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Is there a need for Irish beauty bloggers to be transparent in their product reviews? – A *PR and Irish beauty bloggers Insight*

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Executive Summary

In line with developments in technology and online platforms, Irish beauty blogs have increased in popularity over recent years. With this, there has been a rise in the number of blogs and blog readers. This study explores the phenomenon of beauty blogs in Ireland and focuses more specifically on the use of stealth marketing and blogger transparency in product reviews.

The development of a blog is discussed along with key theories that have assisted in the evolution of a blog. The theories discussed include those relating to eWOM (electronic word of mouth) and Web 2.0 in particular. The tools used by marketers when using a blog as a product promotional tool are outlined. The impact of stealth marketing on the credibility of a blog is considered in detail in this context.

In order to gain deeper insights into the research question, it was decided to conduct the research with two sample groups: bloggers and PRs. Based on the philosophies underpinning various research methods and sampling it was found that e-Research was the method best suited to this particular study. This allowed for participants to respond to the research questions presented in their own environment.

Overall two main themes emerged as the outcomes of the research conducted with both groups: the disclosure of the source of a product should be standard practice and, credibility is viewed as being important by both blogger and PR.

As this research was small scale, the findings presented are not conclusive. It is recommended that further research be conducted with bloggers and PRs using mixed research methods in order to gain more accurate insights into their views on credibility.

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1. Introduction

This dissertation will explore the area surrounding Irish beauty bloggers and their choice of disclosure or non-disclosure to their readers. To date, no significant study has been conducted on beauty bloggers specifically. However, with the development of Web 2.0 and eWOM there has been significant research around the area of trust, specifically in the practice of stealth marketing.

As the researcher has a background in blogging and an interest in beauty products, the online activity of Irish beauty bloggers was of particular interest and formed the focus of the research. Based on the observation of a range of blogger activities on social media sites, such as Twitter, where bloggers interact with each other over the course of two years, in the researchers' own time, it became apparent that there was a divide over the transparency of product reviews. Based on this, it was decided to focus the research on blogger transparency in product reviews.

Overall, research in regard to the question posed by this study is sparse.

However, there is a significant body of literature in related areas.

Due to the nature of stealth marketing, a tool that marketers use to promote products in a subtle manner unbeknown to consumers (Martin, Smith, 2008), the practice has become more widespread. It is only with the development of the interconnectivity of Web 2.0 (O'Reilly et al, 2009) that web users use of the Internet has changed. This has led to the evolution of consumers into prosumers (Kotler, 1986). The establishment of this online consumer – the prosumer – has led to the establishment of a voice that consumers had never experienced before. This voice originated when the comment feature of blogs was introduced (Xifra,

Huertas, 2008) allowing consumers to finally interact with the blogs they followed.

The approach of stealth marketing became popular among marketers who thought outside the box. However, when it was discovered by the public that this approach was used, there was discontent as it was viewed as being a deceitful marketing tool (Martin, Smith, 2008). The practice of stealth marketing online was found to be similar to its use in offline settings as stealth marketing is based on Word of Mouth communication (WOM). As blogs grew in popularity and personalities were being established, the blogger gained the trust of the consumer as a credible source (Jonas, 2010).

Consumers now look towards online reviews to help ease the decision-making process thus increasing the popularity of blogs. Consumers come to know and trust bloggers in their product recommendations. Primarily, if a blogger is approached by a public relations practitioner (PR) to write a review about a product and does not disclose that he/she was contacted, this is understood to be stealth as there is potential for bias on the blogger's side.

In this dissertation, an understanding of current research in the area of blogging in general will be established through a literature review. This will be followed by a focus on the establishment of the research question. A number of hypotheses will be derived from gaps identified in the secondary research and these will establish the aims and objectives of this study. An overview will then be presented of the possible methods of research and an outline of the method deemed best suited to this research will be presented. With this research method established, an analysis and discussion of the research findings will follow exploring the research question in full and establishing the key findings to the study. Lastly, the conclusion will provide a summary of this dissertation and will consider the need for further research in this area.

2 Literature Review

2.1 What is a Blog?

In comparison to Word of Mouth (WoM), trying to define what a blog is appears to be difficult. However, with the development of Web 2.0 different definitions have been created. An overview of a number of these definitions will be explored which will then lead to the definition that best suits what a blog is considered to be in today's environment.

Since the use of the Internet becoming widespread, there has been some form of a personal online journal with a facility to share links. There have been many different platforms allowing for this type of journal to function on the World Wide Web (www) over the years. Jorn Barger would be considered the father of the blog as he created a platform for an online journal now known as 'a blog'.

The popularisation of the phrase 'blog' was due to the launch of the blogging platform 'blogger' "in August 1999 by Pyras Labs" (Garden, 2012). The term that was coined has helped to identify what a blog is and what doesn't fall into this category creating a definite set of characteristics that were otherwise unknown up until 1999. When the phenomenon of the blog was first discovered by early adopters blogs "had three main features: they were chronologically organized, contained lists of links to interesting sites on the web and had some commentary regarding these links" (Garden, 2012).

As technology has evolved so quickly, it has become difficult to find a solid definition of a blog. There continues to be much debate around the area of what

constitutes a blog. One of the main debates refers to a feature of links, which was seen in early blogs. Blogger Rebecca Blood considers this to be a key in defining a blog along with some scholars (Garden, 2012). Blood's view on this topic is that if there is no reference to the original source of the post it is not a blog. However, it is important to keep in mind that Blood's take on the topic stems from experience of older blogger platforms and not the current technology used by blogging platforms.

Garden (2012) has suggested that the reason for the confusion is because the term 'blog' refers to the platform and the output. He argues that this is why there is a divide on the definition and that quite often one suggested definition may refer to a technical or a normative aspect of a blog. This would explain why Blood's ideal of a blog is so definitive as technology was not as prominent then as it is now since the introduction of Web 2.0.

Journalist Jeff Jarvis' is of the view that "[t]here is no need to define 'blog'". He goes on to define 'blog' as follows: "A blog is merely a tool that lets you do anything from change the world to share your shopping list. I resist even calling it a medium; it is a means of sharing information and also of interacting: It's more about conversation than content ... Blogs are whatever they want to be. Blogs are whatever we make them. Defining 'blog' is a fool's errand" (Garden, 2012). As Jarvis' definition is flexible in an academic setting, it doesn't suit this research. However, Jarvis' definition has some application to research on beauty bloggers as their posts are not necessarily confined to cosmetics.

The literature suggests that there is a consensus "that a blog is a *type* of website or web page which uses blog software such as Word Press to simplify the creation and maintenance of content" (Garden, 2012). This does help to clear up a particular level of uncertainty around the topic. The above definition of a blog will be used as a reference throughout this dissertation as it allows for a broad reach but is accurate in regards to beauty bloggers as the chronological order which a lot of scholars such as Hourihan, 2002 agree on is a key feature that is becoming outdated on many blog pages.

Marketers have turned towards bloggers as a means to promoting products or

services. For marketers, there are a number of benefits as bloggers have built up their own brand through their blog and as a result they have become trusted individuals in the eye of the consumer. Furthermore, marketers can build relationships with bloggers as some may be viewed as social influencers (Technorati, 2011).

Today's blogs have become very popular among online users. It has been observed that there is an ever increasing number of blog readers (Collinater et al, 2011). One feature of a modern blog is that a reader can choose to opt in to receiving emails related to other comments made on the post (Kennedy, Dalgarno, Grey, Judd, Waycott, Bennett, Maton, Krause, Bishop, Chang, Churchward, 2007). This has allowed bloggers to create a rapport with their readers as the blogger is now free to interact with his/her readership thereby strengthening WOM. WOM is something that is difficult for marketers as it is an experience in which marketers cannot engage (Atta, 2012). Now, more than ever, consumer reviews play a key role in the decision making process. In recent times customer-to-customer (C2C) information has become a key feature in the decision making process (Yubo, Jinhong, 2008). This leads on to the need to understand WOM which will now be discussed.

2.2 What is Word of Mouth (WOM)?

Word of Mouth has been established as one of the most powerful tools that a marketer can use (Cheung, Lee, Rabjohn, 2008; Engel, Blackwell, Kegerreis., 1969; Katz, Lazarfeld, 1955). It has been viewed as one of the most influential methods of sharing information (Chan, Ngai, 2011; Breazeale, 2008; Godes, et al 2004; Maxham and Netemeyer, 2002). WOM is a natural form of peer-to-peer interaction. This is what makes it such a powerful marketing tool. It is not something that can be made to occur. Ivan Palmer who founded the WOM specialist agency, *Wildfire* has said, "word-of-mouth marketing is about nurturing natural behavior and seeking out 'influencers' who will talk about the brand as part of conversation, not as the result of payment" (Roberts, 2008).

These influencers help to alter a consumer's opinion about a product (Katz, Lazarsfeld, 1955).

In comparison to blogging, WOM has a clear definition. Richins, Root-Shaffer (1988) concluded that WOM is "the process of conveying information from person to person and plays a major role in customer buying decisions (Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, Chowdury, 2009). As such, WOM is viewed as being "one of the most influential channels of communication in the marketplace" (Allsop, Bassett, Hoskins, 2007). The reason that consumers rely on WOM to such a large extent is because it makes the decision making process faster (Das, 2013).

WOM has been referred to as the "ability to hold a consumer's attention and enhance the information's accessibility from memory" (Magini, 2009). For example, if a consumer is in a store, they may remember that a product was recommended to them and therefore there is a higher chance of purchase. Herr, Kardis, Kim, (1991) found that WOM exerts a greater influence on consumer product judgments than any other form of communication. This can be used to turn a negative point of view into a positive. A finding in the research that shows how eWOM can help to build a brand's image will be discussed later in this dissertation. The use of WOM by marketers is primarily to influence consumers into buying a product or service (Jansen et al, 2009). This can be achieved through the influence of those in a consumer's social, work circle etc. Furthermore, WOM is known to play a substantial role in a consumers' buying decision (Richins, Root-Shaffer, 1988).

As powerful as WOM is, there are pitfalls. WOM's true potential is lacking in the real world. This is due to limitations such as boundaries and reach (Bhatnager, Ghose, 2004). This might suggest why eWOM has become so popular as there are very few limitations to its potential reach of online consumers. An understanding of eWOM will now be discussed.

2.3 What is Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)?

With Web 2.0, WOM has been able to evolve into eWOM. It has been defined as a “statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet” (Janson, Zhang, Sobel, Chowdury, 2011). The evolution of eWOM was only possible through the development of Web 2.0. As a result, there has been a rise in the number of online consumer generated content. This online content may be created through a number of social networking sites or through blogs (Coulter, Roggeveen, 2012). This form of online communication can take place in a number of ways such as forums, websites and social networks (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh Gremler, 2004). eWOM is known to be a great method for direct marketing. However, marketers have to take the risk of lack of control over the marketing campaign (Kolter et al, 2009). In a survey conducted in 2013 by Dimensional Research it was found that a negative review affected a consumer’s purchase decision by 86% while a positive review would affect a consumer’s buying decision by 90% (Marketingland, 2013). This alone shows how powerful eWOM has become in this era.

Since 2004, there has been an overall growth in eWOM. The majority of this growth stems from online networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Blogger etc (Chan, Ngai, 2011). Kolter et al, (2009) noted that “by exploiting the power of peer-to-peer advertising, brands are able to raise their awareness and achieve valuable dwell time through attracting the full attention of their audience for minutes rather than seconds”. This statement outlines how influential this tool can be.

As powerful and as positive as the statistics above are, there is negativity. Not all eWOM by bloggers may come across as relevant to the reader: “How the WOM information is evaluated by the message recipient relative to satisfying his or her own needs” (Coulter et al, 2012). This might suggest that the reader may have had to develop the need for the product or service for this tool to be successful. However, as noted earlier, this is not a loss to the business as the product that has

been recommended will resonate with the consumer. It seems that eWOM is important for consumers. If they participate in online eWOM, i.e. comment on a blog, they become part of a virtual community. As a result, this leads to social benefits such as acceptance from an online community (Hennig-Thurau, 2004). eWOM not only benefits consumers, it also benefits brands. Where blogs are concerned, a post is available for anyone who wishes to view it. In one sense online blogs do not have an expiry date unless the post/blog has been deleted (Hennig-Thurau, 2004).

eWOM has many attractive features. It is low cost and also provides “ high reliability, anonymity and high interaction” (Durnkan et al, 2012). The speed at which eWOM is created is vital due to the popularity and importance of eWOM in the virtual space (Durnken et al, 2012). Regardless of the experience of a product, a consumer is more likely to share their thoughts with their online network, a network that has a much wider reach than traditional WOM settings.

There is a possibility that eWOM has effected the effectiveness of traditional WOM. As the number of prosumers is increasing, their savviness is also on the rise. WOM seems to be the ‘go to’ tool for marketers as traditional forms of communication/advertising are loosing their effectiveness. It has been suggested that consumers now find the traditional form of adverting difficult to trust (Tseng et al, 2013). But there are obvious links between a blog and eWOM.

2.4 How Does a Blog and WOM/eWOM Connect?

Any form of online activity through social networks, and therefore by bloggers, is considered to be eWOM. As eWOM has evolved it has given rise to the popularisation of blogs. Along with Web 2.0, eWOM has created a revolution in how the Internet is now used by marketers and prosumers. In comparison to traditional WOM, the credibility of this form of information sharing has increased. This has resulted in eWOM now being viewed as more credible than its traditional counterpart, WOM (Bickart & Schindler, 2001).

As it has been established, eWOM is a form of face-to-face communication in an online environment. As a marketing tool, eWOM might be perceived as less personal than the traditional setting of face-to-face WOM. However, The benefits of using eWOM as a marketing tool provides greater results than traditional forms of marketing. This is down to the speed at which consumers can communicate and the expanded reach of the consumers' voice. This is the key to the success of eWOM.

In the same way as in WOM, negative comments have a greater impact. However, in the online environment unfavorable eWOM is noticed thus the effect of a negative comment outweighs that of a positive comment (Janson, 2009). While eWOM possesses the qualities of WOM, it has been found to have a long-term impact in comparison traditional WOM (Durukan, Boxad, Hamsioglu, 2012).

As consumers are finding their voice they are also engaging with their fellow consumers. Duan, Gu, Whinston, (2008) have noted that individuals are engaging online with persons whom they do not know offline. As a result, communication between these types of individuals has been accelerated at a phenomenal rate via social media platforms reflecting that consumers believe what others are saying about a product or service and finding the content that has been created about a particular product to be genuine. It seems that even though the individual is unknown to the consumer that there is an automatic level of trust as the content is being shared on a platform that the majority trust such as Twitter or via a blog etc (Jonas, 2010). Latané, (1981) has suggested in regards to WOM that “when other people are the source of impact and the individual is the target; impact should be a multiplicative function of the strength, immediacy, and number of other people”. Therefore in the Web 2.0 era, as the number of followers grow, the influence on the consumer increases. From this, the power of the message increases.

Consumers assume that product reviews have been written by their peers and this

results in the creation of an incentive to interact with the blog reader (Hennig-Thurau, 2004). Because of this interaction, the bloggers credibility rises as it shows that others do read the blog.

Mir, Zacheer (2013) have suggested that people are connected to online networks in order to communicate with those who have a similar interest in a hobby etc. Individuals now turn to online resources such as review pages or blogs to gather information about a product or a service. This highlights how powerful social networks are in helping to move individuals through the promotion mix. The impact that a negative mention has on a product or service is substantial. It can damage a brand as companies have no control over how far the negative eWOM will spread. Bloggers may be the most influential as they are writing posts on a regular basis and interacting with their audience on a range of different social networking sites thus building their credibility and expertise in the online world.

Ghazisaeedi, Steyn, Heerden, (2012) have suggested that consumers look to bloggers to drown out advertising's noise. This can be applied to beauty bloggers as they can be viewed as experts or better informed in the individual's eyes. When it comes to making choices about which products to purchase consumers view bloggers as being trustworthy. This is a huge factor in why blogs are so popular. Since the comment feature was created for blogs, consumers can interact with the blogger and get instant feedback. Further developments in social media now allow consumers to interact with the same blogger on a number of different platforms. As a result, this gives the reader an insight into their lives, a factor that may contribute to a reader trusting a blogger (Xifra, Huertas, 2008). Edelman, Intelliseek (2005) conducted a survey and found that 56% of Americans trusted academics and physicians while the remainder trusted people in positions similar to their own. This showed that every day consumers feel that they can trust bloggers and those numbers are sure to have increased since that survey was conducted.

“As blogging technology enables readers of blogs to contribute to public

comments, it has a profound impact on the public relations function” (Ghazisaeedi, et al 2012). It can be assumed that a shift has occurred in this sphere. Consumers have the option to respond to or ask questions and get feedback from the blogs they read. In comparison, traditional PR and marketing it is a one-way system. As social media has progressed so have other platforms. In turn it has resulted in a change in how consumers view and research a product. Consumers will no longer take a PR statement at face value they will now conduct their own research on products.

Readers expect bloggers to be honest with them and that they disclose PR samples provided by brands. However, Colliander et al, (2011) have gone on to say that readers prefer bloggers to only mention products that they have truly enjoyed. The pressure of writing only positive posts could, as a consequence, in some instances, result in blogs morphing into dishonest blogs.

In recent times blogs are becoming increasingly important in informing readers about a product or a service and more consumers are turning towards blogs for their information (Droge, Stank, Pollitte, 2010). If PRs choose to use bloggers as a means of promoting a product, the PRII (Public Relations Institute of Ireland) have a number of guidelines in place to ensure good practice, one of which states “Public relations activities must be carried out openly: they must be readily identifiable, bear a clear indication of their origin, and must not tend to mislead third parties” (PRII, 2011). This means that PRs should encourage external parties such as bloggers to state that, when relevant, they have been contacted by a PR to promote a product.

In a survey carried out by Technorati.com, they asked 1231 bloggers if they disclosed the source of a product. It was found that 86% of blogger said they disclosed if a post was sponsored by a brand.

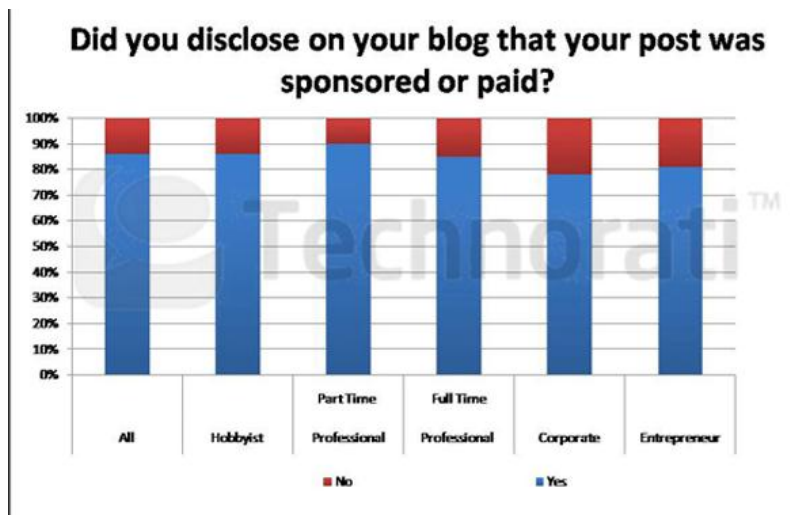


Figure 1. Disclosure of sponsored or paid blog posts. Source: (Technorati.com)

Figure 1 demonstrates that a number of bloggers questioned are upfront about brands approaching their blogs for advertising.

While blogs are beneficial to consumers, they are of benefit to marketers as well. Marketers can use blogs to promote a product. Like consumers, marketers can use bloggers to cut through the clutter and target their desired consumer directly as already stated. The blogger, as has already been established, is an influencer in the eyes of the reader. Due to this, there is a greater chance that the reader will purchase the product. This is achieved by giving the blogger an opportunity to try out a product allowing the blogger to write an honest review about the product (Ashley, Leonard 2009). As bloggers promote their blog on other social networking platforms they can reach a wider audience. This helps a blog post to reach outside the blog's general readership (Mangold, Faulds, 2009). It is important for marketers to remember that using blogs as part of the promotion mix is only effective when there is a need to improve brand image. However, there may be exceptions when the objective is to promote a product or a service (Bruhn, Schoenmuller, Schafer, 2012). This form of marketing can also be beneficial to the overall budget allowing for SMEs (small and medium enterprises) to partake in online advertising as the costs are lower than those associated with traditional advertising (Ay, Aytakin, Nardali, Bayar, 2010; Kaikati et al, 2004). This however would not be possible without the development of Web 2.0.

When Dove launched a new product to the Philippines, they aimed to grow their audience by targeting young women by using social media such as blogs. As the results below illustrate, the strategy was very successful:

- “Showeroke video and blog entries were picked up in several blogs generating a readership of 18,000.
- Dove Bar annual penetration went up from 13.7% to 18.4%
- Dove Body wash loyalty went up from 24% to 27.6%
- Winner of the Best Creative Campaign ICON Award (Havas Digital awards)” (Somesso.com, 2013).

It is clear from the successes of the Dove campaign that blogs are an extremely effective in promoting a product by simply creating awareness of the chosen item to promote

2.5 What is Web 2.0?

Web 2.0 has given rise to a new type of consumer, the prosumer. First it is important to understand Web 2.0. Web 2.0 has developed from Web 1.0 where there was a one-way dialogue in place. Now a two-way dialogue has been established giving way to interconnectivity (O’Reilly & Battelle, 2009). This allows for online interactions to take place and has made the development of social networking sites popular. What differs about Web 2.0 in comparison to previous versions is that there is a participative element (Miller, 2005). In essence, this changed a lot of aspects of online platforms.

Web 2.0 has been defined as a “technology [that] offers users easy-to-use interfaces to contribute and generate content through interactive applications that operate on networks or the Web versus software that users install and use on an individual hard drive” (Bianco, 2009). This has allowed for the empowerment of consumers as they can now share information on a number of different platforms, one of these being blogs (Ano, 2008).

The second feature of Web 2.0 is that it allows interaction to occur in real time (O'Reilly et al, 2009). Real time communication has become increasingly popular with the development of micro blogs such as Twitter and social networks like Facebook (Jansen et al, 2009). Bloggers may choose to promote posts on these sites and as a result a consumer may interact with the blogger on an external social media site. O'Reilly et al (2009) view the development of Web 2.0 as the driving force behind the popularisation of blogging. Furthermore Web 2.0 has given consumers the power to become content creators themselves (Rapoza, 2006). Consumers can now gather information from their peers about a product far more effectively than before (Constantinides, 2008).

Web 2.0 is the root cause to the effectiveness of eWOM. Without Web 2.0's feature of interconnectivity, eWOM would not exist (Rapoza, 2006). Web 2.0 has allowed for marketers to create a direct dialogue with consumers, something that heretofore had not been possible (Tanase, 2010). With the establishment of a direct dialogue, consumers now have the opportunity to interact with brands and respond directly to marketers' messages. This has allowed for the voice of the consumer to be heard in the public space of social networks leading to the development of a new consumer, the prosumer.

2.6 Understanding Generation Y and Prosumers

- How they connect to blogs and Web 2.0

Those that fit into the generation Y profile can be expected to read blogs more frequently due to their innate need to be hyperconnected in comparison to other generations. This new consumer is "integrating the web into their daily life" (Constantinides, Fountain, 2008).

The majority of people who write a beauty blog in Ireland are of the generation Y era. From simply observing a #irishbloggers conversation on Twitter, this age group is quite clear. Those who fall into this group were born between 1980 and 1994 (Kim & Hahn, 2012). There is, however, some disagreement over the exact dates that should be used to help identify the type of person that fits the

generation Y profile (O'Neill, 2010; Rock, 2010; Djamasbi, Siegel, and Skorinko, 2011).

One of the main traits of a generation Y individual is that they are early adopters (Kim et al, 2012) meaning that they will adopt trends before they become popular. This is because they are online and connected to more people than the average person, including strangers (Blazevic, Hammedi, Garnefeld, Rust, Keiningham, Andeassen, Donthu & Carl, 2013). They are also highly connected to social media sites (Bolton, Parasuraman, Hoefnagels, Migchels, Kabadayi, Gruber, Komarova, Loureiro & Solnet, 2013) and would possibly be active on more than one platform. 'Gen Y' feel the need to express their daily lives on a number of different sites because "They have been 'wired' almost from birth – playing computer games, navigating the World Wide Web, downloading music, and connecting with friends via instant messaging and mobile phones" (Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman, Hansen, 2009). However, there is a downfall. Generation Y consumers need to have what they want now (Kotler et al, 2009). Because 'Gen Y' is active online they, have become prosumers.

In 1980, the futurist Alvin Toffler first introduced the concept of the prosumer, as consumers "who are simultaneously producers and who can distribute and consume their own goods or services" (Santomier, n.d). Web 2.0 has allowed for Toffler's vision to be realized. Ritzer, Dean, Jurgenson, (2012) have split the hybrid consumer into two sections: "The concepts of the *prosumer*, one who is both producer and consumer, and of *pro-sumption*, involving a combination of production and consumption". In simpler terms, these consumers have been defined "as people who produce some of the goods and services entering their own consumption" (Kotler, 1986). The term prosumer is not a new, as one might imagine, as the term was create by Alvin Toffler in 1980 (Ritzer et al, 2012).

This hybrid consumer is best seen when a brand allows for an interaction to take place as this helps to build a relationship between both brand and prosumer. With the development of Web 2.0 a shift in power has occurred. It has allowed consumers to gain a large amount of power and knowledge about products and services than had not previously been possible (Contantindes, 2008). With this

the prosumers' voice online is highly influential. Because they are highly connected they have also become "highly knowledgeable about product and services and can play a key role in improving these products and services" (Diffley, Kerarns, Bennett, Kawalek, 2011). Web 2.0 has allowed consumers to interact with businesses. This is where the prosumers' valuable information comes into play (Ritzer et al, 2012). The prosumers are seen solely online, as this the only channel that allows them to interact with brands via social networks. The hyper connectivity profile of Gen Y and their yearning for more participative experiences has seen a marked increase in the activity and access to consumer voice in social media, a development that has been facilitated by Web 2.0 and similar platforms. As prosumers' online activities demonstrate that they are well educated about a product/service, brands become aware of these individuals and harness this resource.

2.7 Technology

The manner in which consumers use technology has evolved. With Web 2.0 there has been a strong development in the smartphone. Figure 2 below shows the popularity of the use of a smartphone in Ireland.

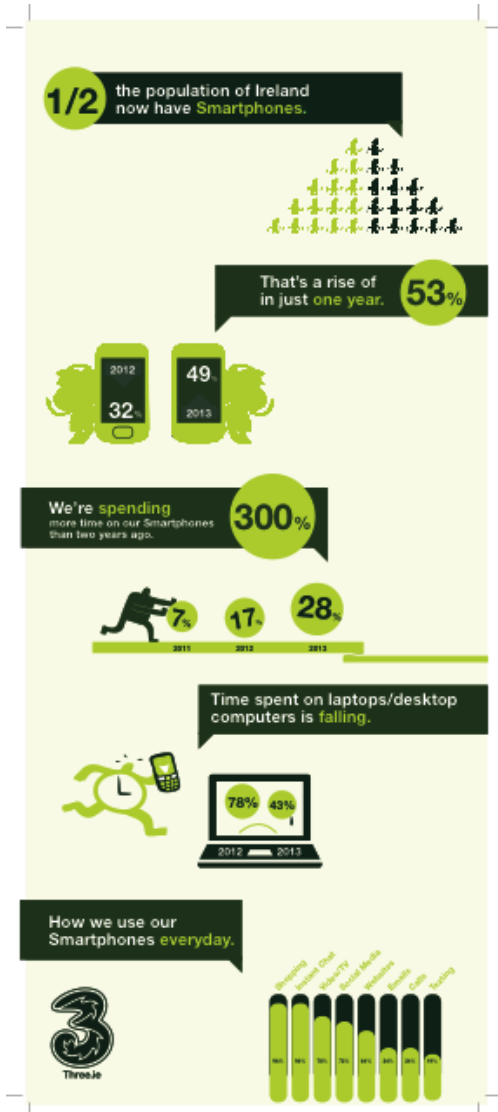


Figure 2: Smartphone use in Ireland. Source: Thinkhouse, 2013

This has allowed Gen Y to become increasingly connected to the online world via social media sites (Kolsaker & Drakatos, 2009). Prosumers are now able to interact with brands while on the move and this in turn has increased the need for the prosumer to connect with their peers online.

The mobile network Three carried out a survey in April 2013 examining the use of mobile phones in Ireland. The survey found that amount of time spent online has increased dramatically: “Irish people are spending 300% more time online on their smartphones than they did just two years ago” (Thinkhouse, 2013). This suggests that individuals have instant accesses to the Internet when they are away from a computer or laptop allowing for eWOM to occur more frequently. “72% of Irish smartphone users look up websites on their smartphones everyday”

(Thinkhouse, 2013). Due to such a huge amount of Irish consumers interacting with the Internet on a daily basis there is a risk that consumers may come across dishonest product reviews.

With the development of technology in smartphones, it has been observed that consumers are now accessing eWOM via their smartphones. This means that consumers have an increased access to communication, which allows for consumers to be influenced while on the move (Balasubramanian, Peterson, Jarvenpas, 2002). The development of technology has led to an increased use in guerilla marketing.

2.8 Guerilla marketing

Guerilla marketing has been defined by (Kolter et al, 2009) as “an unconventional approach originally intended to assist small businesses to get them noticed in markets where the conventional media are cluttered”. In other words, this form of marketing is used to cut through advertising noise. While Tek (1999) has defined guerilla marketing as “a tool that allows SMEs to demoralize their rivals with small, periodical and surprising attacks, requires swift action and utilizes creativity and imagination” raising a ethical concern with the use of this tool as it is considered to be a gray area.

Guerilla marketing can be viewed as thinking ‘outside the box’. This area consists of a number of different marketing techniques and ‘Guerilla marketing’ is now seen as an umbrella term. The tools that fall under this term include: product placement, alternative ambient, word-of-mouth, consumer-generated approaches, stealth marketing, undercover marketing and grassroots marketing (Serazio, 2012). Some of the tools that belong to the category of guerilla marketing are used by PRs and Marketers to help promote their own product or service.

Guerilla marketing differs from traditional marketing as it is unexpected, usually outdoor, online and through interpersonal avenues – unconventional, literally, in its choice of “media” platforms (i.e., engaging a medium beyond the traditional

television commercial or newspaper advertisement) (Serazio, 2012). Since the introduction of the Internet, guerilla marketing has thrived due to its unconventional tactics. In addition, since the development of Web 2.0, an increased number of different platforms on which this tactic can be implemented have become available. “Guerrilla tactics demonstrate a decidedly more flexible, niche-seeking, ambiguous” approach to advertising (Serazio, 2012). This demonstrates how powerful this tool can be when used correctly.

For a guerilla marketing campaign to be successful it needs to be unnoticed by the target audience as it allows for “the consumer [to] draw out information without feeling like it has been forced upon” them (Serazio, 2012, P. 236). As consumers do not realise that they are the target of a particular marketing campaign, the defenses they have built up towards traditional marketing are ineffective when the tool of guerilla marketing is implemented. As a result of a campaign going under consumers’ radar they are 1) more favorable towards the brand and 2) they spread the word “Because we do not (generally speaking) filter out friends, this kind of guerrilla marketing is a way of parasitically harnessing that trust placed in peer influences” (Serazio, 2012). This is hugely beneficial for social networks and a blogger can mention a product allowing it to reach thousands of potential customers. This alone demonstrates that WOM is hugely important in the implementation of a successful campaign.

However, there is an issue of credibility as bloggers themselves may find that they themselves contribute to the success of this marketing tool by simply not informing their readers that the product they received was a PR sample. In recent years, there has been a shift in the Irish beauty blogger community whereby examples can now be seen of posts stating whether the product was received from a PR. It may be suggested that the action of disclosing if a product was a PR was influenced by US bloggers where FTC (Federal Trade Commission) have a law in place that ensures bloggers disclose if they were contacted by a PR to promote a product (.Com Disclosure, 2013).

2.9 Stealth marketing

The sub-marketing category of guerilla marketing, stealth will be explored as it relates directly to the online environment. It has been defined as being: “anchored on the premise that word of mouth remains the most effective form of promotion and that peer group recommendation is the ultimate marketing weapon” (Kaikati, Kaikati, 2004). It has also been defined as “the use of surreptitious marketing practices that fail to disclose or reveal the true relationship with the company that produces or sponsors the marketing message” (Martin et al, 2008). This demonstrates the importance of the use eWOM in this approach. As stated earlier, it also has the added benefit of allowing “marketers to cut through the clutter of advertising” (Kaikati et al, 2004).

Marketers could use this deceptive tool when incorporating blogs as part of the promotions mix. The technique can take place in many different forms, from actors being paid to talk about a product in an everyday setting, bloggers being paid to write about a product without disclosing that they were paid, those from the company writing reviews about their product/service in online forms (Carl, 2008). Unlike traditional advertising where an aggressive tactic is used, stealth targets a few individuals to help promote a product/service via WOM/eWOM (Kaikati et al, 2004). Ultimately, the end goal of this tool is to “get the right people talking about the product or service without it appearing to be company-sponsored [and] to encourage customers to feel they just “stumbled” upon the product or service themselves” (Kaikati et al, 2004).

As stated earlier WOM, is about a natural peer-to-peer interaction. The role that stealth plays is appearing as if it is a natural and honest interaction (Carl, 2008). Therefore, it is thought that disclosing a sponsored blog post will effect the natural flow of the information being communicated to an audience (Nyilasy, 2006). Marketers often use stealth “to create positive word of mouth [...] around a product” (Martin et al, 2008). This demonstrates that the two techniques are closely linked. It is important for the success of this method that the product or service is interesting enough to be passed on to others in the individual’s network (Riedl, Konton, 2002). This requires the product to have “attractive features that make it “cool” or “in” “ (Kaikatie et al, 2004), therefore ensuring that the product becomes successful once a campaign is launched.

While there is a need to understand that there are underlying differences between credibility and trust, in the eWOM environment, they complement each other. Tseng and Fogg (1999) have defined credibility as “believability”. If that definition is applied this may allow marketers to find a loophole in the ethical concern. “Expertise, knowledge, and trustworthiness make the sources of information credible” (Mir et al, 2012). When these features come across in a blog post, it is clear to the reader, at a subconscious level, that the blogger is genuine.

With the Web 2.0 consumers are looking towards bloggers and other online sources rather than companies to find their information on products and services. This is due to the fact that contemporary consumers are extremely cynical about marketing and conventional advertising/marketing communication (Jonas, 2010). This demonstrates that a shift has occurred in how and where individuals find information. This may also suggest that marketers are aware of the change, and, may decide that stealth marketing is a viable option. The same shift has also been seen in regards to media as “they are more current” (Pitt, 2011). Pitt goes on to state that “they [blogs] are seen as more credible than most mass media” (Pitt, 2012,). This shows that bloggers have an increased amount of influence through the content of their blogs. It could be suggested that, depending on the status of the blogger, a ‘what they say goes’ attitude may be adopted by their readers.

For online content to come across as credible there is a need for supporting sources to back up a review. Where beauty blogs are concerned, this could be a number of reviews stating the same information about the product (O’Reilly and Marx, 2011). This may suggest that marketers might contribute to reviews on other forms of blogs in order for the content to seem more genuine. Research conducted by Duan et al, 2008, found that individuals when online trust those whom they don’t know in the offline world. This can put readers of blogs in a vulnerable position, as they could be susceptible to false or misleading reviews.

A study conducted by Ghazisaeedie et al, 2012, where the focus centered on trustworthiness, questioned both avid and occasional blog readers about the

credibility of a product review. They found that those who read blogs on a regular basis viewed blogs as being credible while those who read blogs less frequently. As this latter cohort had not built up a relationship with the blogger, they tended to be more skeptical about the credibility of a review. The

Ghazisaeeidi et al, 2012, study also found “that the 18- to 29-year age group assigns a significantly higher source trust-worthiness to blogs”. This suggests that generation Y are frequent blogs readers and are therefore more susceptible to stealth marketing.

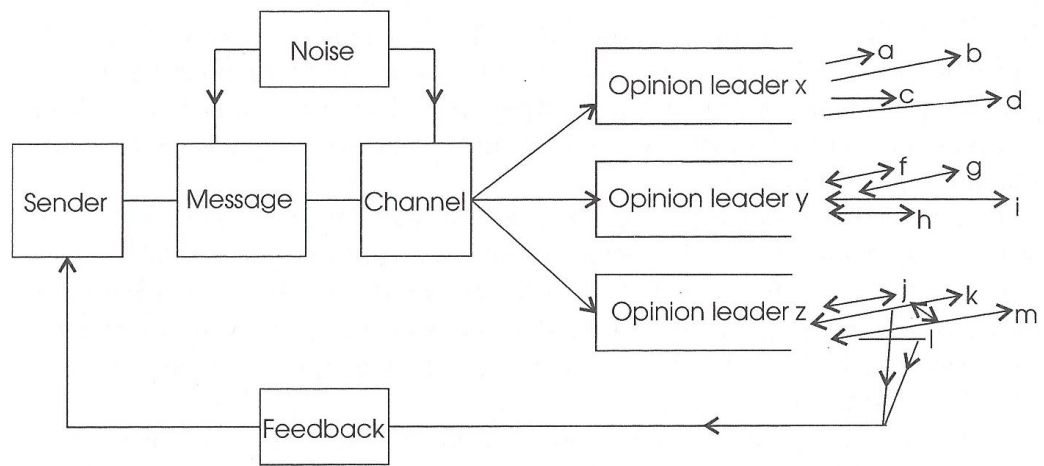


Figure 3: Multi-step communication model. Source: Smith, 1993

Since the evolution of Web 2.0 and the hybrid consumer, consumers now “rely on multiple sources to determine the credibility of information produced by online communities and bloggers” (Mir et al, 2012). Figure 3 above illustrates the various communication options available to the consumer and importantly, that the consumer now has access to the sender.

Readers also research to establish the credibility of the blogger. This is conducted through the number of posts posted and the amount of content that is considered useful (O’Reilly et al, 2011). There is a trend now for PRs to partake in this activity and invite bloggers to write reviews without disclosing the request. There is a worry that bloggers will write favorable reviews in order to ensure a positive relationship with a PR (Ghazisaeeidi et al, 2012). This can be quite difficult to spot and there is no way of knowing. To prove to their audience

that they write honest reviews, bloggers state the source of the product in the post. There is no legislation at present in Ireland to ensure that this happens, however there are guidelines. Currently it is at the blogger's own discretion to state whether or not they were approached by a PR.

Where bloggers may want to please PRs with positive reviews, they could find that they need to write misleading reviews about a product. However, there is a way to spot a false post: "when individuals are deceptive in their narratives they typically use fewer first person singular words such as "I" and "my". In blog analysis, the absence of these words can be seen as a potential indicator of deception where the deceiver is feeling guilt and subconsciously avoids using first person singular words" (Magnini, 2009). The reality is that not many pick up on the first person phrases and there is a risk of the post in becoming popular. There have been cases where companies themselves have placed corporate messages in blogs without identifying that it was a sponsored post (Magnini, 2009). This clearly falls into stealth marketing approach and would be seen as standard practice. When this tool is used in the above context it poses an ethical issue.

As consumers trust bloggers, this is an area that needs to be explored. Credibility clearly helps to build trust. The definition of trust offered by Larzelere, Huston, 1980 is useful here: "trust exists to the extent that a person believes another person (or persons) to be benevolent and honest." Individuals take a risk when they trust a blogger as there is uncertainty about the credibility of the blogger. Readers may be aware on a subconscious level that there is the possibility that the content of the post is dishonest. Therefore they may review the content on the site and against social media sites that are connected to the blog in order to gauge if the blog is honest and reach a judgment on its credibility status (Hertzum, Anderson, Anderson, Hansen, 2002). Also if bloggers share personal information such as their age, where they live etc., which can be found in an 'about me' page, this helps the credibility the blog (Xie, Miao, Kuo, Lee, 2011).

While stealth marketing as a tool offers many benefits, there are many downsides which border on ethical concern. If a company can find a way around the issue of

using stealth marketing, this tool can help to give a brand a face. This means that a company can choose the type of blog, theme etc. that will allow them to target their audience almost directly (Dwyer, 2007). This can help a brand build a relationship with its customers and gives the company the opportunity to interact with its consumers directly via social networks such as Twitter and Facebook which are connected to most blogs.

The relationship between the blogger and the reader is rather complex. If a blogger is found to be dishonest this might break many relationships that the blogger may have built over his/her time blogging. This could have a knock on effect on brands and could be so severe that they may not be able to recover (Collander et al, 2011).

Carl (2008) conducted research to explore if disclosing the nature of the source would effect the effectiveness of the stealth marketing campaign. The study did not find that non-disclosure effects this strategy. However, it did find that “[p]erceptions of trustworthiness and goodwill were actually higher with disclosure of corporate affiliation” (Carl, 2008) and that “the relay rates, or the number of people told after the WOM episode, was actually higher when disclosure occurred” (Carl, 2008).

Stealth marketers need to be careful about the way in which they use this tool as it can irreversibly damage a brand’s reputation. The use of stealth marketing could make it difficult for marketers to reach their target audience if stealth marketing is used to such an extreme that it creates a backlash from consumers (Martin, Smith, 2008). Those who agree with the practice of stealth marketing believe that “stealth marketing tends to be more credible than traditional advertising by pointing out that few consumers believed Tiger Woods drives a Buick after tournaments” (Kaikati et al, 2004).

2.10 Conclusion

The literature review outlined the key topics associated with this study. A blog

was defined as “a *type* of website or web page which uses blog software such as Word Press to simplify the creation and maintenance of content” (Garden, 2012). As the blog was established, this made way for the potential use of WOM as a marketing tool in the blogosphere. Furthermore, the effectiveness of WOM and how it evolved, through developments in technology, into eWOM and how consumers became prosumers were outlined. This gave an insight into how eWOM, through Web 2.0, revolutionised the use of the Internet by marketers to promote products in a way that was not possible when using traditional methods. The many benefits of Web 2.0 were highlighted one of which was the use of blogs and social networks as sources of information that cut out noise from advertisements.

The literature also discussed concerns about transparency in online communication in regard to product reviews. The manner in which eWOM and blogs are connected was also established thus recognising that online consumers have access to multi-step communication, including the possibility of providing feedback directly to the source.

It is evident from the literature that Web 2.0 was a major factor in the increase experienced in blogging activity. It is noteworthy that this activity is strongly associated with a particular cohort of the population known as generation Y. Constant social connectivity through the use of, for instance, the Internet and smartphone, is very important to this generation. This, however, increases the potential for individuals belonging to this generation to be targeted by stealth marketing.

3. Aims and Objectives

3.1 Aims

The main aim of this research is to explore the credibility of Irish beauty bloggers. The literature review has established that it can be unclear at times whether or not a blogger ‘s review is honest. The only clear way of establishing

transparency for blog readers is if the blogger has stated that it is an honest product review by stating the source of the product. This will be explored from the blogger and PR perspective. Two groups were selected for the research. By choosing two groups it allowed for a unique insight into blogger disclosure as the two separate groups would be compared to establish if they had a similar viewpoint on the research question.

Furthermore, the implications that come from blogger non-disclosure will be addressed through primary research as it has already been examined from secondary data while not from a blogger or PR perspective.

The research question which was developed from gaps found in the secondary research is as follows: “Is there a need for Irish beauty bloggers to be transparent in their product reviews? – a PR and Irish Beauty Bloggers Insight”

3.2 Objectives and Hypothesis

Through the development of the research question, a number of hypothesis were established which would allow for the aim of the study to be reached. As two groups were involved in the study two sets of hypotheses were developed in order to achieve the overall aim. The hypotheses were derived from the secondary research below.

Hypotheses for bloggers

H1

There is a predisposition for Irish beauty bloggers not to be transparent in their blogs when writing beauty product reviews.

H2

Irish beauty bloggers are being approached to partake in stealth marketing campaigns.

H3

Irish beauty bloggers are writing positive reviews to ensure a positive relationship with PRs.

H4

Irish beauty bloggers are propelled to be transparent in their writings of product reviews.

Hypotheses for PRs

H1

The use of Irish beauty bloggers is an effective way of creating awareness.

H2

PRs feel that Irish beauty bloggers should be transparent.

H3

There is a predisposition for Irish beauty bloggers to write dishonest reviews in order to maintain a positive relationship with PRs.

H4

There is a greater sense of credibility for readers of blogs when Irish beauty bloggers write honest reviews from a PRs perspective.

H5

PRs advocate the use of stealth marketing tools in campaigns.

From the two sets of hypotheses, questions were developed which could then be asked to both groups participating in the study.

4. Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore the most appropriate method of research to be used in order to carry out research on the question “Is there a need for Irish beauty bloggers to be transparent in their product reviews – a PR and Irish beauty bloggers Insight” and to research how transparent Irish beauty bloggers are.

This chapter discusses the research methods considered and presents a rationale for selecting and developing an e-Research model for this study. It will explore the different research philosophies associated with the different methods. It will then consider the research method most suited to undertake this study. However, before this decision is reached an outline of each method will be explored. A range of different sampling methods will be discussed and the reasons for selecting a particular model for the purpose of this research will be explained. Ethical considerations will also be addressed. Lastly, any limitations which were encountered during the research will be listed.

4.2 Overview of research philosophies

A research philosophy is an “overreaching term relating to the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge in relation to research” (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, 2012). The philosophies are split into two categories: epistemology and ontology. There are a number of philosophies that need to be considered first. These consist of positivism, realism, interpretivism and pragmatism. For the latter category, objectivism and constructionism will also be discussed.

Epistemology

Positivism

This is where existing theory is used to create a hypothesis (Saunders et al, 2012). The hypothesis will be tested from existing secondary research. “An epistemological position that advocates the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social reality and beyond’ (Bryman, Bell, 2011). Due to the nature of this study, there is a need to derive a number of hypotheses

from the secondary research; therefore a positivism philosophy will be adapted in this dissertation.

Realism

Is a “philosophical position which relates to scientific enquiry” (Saunders et al, 2012). It “acknowledges a reality independent of the senses that is accessible to the researcher’s tools and theoretical speculations. It implies that the categories created by scientist refer to real objects in the natural or social worlds” (Bryman et al, 2011).

Interpretivism

This “advocates that its is necessary for the researcher to understand differences between humans in our role as social actors (Saunders et al, 2012) Unlike positivism interpretivism looks at understanding human action (Bryman et al, 2011). “that requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action” (Bryman et al, 2011)

Pragmatism

Is “a term deriving from the history of science, where it was used to described a cluster of beliefs and dictates that for scientist in a particular discipline influence what should be studied, how research should be done, and how results should be interpreted.” (Bryman et al, 2011) in short this allows for different methods of philosophies to be used in order to carry out research. Its viewpoint is that not one form of philosophy can be used to give an outline in what is occurring in the world (Saunders et al, 2012)

Ontology

Objectivism

Is a “position that asserts that social entities exist in a reality external to, and independent of, social actors concerned with there existence” (Saunders et al, 2012) therefor that this theory is a consent, however without bloggers, the actors the social entities would not exist therefore this philosophy will not be used.

Constructionism

Takes the viewpoint “challenges the suggestion that categories such as organization and culture are pre-given and therefor confront social actors as external realities that they have no role in fashioning” (Bryman et al, 2012). Because this dissertation is not focusing on an organization instead a action which the actors partake in this philosophy would not suite the nature of the study.

Conclusion to research philosophies

All potential research philosophies were considered before choosing a positivism stance. This was chosen as it allows for hypotheses to be formed from the secondary research conducted. As there is no prior research carried out in the specific area of beauty bloggers, a positivism view allowed for prior knowledge of the topic and related areas to be used to inform and create the hypotheses applied. As positivism falls under the Epistemology philosophy, a subjective view will be taken which implies a quantitative research method will be undertaken. This s into a discussion about the research method that best suits this study.

4.3 Overview of different methods of research

Quantitative

It was originally hoped to conduct a number of surveys based on the topic of beauty bloggers and credibility that would produce quantitative data. Using a quantitative approach allows for more static results and also allows for regularities to be uncovered and for recurring themes to be identified (Bryman et al, 2011). This method provides for more control over how research is returned as unlike a qualitative approach no respondents would stray from questions asked (Bryman et al, 2011). The nature of a quantitative method allows for no influence from the researcher as there is no conversation occurring between both parties, this ensuring that the objectivity of the study will not be compromised (Bryman et al, 2011). It was understood that a quantitative method of research would give

a reliable result unlike a qualitative approach. However, it became apparent at an early stage in the methodology design that a quantitative approach would not suit this particular study as there is little prior research available on the chosen area and that little or no data would be available for comparison. While a quantitative approach would yield reliable data, it would not provide scope for interaction between the researcher and the subjects and aspect which was deemed necessary for this particular study as it aimed to gain insights into the views of two distinct groups in a relatively new area of study. Consideration of other approaches to data gathering would therefore be necessary.

Qualitative

As there has been no research carried out specifically on beauty bloggers in Ireland conducting in-depth interviews may give a deeper insight. It would allow for the exploration of key themes that both bloggers and PRs would touch on during the course of interviews and so see if the data from the interviews reflected the hypotheses tested (Saunders et al, 2012). By choosing an in-depth interview, it may allow for themes that were not seen in the research to be brought forward. However this method of research would not give a desired level of control with a risk of themes not being addressed by the participants (Bryman et al, 2011). It was accepted that with this method being carried out that participants would give an honest response (Saunders et al, 2012). Even though an honest response is desired there is a worry that those involved would be impressed by the interview (Bryman et al, 2011). The lack of transparency around the manner in which the data is analysed could also be of concern (Bryman et al, 2011). Qualitative research can be unstructured in nature meaning that it can be time consuming to analyse and that unnecessary data with no relevance to the study can be collected. Therefore, this method will not be used as a method of conducting the research. As there was no prior research carried out in the area it was felt that an overview of collected findings would suit the research question as it stands while this method may be considered for future research on areas related to the topic.

Mixed Research Methods

This method allows for the integration of qualitative and quantitative methods (Bryman, 2011). Bryman et al, 2011, have suggested that a triangulation strategy gives hypotheses further definition based on what the findings suggest. This is so because more than one tool was used allowing for overlap to occur giving results more depth taking account of both the “numbers” and “word” approach from both quantitative and qualitative methods (Saunders et al, 2012). As there was not ample time to fully implement this method and due to financial constraints this method was not used. However this method may be used in future research to allow for a more in-depth response and deeper understanding on the research question.

E-Research Methods

This is a relatively new form of research which has only been used by researchers in recent years (Bryman et al, 2011). This method is beneficial as research data can be gathered from websites, chatrooms, social media/networking sites, email and online forms. There are a number of other benefits to this approach also as distance and limitations to size of sample are not issues and the speed with which the data would be collected is increased in comparison to traditional methods (Bryman et al, 2011). Due to the nature of the research area it seemed appropriate to implement this method as it allowed connecting with bloggers in their own environment.

Conclusion of methods

Having reviewed the various research methods available, it was concluded that an E-Research approach better suited this particular research study. This was chosen as it allowed direct access to the sample, which helped in determining the samples. One of the main reasons for this choice was due to the fact that bloggers are not based in a central location. Conducting E-Research therefore allowed the research to contact a number of bloggers whom the researcher would not have been able to get in contact with without using this method. Bloggers and PRs

where posed questions that derived from the hypotheses and these were asked via Email.

4.4 Overview of different Methods of Sampling and Sample

Probability Vs. Non-Probability Sampling

Probability sampling is where “the chance, or probability, of each case being selected from the population is known and not zero” (Saunders et al, 2012). This means that there is equal chance for each blogger to be chosen to partake in this research. With this method there is a possibility of approaching a blogger who is inactive, which may alter the results of this study as the sample of bloggers need to blog regularly in order to give a clear insight into what is occurring at this moment in time in relation to the research question. Therefore, the risk of this occurring is too great. As a result this method of sampling will not be used in the study.

Non-Probability is a “selection of sampling techniques in which the chance or probability of each case being selected is not known” (Saunders et al, 2012). In this instance, potential individuals are not aware of the research that is being carried out, nor do they have equal opportunity to partake in the sample. Based on this, there are four different possible types of sampling that can be used: purposive, volunteer, haphazard and quota sampling (Saunders et al, 2012). Because of the specific research question and the chosen sample of groups this method will not be used as the research is to be conducted with specific groups.

Judgmental sampling

Due to the nature of the size of the sample, judgmental sampling, or, as it is also known, self-selection sampling, will be used. This gives added benefit to the research when selecting bloggers and PRs. The researcher will be able to invite active Irish beauty bloggers to partake in the study along with PRs who deal with Irish beauty bloggers (Saunders et al, 2012). From observing the regularity with which bloggers publish posts, the researcher will be able to choose relevant bloggers to partake in the study. The bloggers that were invited to partake in the

research were chosen based on the length of time they have been blogging and the amount of GFC (Google Friend Followers) they had. This allowed for a comprehensive view into the Irish beauty blogger environment. Furthermore, it ensured that the study was not focused exclusively on high profile bloggers but a cross-section of all bloggers (Saunders et al, 2012). As the researcher is a blogger, she was able to determine which PRs dealt with Irish beauty bloggers. This ensured that PRs who did not deal with Irish beauty bloggers would not be included. As a result, the researcher was then able to invite relevant PRs to partake in the research.

The Sample

In total seven bloggers were invited to partake via email that was sent out on 5 August 2013. Nine PRs were asked to join the study via email which was sent out on the same day. A reminder email was sent to both individuals who failed to respond to the original email on the 19 August 2013.

Six out of the seven bloggers invited agreed to partake in the study. However, only seven out of the nine PRs responded to the email, two of whom declined to participate in the research.

Once a participant of the study agreed to partake, an email was sent with a list of questions relating to the hypotheses. The bloggers responded to the questions within twenty-four hours. PRs on the other hand were slower to respond, even when a reminder e-mail was sent. A further reminder email was sent to those who had yet to respond on 25 August 2013. Only one out of the two responded with relevant data to the email while the second PR failed to respond.

4.5 Data Analysis

Data was collected via email. Each question asked to both groups was compiled under each hypothesis. As participants responded by email it was difficult to analyse how the respondents reacted to a question. However, the researcher was

able to see if a participant had attempted to avoid a question. The researcher was able to see if both groups agreed or disagreed with the hypotheses over all and was able to outline how many disagreed and why. The manner in which the questions were posed required the respondents to provide detailed answers thus allowing for substantial themes to be established. As the questions were administered to two groups, the findings from both groups were cross-referenced to see if there were any similarities between the groups in their responses. This helped provide a sound basis for findings.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

As such a research topic is highly sensitive, it was deemed necessary that full anonymity and confidentiality would be given to all participants (Bryman et al, 2011). As a result, the participants were informed that the data gathered would be confidential and that their identity would be protected in order to protect their privacy. Due to this, the data received from each individual is referred to by their group and the number assigned to them as a member of the group. The numbering was applied as follows, Blogger 1, Blogger 2, PRs 1, PRs2 and so on. It was felt that by implementing this that it would allow participants to respond to the questions with confidence and that they would not hide anything.

4.7 Limitations

This is a relatively new area of study and no prior research has been carried out on this topic in Ireland. A series of questions were developed that reflected gaps found in the secondary research. A mixed-methods approach is ideal for this particular research. However, due to the time frame that was given to writing this dissertation, using a mixed-methods approach was not feasible. The main benefit to this approach is that it would allow for face-to-face meetings where respondents' true feelings towards questions could be analysed on a deeper level.

Due to the timeframe and the need to analyse data, there was insufficient time to replace those who failed to respond to the invitation to participate. As the number of participants in each group varied, it is felt that data gathered may not be conclusive.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter set about exploring a variety of potential research philosophies for this study and concluded that a positivism philosophy would best suit the research. This allowed for experimental research to be conducted as the hypotheses were derived from the secondary research. An overview was provided of the different methods that could be implemented. It was found that E-Research best suited the study as it would allow for greater access to potential participants in the research. Judgmental sampling was chosen as it was deemed the most appropriate as there was a risk that the bloggers and PRs who would have been invited to partake in the research may have been inactive in the industry for some time. The data analysis was then discussed. It explained how the data for this dissertation was gathered. Ethical considerations were explored and it discussed why anonymity was vital for participants in this study. Limitations of this study were addressed.

5. Analysis of Findings and Discussion

As outlined in the methodology, two groups were asked to partake in the study. From this two sets of findings have been created. Once the findings for each

hypothesis are outlined, comparisons will be drawn and the possibility of common themes between the groups explored.

5.1 Analysis of Blogger Findings

It is necessary to outline that those questioned have relationships with PRs and do on occasion receive samples from PRs. The bloggers confirmed this in the data that the research had gathered.

H1

There is a predisposition for Irish beauty bloggers not to be transparent in their blogs when writing beauty product reviews.

The main hypothesis comprised of three questions which were posed to bloggers who partook in this survey.

Do you feel there is a need/pressure to state where or from whom you received the product? (i.e, from a PR/ store bought)

Is the practice of disclosing if a product was sent from a PR more widespread?

Does it frustrate you when fellow bloggers do not state where they received their products from?

Two out of the six questioned felt that there was a need or felt pressured to disclose if a PR sent a product to him/her. One noted there was pressure from his/her blogging peers “certain pressure but it wouldn’t be from normal blog readers, more from among the blogger community”. Others felt that it was “good practice to say where you got the product”. With the popularity of Irish beauty bloggers on the increase, out of those asked if product disclosure had risen, the majority felt that there has been an increase. However, none were confident to say that the practice of disclosure had increased: “Yes I think it is with more people/bloggers giving out about it”. One was adamant that the practice of non disclosure was still a regular occurrence among Irish beauty

bloggers: “No, unfortunately a majority of people don’t disclose the source of their products.” Lastly, bloggers do feel frustrated with other bloggers who do not disclose the true nature of a product: “To a certain extent, yes. Generally, I am aware of which products are PR samples because I have the same contacts ... it’s frustrating to know that they may be mislead [readers] by other bloggers which often end up tarring us all with the same brush.” The data found a number of bloggers are transparent with their readers. However, the majority of bloggers may not disclose the nature of a product. Bloggers then suggested that by doing this, it might mislead readers.

This hypothesis was found to be inconclusive.

H2

Irish beauty bloggers are being approached to partake in stealth marketing campaigns.

One question was developed from this hypothesis

Have you ever been approached by a PR to not state that the product was a sample and to write a favorable review? Have you heard of this happening?

One blogger out of six was approached to partake in a stealth marketing approach. However, others have heard of this occurring and were aware of the practice. One blogger provided this example: “It has not happened to me. But there has been stuff, like on twitter the other week, there was this scandal about people being paid to review things but not say that they have been paid to review”. It is clear that bloggers have an understanding that the practice of stealth marketing does occur.

This hypothesis was proved.

H3

Irish beauty bloggers are writing positive reviews to ensure a positive relationship with PRs.

Three questions were developed from this hypothesis.

Do you feel there is pressure for you to review a product in a rushed manner knowing that you may not have a good grasp on the product for writing that review? Mainly in order to maintain the relationship you have with the PR

If you found a product to be poor would you still give it a favorable review? To keep the relationship you have with your PR?

Do you feel pressured to write positive/rushed reviews? In order to keep a positive relationship with your PR

One out of six mentioned a pressure to write rushed reviews not giving enough time to review a product accurately, saying that “I didn’t review a product I received and I was getting emails asking me to put it up”. Another blogger said that some PRs have “put a certain pressure on you”. None out of the six had written a dishonest review in order to maintain a relationship with a PR. What arose from question 7 was that honesty was of the utmost importance to the group overall and that they would not write a favorable review of a product that was poor. None felt a pressure to write a favorable review in order to maintain a relationship with a PR “No, I think it’s important to give a proper review”

This hypothesis was disproved.

H4

Irish beauty bloggers are propelled to be transparent in their writings of product reviews.

One question was derived from the above hypothesis.

Do you think bloggers should be explicit about their relationships with companies/PRs especially where reviews are glowingly positive?

Five out of six felt that bloggers should state the nature of a product in their posts: “I feel that a blogger should always state if they got the product for free, its just good manners!” The blogger who disagreed attempted to mislead the researcher by addressing another issue that Irish beauty bloggers are concerned with.

For the majority of bloggers, transparency when writing product reviews was important to them “I feel that a blogger should always state if they got the product for free, its just good manners” and that “it’s kinda good practice to say where you got the product”. However, one failed to answer to a question posed which suggested that that individual is not transparent to his/her readers. One also suggested at the possibility of legislation: “I think there will be a lot of legislation coming in due to miss information and free advertisement”.

This hypothesis was proved.

5.2 Analysis of PR Findings

Before the main questions were asked it was vital that there was evidence that the PRs who partook in this study did deal with Irish beauty bloggers to promote products. They all answered yes.

H1

The use of Irish beauty bloggers is an effective way of creating awareness.

The following question was derived from the above hypothesis

Do you think that using beauty bloggers is an effective way to promote a product/service beneficial?

All three PRs agreed that Irish beauty bloggers were an effective way of creating awareness. One PR outlined a benefit to using bloggers: “someone who is your

age, who is into the same thing as you, recommending a product is priceless.” This method of promotion was also viewed in this light: “what blogs give is access to a large audience within a certain type of demographic, which is really great [...] I think there is a generation out there that doesn’t buy magazines so much and they are getting all there product information online so, yeah, incredibly effective.”

This hypothesis was proved.

H2

PRs feel that Irish beauty bloggers should be transparent.

The following two questions were derived form the above hypothesis.

Do you feel that bloggers should be transparent about where they received the product?

Do you feel that there should be a law in place where bloggers must state if they purchased the product or it was received from a PR agency?

One PR out of the three felt that there was no need for Irish beauty bloggers to be transparent in their product reviews. The remaining two participants felt that bloggers should disclose if a product for review was sent to them by a PR. One gave further insight suggesting that there should be a governing body in place “so if you were agreeable about PR samples that you had a little stamp or seal of approval that says this blogger is completely transparent.” When asked if there should be a law in place, all three agreed that there shouldn’t. However, one went on to say that being transparent in reviews “should be accepted practice, I think it should be across the board, it’s the way it should be.”

Overall this hypothesis was proven.

H3

There is a predisposition for Irish beauty bloggers to write dishonest reviews in order to maintain a positive relationship with PRs.

The following questions were derived from the above hypothesis.

Do you feel there is a compulsion on the bloggers' part to write a positive review?

Have you come across a review(s) from a beauty blogger that is favorable of the product yet you feel it is a dishonest review?

Three different insights were given to the first question. One PR felt that "if they don't have something positive to say, don't write it", while another participant said "I don't think so. I think if they write a review that's not truthful you can kind of tell". The final participant felt that newer bloggers "feel that in order to remain on the sample list they need to write positive things. Yeah, look it's great for the brand, it's great for the product and brand but for the readers it's not really sustainable. A reader is not going to keep on coming back to a blog that is nothing but positive". From data collected it appears that Irish beauty bloggers do write favorable reviews. However, there is a minority of bloggers who are honest in their product reviews.

All three PRs found that bloggers did not write dishonest reviews. One PR mentioned that the practice was noticed a lot. However, what seems to be happening is that bloggers "copy and paste the press release so that they don't actually review the product". Another PR found the same practice had occurred: "I have read reviews where I know the blogger hasn't tested the product. What they are doing is almost giving the press release back to the reader. So they are not being dishonest. I know they haven't reviewed the product properly. They haven't taken the time to trial it." On the basis of bloggers re-writing press releases, this is viewed as bloggers writing dishonest reviews as they are misleading their readers.

This hypostasis was proven however.

H4

There is a greater sense of credibility for readers of blogs when Irish beauty bloggers write honest reviews from a PRs perspective.

The following question was derived from the above hypothesis.

If bloggers are more truthful in their reviews, does this create a greater credibility for the blogger and acceptance of their communication from the readers?

All PRs agreed that credibility was important. As one PR said: “I think if they are honest their readers will listen to what they say and maybe buy what they are recommending”. While it was stated by another PR “if you want a real review you are going to go to a source you can trust such as a blogger.” This finding shows that PRs feel that readers will respond to honest reviews in a more positive light.

This hypothesis was proved.

H5

PRs advocate the use of stealth marketing tools in campaigns.

This hypothesis was derived from three questions listed bellow.

Have you seen a stealth marketing approach used in the industry? If yes, would this have happened on a campaign or brand that you’ve been attached to?

What do you think of this type of approach?

Do you feel that there is pressure and fear of lack of control that drives some marketers/ PRs to write a review that would fall into the stealth-marketing category?

All PRs had seen this approach used “I would have seen things again probably, not so much recently, but in the early days”. Two out of the three had not seen the approach used on a campaign they had worked on. All PRs on a professional level agreed with the practice of stealth marketing: “I think it is something that can be seen as something quite smart”. One PR stated that the tool was used in a campaign that he/she was attached to: “it’s a good approach, there is a lot of competition out there”. One PR failed to answer the last question while one PR felt that there might be pressure from those above a PR: “if they notice they are getting a lot of negative reviews, I understand that they could feel pressure if they are reporting to someone higher than themselves”. However, one PR felt there was no pressure.

This hypothesis was proved.

5.3 Cross Reference of Blogger and PR Findings

The findings from both groups will be crossed referenced. This will allow for any similar themes to be highlighted.

The main theme that was found is that blogger disclosure should be general practice for all Irish beauty bloggers: “I firmly believe that there is a need to state where the product came from if it was a PR sample”. One PR felt that there should be a governing body which would ensure that Irish beauty bloggers disclosed the nature of a product: “I think there should be some governing body on beauty bloggers in place that has guide lines should be provided and I suppose regulations.”

Credibility of bloggers was also viewed as important to both groups. It was understood that creditability is important for blog readers. One blogger felt that, when bloggers don’t disclose the nature of a product it “is misleading to readers

and lowers the tone and credibility of the whole blog”. However, for PRs, bloggers’ disclosure is not a key necessity as it does not directly effect their work. PRs perspective the importance of blogger transparency was viewed as important for the reader “if you see a blogger who is like, I love this, I love this your kind of like why do you love everything?”

Blogger disclosure and credibility were the two main themes yielded by the data.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to determine if there is a need for Irish beauty bloggers to show full disclosure in their posts. A clear understanding of the available current research related to the research question was first established. The study then outlined what a blog is and its role. From this it was established that there was a need to understand WOM and to trace its development into eWOM. It was then established that blogs and eWOM are closely connected. Web 2.0 was found to have a key role in the development of eWOM and blogs as they are now experienced. Exploring related theory led to the understanding that the evolution of the WWW has made a significant contribution to the development of a new consumer. The arrival of the new consumer had been predicted and was realized due to the development of interconnectivity on online platforms. This consumer being the prosumer, is most commonly associated with a generation known as generation Y. Generation Y is highly connected to the online environment with a need for constant interaction with their online peers. As there has been a noted rise in the use of smartphones this generation is now connected while on the move. While this has many advantages it makes them susceptible to stealth marketing, a sub-category of guerilla marketing.

The increase in the use of blogs provided a favorable environment for the use of stealth marketing. This led to the need to explore issues that have been mentioned in previous research: credibility and trust. It was noted that bloggers in the USA were expected to state the nature of their product in reviews (.COM Disclosure, 2013).

The aims and objectives of the study were outlined. The research question: “Is there a need for Irish beauty bloggers to be transparent in their product reviews? – *A PR and Irish beauty bloggers insight*” was then established. Following this, a list of hypotheses were formed, they were derived from the literature review. This subsequently informed the questions that both sample groups were asked to answer.

Once the aims and objectives were outlined, the various methodologies were discussed in order to find the one that best suited this research. While various research philosophies were explored, it was decided that the research philosophy

would be based on positivism. Consideration was given to quantitative, qualitative and mixed study research methods. However, since this research focused on bloggers and their insights into disclosure, the method of E-Research was chosen. Different methods of choosing a sample were then discussed. Given the researchers' prior knowledge of beauty bloggers, it was found that judgmental sampling would best serve this research.

The analysis of the findings from data collected from the two sample groups was presented. The findings first explored the data from the blogger group. The results found that Irish beauty bloggers may feel pressured by PRs in order to maintain a positive relationship and as a result may not disclose the true nature of the product. It was outlined that this was true on a case-by-case basis and is therefore not applicable to all bloggers.

The data provided evidence that bloggers are approached by PRs to partake in stealth marketing; PRs are requesting bloggers not to disclose their involvement with a particular post. Only one blogger out of the sample had experienced this. However, the remaining five bloggers had heard of this practice occurring.

It was also found that, overall, bloggers were in agreement that they should be transparent when writing product reviews. Furthermore, the data revealed that credibility was highly important to bloggers. It was also evident that bloggers were aware of the importance of honest review for their readers. However, one blogger avoided the question that asked if bloggers should be transparent. This suggests that he/she may disagree with the need for full disclosure on blog posts.

An analysis of the findings based on the data collected from the PRs group found that using blogs was an effective way of creating brand/product awareness.

In general, PRs also felt that Irish beauty bloggers should be transparent. It was established, however, that a minority felt that bloggers did not necessarily have to be transparent with their readers. All PRs responded that blogger disclosure was not a concern on a professional level.

The research also revealed that there was a tendency for Irish beauty bloggers to write misleading post. However, on further investigation, it was found that this was done through bloggers regurgitating press releases.

Lastly, PRs were asked for their viewpoint on stealth marketing. It was found that they were aware of the use of this marketing tool. However, on a personal note one PR disagreed with the method but from a professional viewpoint all agreed that it was an effective tool and one PR mentioned that it had been implemented in a campaign that he/she was involved in.

The research data from both groups were then cross referenced to establish any similarities. Two themes were found to be of importance to both groups. The main theme that was established from the findings was that it should be general practice for Irish beauty bloggers to be transparent on their blog. However, it was not felt that legislation should be put in place to ensure full disclosure by all Irish beauty bloggers. It was suggested by one of the PRs that a governing body, which would provide guidelines for bloggers, should be put in place. This is similar to what the FTC have in place in the US.

The second theme that was common to both groups was that it was deemed highly important for bloggers to be credible. It was stated by one of the bloggers that a dishonest review was “misleading to readers and [that] it lowers the tone and credibility of the whole blog”. For PRs, credibility was also important. It was felt that repetitive reviews which came across as dishonest or overly positive may lead readers to question the credibility of the blog and brands associated with the blog.

7 Recommendations

As already stated, the researcher is of the view that a mixed-methods approach

would best suit a similar study in the future. This method would allow for a larger sample of both groups where in-depth interview could be carried out with a selection of participants.

It is also recommended that the readers' voice should be included in future research. Their opinion on blogger discourse would complement this study and would, for instance, provide for the triangulation of the evidence.

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Appendix 1

Questions posed to Bloggers

1. Do you work with any PR practitioners on promoting certain brands?
2. Do they supply you with free samples/ promotional products for review?
3. Do you feel there is a need/pressure to state where or from whom you received the product? (i.e, from a PR/ store bought)
4. Is the practice of disclosing if a product was sent from a PR more widespread?
5. Does it frustrate you when fellow bloggers do not state where they received their products from?
6. Do you feel there is pressure for you to review a product in a rushed manner knowing that you may not have a good grasp on the product for writing that review? Mainly in order to maintain the relationship you have with the PR
7. If you found a product to be poor would you still give it a favorable review? To keep the relationship you have with your PR?
8. Do you feel pressured to write positive/rushed reviews? In order to keep a positive relationship with your PR
9. Have you ever been approached by a PR to not state that the product was a sample and to write a favorable review? Have you heard of this happening?

10. Do you feel that PR's respond negatively to an unfavorable review or do they react in a positive manner? If you could you state an example?

11. Do you think bloggers should be explicit about their relationships with companies/PRs especially where reviews are glowingly positive?

Appendix 2

Questions posed to PR's

1. Do you use beauty bloggers in your dissemination of marketing communication for clients?
2. Do you think that using beauty bloggers is an effective way to promote a product/service beneficial?
3. Do you feel that bloggers should be transparent about where they received the product?
4. Do you feel there is a compulsion on the blogger's part to write a positive review?
5. If bloggers are more truthful of their reviews, does this create a greater credibility for the blogger and acceptance of their communication from the readers?
6. Have you come across a review(s) from a beauty blogger that is favorable of the product yet you feel it is a dishonest review?
7. Have you seen a stealth marketing approach used in the industry?
8. If yes would this have happened on a campaign or brand that you've been attached to? – What do you think of this type of approach?
9. Do you feel that there is pressure and fear of lack of control that drives some marketers/ PR's to write a review that would fall into the stealth-marketing category?

10. Do you feel that there should be a law in place where bloggers must state if they purchased the product or it was received from a PR agency?

Appendix 3

Blogger 1, data collected 05/08/13

Response to question one

Yeah but not, its all done through, kind of you receive a product to trail it, if it goes well I will wright about it if not that will be it. Like certain brands like Vichy, La Roche Posay fall under the one canopy makeup NYC that would bit it.

Response to question two

Yeah, you get provided with them, they mail them out and you know you can trial and blog. You are not really under any complement to write about them so its not 100% free advertisement.

Response to question three

Yeah, it's kinda good practices to say where you got the product. Like if you bought it yourself you don't necessarily have to disclose where you bought it. But if its given to you by a brand you should say who its from and state. Like I'm not really saying you should hashtag when you are tweeting it. I'm not saying you should hashtag a sample as long as you have outlined and made it clear that it is a sample kind of thing.

Response to question four

Sometimes it can be very misleading because some bloggers may be paid by the brand and they have received money for something and they are not telling you this sample can be very misleading as you presume they bought it themselves off their own back but that's generally not the case. It should really be stated yeah

Response to question five

Personally no, but there have been PR's that have sent me a sample and by the end of the week have been asking me when it would be up. I use three weeks minimum for skincare, makeup is something you can write about straight away if its not a foundation I'm talking like a eyeliner or something, you can talk about that after a day or two. So there can be pressure but it's really your own

prerogative. If you are going to be pressured by a PR there is not much you can do about it. You have to do it off your own back.

Response to question seven

No I think transparency is vital when it comes to blogging, I think it would be very unfair on the reader and doesn't reflect that well on the blogger, it is defiantly something I would avoid, I would rather not blog about a product than do that

Response to question eight

I tend to be quite honest if a product is not cutting the mustard. PRs tend to like the good and the bad about their products.

Response to question nine

Its not happened to me. But there has been stuff, like on twitter the other week, there was this scandal about people being paid to review things but not say that they have been paid to review. So like yeah its not to say that it has happened to me but there is a lot of it going on at the minuet.

Response to question ten

It depends on the PR. You can have negative backlash for a positive review from PRs, which I found crazy, that happened to me with art deco. No I think it depends on the brand and what you said about the product if it was a fair enough statement if the PR reacts snippy you think is this someone who is actually in it or is this an intern

Response to question eleven

Yeah I think you should sate that you have a good relationship with a brand in the past. Like if you are saying that a certain cream lets just say that Mac strobe cream and you are giving a really good review and you like the MAC stuff and you have worked with there PR, I think you should state that you know as I have said in the past I have had a good working relationship with this brand in the past it really is down to the bloggers purgative. But I think there will be a lot of legislation coming in due to miss information and free advertisement. It kind of

is the PR's it depends on all the different kind of. Some PR's are grand and then others are a bit

Blogger 2, data collected on 06/08/13

Response to question one

I do yes, certain PR.

Response to question two

Yes they do.

Response to question three

There is a certain pressure but it wouldn't be from normal blog readers more from among the blogger community.

Response to question four

Yeah because there are more bloggers, the trust seems to be gone from the community, so there is a pressure.

Response to question five

Not really, it doesn't bother me, but it would bother others not me personally.

Response to question six

Yeah well, I have to say I have worked with some PRs in the past and they put a certain pressure on you, its mainly the UK PRs they put a tremendous amount of pressure on their bloggers. The Irish PR are a total kettle of fish altogether. They understand it will take a month or more to review a certain product of skincare or you have other products that need reviewing. I do it in a queuing system.

Sometime I feel an awful lot of pressure when they are emailing you constantly.

Response to question seven

No, I have done a few bad reviews in my time!

Response to question eight

No I wouldn't totally, like if I wasn't getting on well with a product, I might say 'this person would get on better with it'. I wouldn't totally dirty my name with the PR.

Response to question nine

Yeah over in the UK it happened. I won't name the brand but it was a well known hair brand but I haven't heard of it happening in Ireland.

Response to question ten

Personally I have never had experienced. If I did a negative review had any problems with the PR but yeah I have seen it but not in Ireland again, it seems to be more different over there than here but no proper example of it though .

Response to question eleven

I don't know, no they shouldn't, they should given everyone fair treatment. Like with the whole Cocoa Brown thing, people do feel like they are cheating on Marisa if they review a different tan and they wont review a different tan I will review any tan anyway.

Blogger 3, data collected on 06/08/13

Response to question one

I don't work on a regular basis with a certain PR to promote a certain brand but I would be in more communication with one PR then another about different brands/products.

Response to question two

Occasionally, I wouldn't have as large a following on my blog compared to other bloggers so I feel like some PR's don't want to waste their time or recourses sending me freebies.

Response to question three

I feel the need to state if I got the product for free but I wouldn't say which PR sent it. If I buy the product myself I probably would name the shop just so

readers can know where to get it if they want it.

Response to question four

A little yes. I sometimes read a post and think hmm that seems like they were paid/sent that for free. Then later in a tweet or some other social media or maybe I'll see numerous posts by other bloggers on the same thing so then I gather that that first persons product was sent for free.

Response to question five

Yes. It's sort of like saying thanks to the PR when you say you received it so I find it rude. I also think its insulting to readers, the reader should know where and how they obtained the product because opinions can be swayed when something is free.

Response to question six

Sadly I do. I have gone a while where I didn't review a product I received and I was getting emails asking me to put it up.

Response to question seven

I would tell the truth but honestly if I receive a product even if I don't like it I will try pick at least one point I like and include it just so I'm not completely slandering the product!

Response to question eight

I feel a little bit of pressure but at the same time this isn't my job and I don't then anything so I will take my time, I used to not be like this but then like I said I realised that this is a hobby not a job.

Response to question nine

I haven't and I haven't heard of it but I wouldn't be surprised.

Response to question ten

I've had PR's not email me back and I feel like I've been taken off one PR's mailing list.

Response to question eleven

I feel that a blogger should always state if they got the product for free its just good manners! But I also think that no they shouldn't talk about their relationship with the PR as that is private. It's like broadcasting your contract in your regular job. A simple 'I did not pay for this I was sent it for reviewing' is all that's needed in my opinion.

Blogger 4, data collected 06/08/13**Response to question one**

Yes.

Response to question two

Yes.

Response to question three

I firmly believe that there is a need to state where the product came from if it was a PR sample. There is no pressure that I am aware of but, I think readers value the transparency.

Response to question four

No, unfortunately majorities of people don't disclose the source of their products.

Response to question five

To a certain extent yes. Generally I am aware of which products are PR samples because I have the same contacts. However, readers are less inclined to know/recognize a sample and it's frustrating to know that they may be being misled by other bloggers which often ends up tarring us all with the same brush.

Response to question six

Not at all. From the outset I ensure that a PR knows that any product samples are being sent for consideration only and are not guaranteed to get a full (or

positive!) review. I have yet to come up against a PR who doesn't respect this or who puts unrealistic time limits on a blog post.

Response to question seven

Again, not at all. I frequently write reviews that are not positive. However, I tend to consider the product objectively and try to give it a constructive review. After all, just because a product doesn't work for me, doesn't mean it won't work for other people.

Response to question eight

No. From experience, PRs appreciate being able to go back to their clients with constructive feedback, whether that be positively or negatively slanted.

Response to question nine

I can't recall an occasion that I have been asked for a favorable review but, with regards to non-disclosure, we have been asked before not to note a Sponsored Post as such (which goes against our Disclaimer) and we have promptly turned the offer down as a result. I have heard of it happening and I have also seen the same Sponsored Posts we have turned down cropping up on other blogs and not being marked as such which, again, I feel is misleading to readers and lowers the tone and credibility of the whole blog.

Response to question ten

I have never come up against a PR who has questioned an unfavorable review or been angry about it. I don't have exact examples but a recent conversation with a PR told me that she appreciates ALL reviews, so long as they are written fairly and constructively and don't slander or miss-sell the product/brand.

Response to question eleven

I think it is sufficient to denote a product as a PR sample; whether that is by putting an asterisk beside the product name or by stating "This was sent to me by X brand". The choice is up to the individual blogger and what is right for the tone of their blog. Ultimately, if everything is above board and transparent across the entire blog, readers should not have reason to question a glowingly positive

review as anything other than genuine opinion of a product that happened to be received for consideration of review.

Blogger 5, Data collected on 06/08/13

Response to question one

Yes I do, but they're always a brand that I actually love and would normally buy, or hope to buy.

Response to question two

Yes they do.

Response to question three

I feel it's very important to state if it's from PR, which I like many bloggers note with an asterisks, just to let readers know you've been provided this to review.

Response to question four

I think it is, because people are beginning to wise up and realize what is going on.

Response to question five

It only frustrates me if I know they are a definite PR sample and it isn't stated. I feel this helps the blogger be more honest, and create that trust.

Response to question six

No, I feel the importance of giving a product a proper review, to check out breakouts if it's skincare, longevity for makeup etc. I inform the PR of this and they understand usually.

Response to question seven

In a case like this I would try it on someone else. If it didn't work for me, it may work for someone else. This way the PR is still getting a review.

Response to question eight

No, I think it's important to give a proper review

Response to question nine

Whilst it has not happened to me, I have heard many unfavorable stories of brands getting bloggers to do this, and when readers find out this not only puts the blogger in a bad light, but also really lets the brand down.

Response to question ten

I would rather not say

Response to question eleven

I think the only thing that could be necessary would be to state that your opinions are absolutely true in this situation and it would be something you would buy yourself!

Blogger 6, data collected 07/08/12**Response to question one**

Yes.

Response to question two

Yes, sometimes.

Response to question three

No.

Response to question four

Yes I think it is with more people/bloggers giving out about it.

Response to question five

No not really, I don't care where they get it from as long as its an honest review.

Response to question six

No I will take my time to give an honest review and if the PR has a problem with that I will tell them why I sometimes take 1 month+ to write a review especially on skincare.

Response to question seven

No I would probably list the pros and cons or say it might suit someone else or tell the PR directly that I didn't like the product that much.

Response to question eight

Not pressured but I hate writing bad things about a product that I know a lot of work has gone into or if it's just me that doesn't like it.

Response to question nine

No and no but I'm sure it does happen.

Response to question ten

Yes I wrote a review about Stenaline I said I loved it and would travel again, I only had one tiny negative thing to say really it was just constructive criticism (kids play area was just a bit dirty) and they immediately concentrated on that tiny small thing and said they were sorry I didn't enjoy Stenaline (when I did) at the same time they didn't say 'we will pass that on thanks' I wrote loads of great positive things as I genuinely enjoyed the trip. They never contacted me again!

Response to question eleven

A bit, I can usually see through bloggers whom are sent stuff from a certain brand on a regular basis yet never have anything bad to say. That annoys me if their review is not honest and they are obviously just trying to keep in their good books!

Appendix 4

PR 1, Data collected on 05/08/13

Response to question one

Yes

Response to question two

Yes definitely

Response to question three

Not really, the bloggers seem to want to know where they got it from and always state it. But it doesn't affect us. We just want the product out there. It's more the bloggers preference than anything else.

Response to question four

A lot of them feel that if they don't have something positive to say won't write it. Which can be good for the client

Response to question five

Yes

Response to question six

Defiantly, but there are bloggers who will explain why they don't like it. Irish bloggers tend to be upfront. I have had to chase a few but found that they hated the product and there was no point in them writing a bad review. We don't want that. We understand that skincare does not suit everyone but if they outright hate the product we prefer if they don't write about it.

Response to question seven

Yes I think is savvy.

Response to question eight

It is a good approach there is a lot of completion out there.

Response to question nine

No not at all, I haven't come across any.

Response to question ten

Maybe for the readers, a lot of PRs will expect a review but there is an understanding that bloggers have other reviews to write and might not have the time. I don't think there is a need for it.

PR 2, data collected on 15/08/13**Response to question one**

Yes to both, I have a database of them, I send them press releases, samples, event invites etc.

Response to question two

Yes I think its fantastic, and becoming more viable all the time. I think what blogs give is access to a large audience within a certain type demographic, which is really great. Particularly beauty and skincare, I think when you can access your purchasers daily it's incredibly viable. I think there is a generation out there that doesn't buy magazines so much and they are getting all there product information online so yeah incredibly effective.

Response to question three:

Yes, I wish there was some sort of governing body in place where either so if you where agreeable about PR samples that you had a little stamp or seal or approval that says this blogger is completely transparent. I think they should I think for the readers, it builds trust builds credibility. When they know, first it's nice to see a blogger who received a PR sample isn't giving it a rave review I think its a trust thing. I don't think a blogger should slate a product that they have been given a sample of. I think there is a way to give a very fair appears of that may contain no negativity

Response to question four

Yes, with newer bloggers, I don't know if you can split them into armature or professions. I think newer bloggers feel that in order to remain on the sample list they need to write positive things which, its' great for the product and brand but for the readers its not really sustainable a reader is not going to keep on coming back to a blog that is nothing but positive. I think early on in their blogging career they might have to. I think it comes with time there is a lot of fairly established bloggers now that give very real product appraisals, I think part of that is why they are so successful and they just keep on getting readers.

Response to question five

I really think so, as a big blog reader myself. I think that's 100% yes, like you can go on a brand website to read the blurb about the product if you want a real review you are going to on to a source you can trust such as a blogger.

Response to question six

I have read reviews where I know the blogger hasn't tested the product what they are doing is almost giving the press release back to the reader. They are not being dishonest, I know they haven't reviewed the product properly, they haven't taken the time to trial it. Yes so I suppose not strictly but I have seen products that are slightly dishonest.

Response to question seven

I would have seen things again properly not so much recently but in the early days, where brands where moving into online marking where brands where brands where commenting on posts. Commenting on sites and thing. That would be it really. Smart bloggers are doing very obvious things like sponsored posts and they are making that clear, so apart from brands commenting on thing unless its really good stealth marking I am not particular aware of it

Response to question eight:

In some way I think it's something that can be seen as quite smart. It's something that sits morally wrong with me. I just believe that if your product is really good it will grow its self it will become really popular. Because I genuinely believe in so many of the products that I look after I don't worry and the brands would be the same.

Response to question nine

I don't know, you hear stories about bloggers feeling tremendous pressure from PR's to write something as in did you get the product, did you write the review, did you like it, I would love for you to put something up on this. I suppose they do feel an element of 'god I received the product I need to pay them back in some way'. Again its something I wouldn't do, I don't think its something that's talked about a lot, again the pressure the blogger might feel from the PR, I don't know the greatest about the goes on. I have a idea that it goes on but probably very subtly. Between PR's and bloggers

Response to question:

I think it should be accepted practice, I think it should be across the board. As I have mentioned earlier I think there should be some governing body on beauty bloggers in place that has guide lines and I suppose regulations. You don't want to end up with a doctoral because blogging is such a personal thing but I mean partially for bloggers who intend to make money or gain samples in place. I would also love to see a body where I can see who is doing really well and whose not.

PR 3, data collected on: 25/08/13

Response to question one

Not for all of them, for a lot of our beauty and lifestyle brands we defiantly would, I think they are a great resource.

Response to question two

I personally do, I think its very beneficial, I think peer-to-peer is where everything is going these days rather than an advertorial or even an editorial in a newspaper or magazine rather someone who is your age who is into the same thing as you recommending a product is priceless.

Response to question three

I think they should, everyone knows that bloggers get sent free things, weather is beauty products or clothes, people just know. I don't think there is any shame in saying I was sent this, as long as they give an honest review, it's fair.

Response to question four

I don't think so. I think if they write a review that's not truthful you can kind of tell, like the way the language they use or what they say. I think if they don't like something that's fair enough. Not everyone is going to like. That's fair enough. I don't think there is a compulsion to be dishonest but you can tell if they are.

Response to question five

Absolutely, if you see a blogger who is like, I love this, I love this your kind of like why do you love everything. Like they could be like I this but this is a problem or I liked the skirt but the stitching was wrong. I think if there honest there readers will listen to what they say and maybe buy what they are recommending

Response to question six

I notice a lot, well I say a lot, a handful, I see them copy and past the press realize so they don't actually review the product.

Response to question seven

Not so much, there is a lot of paid for blog post. I noticed now, sponsored post where they get paid 100 quid to write a favorable review about something it's not really stealth because you have to be upfront about it. Its kind of like an advertorial, you don't really read it with the same mindset.... well I don't

Response to question eight

We wouldn't do any non paid stuff - I am personally not a fan, it gets you coverage but there is no weight to it, its basically copy and past what you see you can show that to your client, look we got 10 blog hits but only one actually used to product. I think fair things or fair reviews giving someone the time to actually review it and taking the good and the bad

Response to question nine

Yeah if they notice they are getting a lot of negative review they where putting out there I understand that they a are reporting higher to someone than themselves and I understand they want to do a good job but I'm sure they can see through it as well, like if there is a lot of positive reviews.

Response to question ten

I don't think there should be a law, I think a lot of bloggers are quite honest, listen I got this for free but I am going to be honest about my review. There was a thing of CH 4 about celebrities' getting free stuff, I think you can see though it, like when a celebrity tweets about it you do think that they are actually getting paid for this they don't love tea or telephones that much. I'm not sure it actually requires a law I think people are getting to know more and more free stuff. I think they should be honest about it and discourse where they got it.