social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. The results of this study indicated a correlation to Aaker (1997) theory of brand personality. The millennial consumers that were interviewed discussed how bloggers present an image of themselves online. Thus, if the image of a blogger is relevant to a brand such as the fitness industry blogging can be a creative way to capture the attention of that brand's target market. As discussed previously bloggers can represent a brand and promote through blog posts and social media influence. Recently, many brands have had bloggers at the forefront of campaigns. In companies within the cosmetic industry bloggers perform the role as brand ambassadors, this is also seen evident in some popular Irish brands. Brands choose bloggers that best represent a company based on their audience such as the influencers demographic, their personality and image of their blog. However, generating word of mouth positive or negative as an effect on future consumers. Consumers have an incline to share negative word of mouth over positive because consumers want to express their annoyance and frustration towards a product or service.

Bloggers have been described as market mavens such as Goldsmith et al. (2003) suggested that these are people who consider themselves an expert in a specific industry. It can also be argued that bloggers are a form of an opinion leader, as this type of individual has the ability to influence public opinion. This relates to bloggers as their opinions and reviews on products and service influence the viewpoint of a brand to their audience. Recent literature introduced a concept called a brand selfie. The brand selfie is a photograph of an everyday consumption of a brand. McQuarrie et al. (2013) suggested that ordinary consumers could build and reinforce a leader position for an acquired audience. This can be evident with bloggers of the fashion industry to establish their role in the marketplace. Consumers play the role of



creation and destruction of brand images and associations. Schroeder, (2008) interestingly shared that snapshot-like ads are focused to blur the line between marketing that is a company created method of communication and a consumer-to-consumer method of communication. Muniz and O'Guinn, (2001) suggested that brand selfies provide a connection between a consumers brand experience and the brand community. The results clearly provided evidence that live streams showed the bloggers as a real person or consumer behind the blog posts. The millennial consumers gave insight that bloggers being more honest about sponsored content ensured credibility. The findings emphasized how consumers relate to the content created by bloggers. This relates to Belk theory of the extended self (1988), which is a reoccurring theme within the findings. Consumers feel as the bloggers they follow represent a version of themselves that they would like to be. Thus, to elaborate a blogger may represent an individuals end goal or desired self. Some participants shared that in their opinion bloggers are inspirational.

### **5.5 Limitations of the study**

The limitations of the study include that the sample of the study was small in comparison to quantitative sampling methods. Hence, due to this reasoning the sample does not fully represent the millennial consumer generation. However, although the sample of the study is small the findings gave incredible insight into consumer behaviour and the blogging and social media industry in Ireland. The findings also emphasized the shift of power to consumers and how consumer's desires are constantly evolving. The practical implications of this study include the predictions that the millennial consumers made about the blogging industry. These recommendations highlighted the future of blogging for millennial consumers and how can be improve to further influence consumer behaviour. The most striking and relevant recommendation is the emphasis on video content. This aspect is beginning to be evident in the modern marketplace for advertising methods such as live streams and viral video campaigns have become increasingly popular in recent campaigns.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **6.1 Summary of findings**

The purpose of this research was to investigate the relationship between bloggers and the millennial generation. The aim is to discover how bloggers affect consumer behaviour from this demographic. In order to uncover this information qualitative methods were used on participants of the millennial generation. Following the focus group, the data collection method included thematic analysis, which was used to elicit themes that arose from the data. The salient topics that emerged from the findings included that millennial consumers used bloggers when making purchase decisions. The findings discussed demonstrate the benefits and influence bloggers have on millennial consumers.

1. Bloggers increased brand awareness for millennial consumers especially within the Irish market for more niche brands.
2. Bloggers have created awareness for brands abroad, which caused consumers to purchase from boutiques in countries such as Australia.
3. The respondents revealed that promotion codes were ineffective.
4. The findings also discovered that consumers felt a personal connection to bloggers through engagement as a blogger represents an end goal or desired self.
5. In a general consensus the participants shared that traditional methods were not as effective anymore.

The millennial consumers gave insight into their personal consumer purchase behaviour and how they perceived bloggers to be a good marketing tactic. Relating back to previous literature bloggers have encouraged an online word of mouth movement. This encouragement has enabled consumers to voice and share their experiences online. Dou et al. (2012) shared that the increase of Web 2.0 related publishing platforms contributed to the growth of reviews created by consumers. The shift in

power over recent years has moved from a business to the consumers. This generation perceived bloggers as genuine as they come across as an everyday person. Bloggers were also described as more relatable to traditional advertising methods. The millennial respondents made some recommendations, which are discussed below.

## **6.2 Future recommendations**

The millennial consumers discussed what methods or recommendations that they find useful from bloggers. This insight is beneficial for both bloggers and businesses as companies can tailor their marketing methods towards these recommendations if millennial consumers are their target demographic. These suggestions have been highlighted and discussed to suit the current marketplace.

1. The key theme that arose from the millennial consumer's suggestions was video content. Video content has become more prominent in recent years in the world of advertising such as viral video and advertising campaigns. This is due to the impact of social media on consumer's daily lives. Bloggers promote themselves across all media channels. This ensures that bloggers reach every age demographic according to their audience. The millennial consumers felt that video content was more persuasive in terms of marketing a product or service. The respondents shared that video content on social media was a positive way to capture their attention when promoting a blog post. Respondents also shared that they prefer the live streaming content as the blogger showcased their personality more.
2. The second recommendation that the millennial consumers shared was the desire to gather the information in a fast and easy manner. Hence, to elaborate the quickest method for a blogger to share a review or any source of information is the millennial's preferred choice. Bloggers are more focused on the social media platform Instagram. A feature on this platform is that members can upload a twenty second clip to their profile. The millennial consumers felt that the short clips were more effective in achieving a call to action such as clicking on a blog post or

a brands website. Brands should avail of bloggers as it is seen as more organic and relatable to consumers. Bloggers are often used as brand ambassadors to gain more awareness within an industry.

3. Another suggestion, which was more advanced emphasized that bloggers should utilise the location feature that is present on all social media platforms currently. This feature enables a blogger to share a location, which enables consumers to see where a blogger would spend their time. One topic mentioned by a participant was how bloggers affected their daily low involvement purchase such as the food and beverage industry. Hence, a blogger posting where they purchase their favourite stores and restaurants was of interest to these millennial consumers. This method is particularly successful for more niche stores or cafes that would not appeal to the average consumer.
4. Trust was another major aspect of the study and the respondents felt that sponsored content should be less prominent. This is due to the participant's perspective that if a blogger purchases a product or service themselves the review would be more sincere. Trust is what makes bloggers successful in marketing so it's important for an influencer to be genuine with their audience. The respondents also shared that they think if a blog post is sponsored that it should be made more aware rather than a hash tag to showcase the blog is sponsored.
5. The final recommendation that the millennial consumers emphasized was image. The respondents reinforced that the blogger must fit the image that they are portraying. To elaborate this can be seen within the fitness industry. In order for an influencer to be credible, their audience must believe that the product or brands that receive positive word of mouth through reviews or product demonstrations achieve what they are promoting. The respondents mentioned the beauty and fitness community to express their thoughts. A beauty blogger is more credible if the influencer has been trained within that industry according to the millennial demographics perspective.

### **6.3 Future research possibilities**

As discussed a key theme that emerged from this study is video content. More studies should be carried out investigating the effectiveness of video content such as live streams on social media platforms such as Snapchat, Facebook Live and Instagram Live on millennial's engagement with a brand or blogger. This concept correlates to their purchase behaviour and how consumers perceive brands through online opinions being posted. Consumers trust bloggers over time, which saves customers doing their own research. This enables brand to easily access a demographic and attach a personality to a brand, which can correspond to the brand associations. A longitudinal study could be designed in the future to see how consumers react to marketing methods from bloggers over a longer period of time and to investigate if their perceptions change.

## References

- Aaker, J. (1997) 'Dimensions of Brand Personality' *Journal of Marketing Research*, **34**(3): pp. 347-356.
- Allen, C .A. and Austin, S.F. (2014) 'Using content analysis to profile the blogosphere' *Academy of Marketing Studies Journal*, **18**(2): pp.181-192.
- Belk, R. (2013) 'Extended self in a Digital World' *Journal of Consumer Research*, **40**(3): pp. 477-500.
- Brown, S. (2015) 'Using focus groups in naturally occurring settings' *Qualitative Research Journal*, **15**(1): pp. 86-97.
- Bilgihan, A., Peng, C. and Kandampully, J. (2014) 'Generation Y's information seeking and sharing behaviour on social networking sites' *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, **26**(3): pp. 349-366.
- Camiciottoli, B.C., Ranfagni, S. and Guercini, S. (2014) 'Exploring brand associations: an innovative methodological approach' *European Journal of Marketing*, **48**(5/6): pp. 1092-1112.
- Colucci, C and Cho, E. (2014) 'Trust Inducing factors of Genration Y blog users' *International Journal of Design*, **8**(3): pp.113-122.
- Dennis, C., Merrilees, B., Jayawardhena, C. and Wright, L. T. (2009) 'E-consumer behaviour' *European Journal of Marketing*, **43**(9/10): pp. 1121-1139.
- Doyle, J.D., Heslop, L.A., Ramirez, A. and Cray, D. (2012) 'Trust intentions in readers of blogs' *Management Research Review*, **35**(9): pp. 837-856.

Dwivedi, A., McDonald, R.E., Johnson, L.W. (2014) 'The impact of a celebrity endorser's credibility on consumer self brand connection and brand evaluation'. *Journal of Brand Management*, **21**(7): pp. 559-578.

Giovannini, S., Xu, Y. and Thomas, J.(2015) 'Luxury Fashion Consumption and Generation Y Consumers Self, Brand Consciousness and Consumption Motivations'. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, **19**(1): pp. 22-40.

Gorman, P., Nelson, T. and Glassman, A. (2004) 'The Millennial Generation: A Strategic opportunity' *Organizational Analysis*, **12**(3): pp. 255-270,339-340.

Hinz, O., Skiera, B., Barrot, C. and Becker, J.U. (2011) 'Seeding Strategies for Viral Marketing: An Empirical Comparison'. *Journal of Marketing*, **75**: pp. 55-71.

Hsu, C.L., Lin, J.C.C. and Chiang, H.S. (2013) 'The Effects of Blogger Recommendations On Customers Online Shopping Intentions'. *Internet Research*, **23**(1): pp. 69-88.

Hsu, C.P., Huang, H.C., Ko, C. H. and Wang, S. J. (2014) 'Basing Bloggers Power on Readers Satisfaction and Loyalty'. *Online Information Review*, **38**(1): pp. 78-94.

Heilman, C.M., Bowman, D. and Wright, G.P. (2000) 'The evolution of brand preferences and choice behaviours of consumers new to a market.' *Journal of Marketing Research*, **37**(2): pp. 139-155.

Johnston, A. (2014) 'Rigour in research: theory in the research approach' *European Business Review*, **26**(3): pp.206-217.

- Kiel, G., Layton, C. and Roger, A. (1981) 'Dimensions of Consumer Information Seeking Behaviour' *Journal of Marketing Research*, **18**(02), pp.233.
- Keller, K.L. (1993) 'Conceptualizing, Measuring and Managing Customer Based Brand Equity' *Journal of Marketing*, **57**(1): pp. 1-22.
- Kapoulas, A. and Mitic, Miljana (2012) 'Understanding challenges of qualitative research: rhetorical issues and reality traps' *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, **15**(4): pp. 354-368.
- Ko, H.C. (2012) 'Why are A-list bloggers continuously popular?' *Online information Review*, **36**(3): pp. 401-419.
- Karakaya, F. and Barnes, N.G. (2010) 'Impact of online reviews of customer care experience on brand or company selection' *The Journal of Consumer Marketing*, **27**(5): pp. 447-457.
- Lee, H. H., and Ma, Y. J. (2012) 'Consumer Perceptions of Online Consumer Product and Service Reviews'. *Journal of Research In Interactive Marketing*, **6**(2): pp. 110-132.
- Lester, D.H., Forman, A.M. and Loyd, D. (2005) 'Internet shopping and Buying Behaviour of College Students' *Services Marketing Quarterly*, **27**(2): pp123-138.
- Liljander, V., Gummerus, J. and Soderlund, M.(2015) 'Young Consumers Responses to Suspected Covert and Overt Blog Marketing'. *Internet Research*, **25**(4): pp. 610-632.
- Lin, T.M.Y., Lu, K.Y. and Wu, J.J. (2012) 'The effects of visual information in eWOM communication' *Journal of Research In Interactive Marketing*, **6**(1): pp.7-26.



Lopez, M. and Sicilia, M. (2013) 'How WOM marketing contributes to new product adoption: Testing competitive communication strategies' *European Journal of Marketing*, **47**(7): pp. 1089-1114.

Lu, H. and Lee, M. (2010) 'Demographic differences and the antecedents of blog stickiness'. *Online Information Review*, **34**(1): 21-38.

Park, B., Ahn, S. and Kim, H. (2010) 'Blogging: Mediating Impacts of Flow on Motivational Behaviour'. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, **4**(1): pp. 6-29.

Power, J., Whelan, S. and Davies, G. (2008) 'The attractiveness and connectedness of ruthless brands: the role of trust' *European Journal of Marketing*, **42**(5/6): pp. 586-602.

Presi, C., Maehle, N. and Kleppe, A.I. (2016) 'Brand Selfies: Consumer experiences and marketplace conversations' *European Journal of Marketing*, **50**(9/10): pp. 1814-1834.

Qu, S.Q. and Dumay, J. (2011) 'The qualitative research interview' *Qualitative Research in Accounting & Management*, **8**(3): pp. 238-264.

Quinlan, C. (2011) *Business Research Methods (1<sup>st</sup> ed)*. Cengage Learning.

Rapp, A., Baker, T. L., Bachrach, D. G., Ogilvie, J. and Beitelspacher, L. S. (2015) 'Perceived customer showrooming behaviour and the effect on retail salesperson self- efficacy and performance' *Journal of Retailing*, **91**(2): pp. 358-369.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill (2008) *Research Methods for Business Students, (5<sup>th</sup> ed.)*. Prentice Hall, Financial Times.

Stokes, D. and Bergin, R. (2006) 'Methodology or methodolatry? An evaluation of focus groups and depth interviews' *Qualitative Market Research Bradford*, **9**(1): pp. 26-37.

Semon, T.T., Cohen, R., Richmond, S.B. and Stock, J.S. (1958) 'Sampling in marketing research' *Journal of Marketing Research*, **23**: pp. 263.

Solomon, M, Bamossy, G, Askengaard, S, and Hogg, M. *Consumer Behaviour: A European Perspective*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, Pearson Publishers.

Seyed, S.S. and Mohammad,R.E. (2014) 'The impacts of relationship marketing on cognitive dissonance, satisfaction and loyalty: The mediating role of trust and cognitive dissonance' *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management Bradford*, **42**(6): pp. 553-575.

Sheth, J.N. and Solomon, M.R. (2014) 'Extending the Extended Self in a Digital World'. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, **22**(2): pp. 123-132.

Sinha, N., Ahuja, V. and Medury, Y. (2011) 'Corporate Blogs and Internet Marketing- Using Consumer Knowledge and Emotion as Strategic Variables to Develop Consumer Engagement'. *Journal of Database Marketing and Customer strategy management*, **18**(3): pp. 185-199.

Smith, J.R., Terry, D.J., Manstead, A.S.R., Louis, W.R., Kotterman, D. and Wolfs, J. (2008) 'The attitude- behaviour relationship in consumer conduct: the role of norms, past behaviour, and self identity' *The Journal of Social Psychology*, **148**(3): pp. 311-333.

Tan, J. (2010) 'Grounded theory in practice: issues and discussion for new qualitative researchers' *Journal of documentation*, **66**(1): pp. 93-112.

Thakur, R., Summey, J.H. and Joby, J. (2013) 'A Perceptual Approach to Understanding User-Generated Media Behaviour'. *The Journal of Consumer Marketing*, **30**(1): pp. 4-16.

O'Connor, F. (2016) 'Millennials & YouTube An investigation into the influence of user generated video content on the consumer decision making process' *Masters Thesis*.

Valentine, D.B. and Powers, T. (2013) 'Generation Y values and lifestyle segments' *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, **30**(7): pp. 597-606.

Walden, J., Bortree, D. and DiStaso, M. (2015) 'This Blog brought to you by Exploring Blogger Perceptions of a Product Endorsement Policy and Reviews'. *Journal of Communication Management*, **19**(3): pp. 254-269.

Wang, S.J., Hsu, C.P., Huang, H.C. and Chen, C.L. (2015) 'How Readers Perceived Self Congruity Affect Bloggers Information Influence'. *Online Information Review*, **39**(4): pp. 537-555.

Wu, W. L. and Lee, Y.C. (2012) 'The Effect of Blog Trustworthiness Product Attitude, and Blog Involvement on Purchase Intention'. *International Journal of Management & Information Systems- Third Quarter, The Clute Institute*, **16**(3): pp. 265-276.

Wang, C.C. and Chien, H.Y. (2012) 'Believe or Skepticism? An Empirical Study on Individuals Attitudes to Blog Product Review'. *International Journal of Innovation Management and Technology*, **3**(4): pp. 343-348.

Wang, S, Hsu, C, Huang, H. and C,C. (2015) 'How Readers perceived self congruity and functional congruity affects bloggers informational influence' *Online Information Review*, **39**(4): pp.537-555.

## **Appendix 1: Consent Form**

### Consent Form

Dear Participants,

I am currently in the final stages of completing my Masters Degree in Marketing. As part of my final assessment I have to complete a Thesis. My research question is as follows In Ireland, do bloggers influence Consumer Behaviour from a millennial perspective? To gather the data for my research I have decided to conduct a focus group consisting of 8-10 students between the ages of 18-24. The focus group will be a discussion for 45-60 minutes about my research topic and I will be asking various questions to all participants. The session will be voice recorded and I will store this recording in a locked box. Therefore, I will be the only person that has access to the recording. The recording will then be deleted after I completed my thesis.

If you accept to be a part of my focus group it is important to know that you can withdraw consent at any time. This participation is voluntary. All participants will be anonymised. I have attached a consent application form below. If you wish to be a part of my focus group the form attached needs to be completed and sent back to me via email. Please fill out all sections of the form and sign the agreement to take part in my study. If you chose to do so, I will contact you via email or phone to give you details of when, where and what time the focus group will take place.

If you have any questions regarding the consent form or focus group details, please do not hesitate to contact me. I would greatly appreciate to hear back from you all.

Sorry for any inconvenience caused.

Kind Regards,

Jennifer Gordon

Email: [JennyGordon94@gmail.com](mailto:JennyGordon94@gmail.com)

Phone:

## Appendix 2: Application for Focus Group

Name:

Age:

Email:

Contact Number:

Do you consent permission to allow any information, quotes or statements said by you within the focus group for my study? Tick within the circle.

- Yes
- No

What is your occupation?

- Student
- Work part time
- Work Full-time

- Unemployed

Do you have an interest/watch bloggers or influencers of any kind?

- Yes
- No

Participants Signature:

Date Signed:

### **Appendix 3: Focus Group Questions**

1. What social media platforms would you use most often and why?
2. What influence does/if any social media have on your purchase behaviour?
3. In your opinion do bloggers influence your brand choice or E- shopping behaviour?
4. How much time on average would you spend reading on a blog?
5. What subject(s) would the blogs that you read be about?
6. How often would you participate or engage with a blog?
7. What is your average frequency of visits per month?
8. What benefit do you receive as a consumer from reading a blog?
9. Do you feel a connection to bloggers through social media and engagement?
10. In your opinion, do bloggers increase brand awareness in an Irish Market?
11. What are your thoughts on product reviews?
12. How would you determine the credibility of a blogger?

13. How do you feel about the content from bloggers whose posts are sponsored by brands?
14. What are some of the factors you use to judge the trustworthiness of the blogs you follow?
15. In your opinion do you think the popularity of blogs is due to social acceptance?