Influencers and Their Audiences: Why, How and When Are Relationships Cultivated and How Does This Affect Consumption of Beauty and Fashion Products?

Natalia Kaszonyi

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By: Natalia Kaszonyi

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Signed by the final Examining Committee:

_____ Chair
     Dr. Rajshree Prakash

_____ Examiner
     Dr. Caroline Roux

_____ Examiner
     Dr. Pierre-Yann Dolbec

_____ Supervisor
     Dr. Zeynep Arsel

Approved by   _____

                    Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

_____ 2017   _____
                                    Dean of Faculty

ABSTRACT

Influencers and Their Audiences: Why, How and When Are Relationships Cultivated and How Does This Affect Consumption of Beauty and Fashion Products?

Natalia Kaszonyi

This thesis studies relationships between fashion, beauty and lifestyle vloggers or bloggers and their followers. I clarify what types of relationships exist between these types of influencers and followers, why people follow vlogs and blogs, the way these relationships are cultivated by the influencers, and how they affect purchasing behavior. The study is conducted through analysis of popular YouTube videos as well as in depth interviews with followers. The findings show that individuals often form what is called a *best friendship* by Banister and Cocker (2014) with influencers. The influencers cultivate these relationships by appearing ordinary while still showcasing expertise at the same time. The study also finds that individuals choose their favorites according to three criteria: similarity, authenticity and expertise. Furthermore, the study finds that individuals follow blogs and vlogs for three reasons: information, inspiration and entertainment and that while vlogs and blogs function as hooks for purchasing products within fashion and beauty, consumers prefer to have more sources of information when making a purchase decision.

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1. INTRODUCTION

"Welcome to the new influencers: digital natives who post, snap and tweet to their hundreds of thousands or even millions of followers — who then rush out and buy the products they recommend. Gone are the days when women took their beauty tips mainly from fashion and beauty magazines. In the digital age, those titles — and their editors — are quickly becoming almost irrelevant, not only to consumers but to the brands themselves." (Strugatz, LA times, 2016)

Word of mouth as a concept by itself is not a new topic, it already gained popularity in marketing in the 1950s when Katz and Lazarsfeld developed the two-step flow model (see Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955). This model explains how influence travels, and considers the fact that individuals might be influenced more by other individuals, than they are by traditional media sources (Watts and Dodds 2007). Research on word of mouth marketing, however, is still fairly new, and a lot of the mechanics are still unclear for scholars (Kozinets, De Valck, Wojnicki and Wilner 2010). Word of mouth, which refers to communication about products, brands and companies between consumers (Babić Rosario, Sotgiu, De Valck and Bijmolt 2016), has been studied for decades, however, the internet has been a game changer. It has affected how individuals communicate with each other about products (Gu, Park and Konana 2012), the number of individuals that can be influenced by a person (Lyons and Henderson, 2005), and how far reaching the information provided by consumers can be (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Social Media has further had a huge impact on the way individuals communicate with others, both with people they know offline, as well as with people they only know online. New forums, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat and individual blogs have surfaced, which has allowed people to communicate in an entirely new way. The most popular of forums, Facebook had over 1.8 billion users as of January 2017 (Statista 2017a), while YouTube had 170 million users in 2015 and is estimated to grow with close to 200 million users by 2019 (Statista 2016). Many other social media platforms have millions of followers as well (Statista 2017a). These new forums have led to a new group of influencers being born; bloggers and vloggers.

Bloggers and vloggers are a new group of people who influence people's opinions online. As "The notion of what constitutes a celebrity continues to expand" (Banister & Cocker 2014,

p.1), these influencers can be viewed as modern day celebrities. They have a big impact on individuals as they continue to share intimate parts of their lives with their followers. Evidence shows that when celebrities share intimate details of their lives (see Kowalczyk and Pounders 2016), it leads to a greater perception of authenticity and emotional attachment. This allows word of mouth to generate greater purchase intention.

This current study focuses specifically on fashion, beauty and lifestyle blogging and vlogging. Viewership of beauty related content on YouTube is growing fast: in March 2015 beauty-related videos had been viewed 1.6 billion times, while this number had grown to 5 billion in June 2016 (Statista 2017b), which makes it a very relevant topic to study. What also make beauty influencers interesting is the fact that only 2,5% of the buzz and conversations relating to beauty related content on YouTube is created by the brands themselves, while the influencers stand for the rest (Statista 2017b). Beauty often goes hand in hand with fashion and lifestyle as well. These types of influencers often do both fashion hauls, makeup tutorials, as well as lifestyle related topics such as favorite restaurants, trips and everyday life. This is why they all need to be included. While some beauty or fashion influencers do talk almost purely about beauty or fashion (see for instance Tati or Lisa Eldridge), most mix elements from their personal lives as well. Many of popular influencers (see for instance Zoella or Tanya Burr) mix all three, and cannot be defined as only one type of influencer. Fashion and beauty blogging and vlogging has grown enormously within the last decade, and led to significant changes for the entire beauty and fashion industries with the most famous beauty and style influencer having over 17 million subscribers as of February this year (Statista 2017b). Dolbec and Fischer (2015) argue that highly engaged consumers can change markets in a way that allows new groups of actors to take part in activities that are central for the industry as well as push existing boundaries. They study the fashion industry but argue that this could also be applicable to other similar markets. Beauty and fashion are often intertwined in the world of blogging and vlogging, and similar kind of changes can be seen within the beauty industry as my opening quote showed.

This study has three goals; first, it aims to clarify why and how people follow fashion, beauty and lifestyle blogs and vlogs, what draws people to a certain influencer and what kind of relationships are formed between audiences and their favorite influencer. Second, this study aims to clarify the role that blogs and vlogs have in the world of product recommendations, acceptance of sponsored reviews, and trust in product reviews. Third, it aims to clarify how

influencers communicate with their audience in order to involve them into creating a relationship between the audience members and the influencer.

The first part of this study is conducted through in-depth interviews with followers of beauty and fashion blogs and vlogs. The participants have been collected through snowballing, and all in all there are 15 participants, between the ages of 19 and 26. The second part consists of analyzing videos of influencers that have been identified through the interviews. The center of the analysis is how they address the viewers; language, humor and different methods they use in order to involve their audiences. While many influencers have multiple channels including blogs and vlogs, I have chosen to look at only vlogs for two reasons. First, the verbal elements between blogs and vlogs are similar (See Trammell & Keshelashvili 2005, Tolson 2010, Frobenius 2015). Second, videos have an added quality because of the use of nonverbal communication as well. Vlogs are also more popular within beauty and lifestyle than blogs.

My thesis has multiple findings. First, the data shows that audiences form relationships with influencers that are similar to those formed with other types of celebrities. Second, influencers cultivate these relationships by appearing to be experts while being ordinary at the same time as well as by involving the audience and encouraging participation. This replicates findings by Frobenius (2014) and Tolson (2010). My data shows that this is an effective strategy because audiences form meaningful relationships with influencers when they perceive the influencer as being similar, authentic and an expert.

Second, the data shows three reasons for why consumers follow blogs and vlogs. These reasons are information, inspiration and entertainment. The data also shows that even when consumers run out of reasons to follow blogs and vlogs they often continue doing so out of habit.

The findings also help explain the role of blogs and vlogs in consumption of beauty and fashion. They usually work as inspiration for consumption of fashion and bring awareness to beauty products. Even though consumers trust influencers, they still need multiple sources of recommendations in order to purchase a product. While previous research has shown (see Kozinets et al. 2010) that sponsorship of bloggers might be acceptable when conditions are right, my research shows that it is indeed acceptable in beauty, fashion and lifestyle blogs and vlogs, as long as the influencers are honest about it. The data also shows that product failure is rarely blamed on the influencer, instead audiences shift the blame on themselves because they trust the influencer. Multiple bad experiences can however lead to reduced purchasing, this can also

happen if a consumer has simply bought enough products or if they don't watch as many videos anymore.

My thesis helps explain the relationship that exists between followers and influencers with the help of existing celebrity literature. My study replicates that of Frobenius (2014) and Tolson (2010) in terms of how vloggers cultivate relationships through communication but extends the literature by identifying how audiences respond to the communication. It also clarifies the role of blogs and vlogs in consumption of beauty and fashion and shows that sponsorship is widely accepted within beauty and fashion blogging and vlogging. The study focuses, however, only on favorite influencers and does not take into account other types of influencers that audiences might follow, which might have provided us with further information on how and why vlogs and blogs are followed, the relationships that are formed and purchasing behavior. The sampling was done through snowballing and might not represent all types of audiences. I also only collected data from vlogs, but not blogs. However, previous literature shows that similar communication is used in blogs (see Trammell and Keshelashvili, 2005).

This dissertation has five sections. Section 2 will be the literature review, section 3 will cover methodology, section 4 will look at findings and section 5 will include the discussion.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review consists of a description of opinion leadership and the two-step model of influence, followed by an investigation into how social media has affected opinion leadership. After that I discuss blogs and vlogs and look more closely at beauty, fashion and lifestyle themed blogs and vlogs.

2.1 Influencers

Traditionally influence has been seen as a pyramid, with a select few influentials at the top, while consumers, who make up the lower levels, do not influence others. This is the view often taken by marketers, which has led to the focus being on individuals at the top of the pyramid (Smith, Coyle, Lightfoot, and Scott 2007). The two-step flow model follows a similar path. According to the model, a small number of people are intermediaries between the rest of

society and mass media. These individuals are called opinion leaders (Watts and Dodds 2007). The two-step flow model was developed by Lazarsfeld and colleagues in the 1940s and 1950s and explains how influence travels, it takes into account the fact that individuals might be influenced more by other individuals than they are by traditional media sources (Watts and Dodds 2007). Those people who exert power through authority structures and organized media are not included in the definition of opinion leaders (Watts and Dodds 2007). Because of word of mouth, marketing messages do not only flow from marketer to consumer, but also amongst consumers (Kozinets et al. 2010). From a marketer's point of view an opinion leader has three important roles: first of all s/he communicates the marketing message to others, second the message may be received better because of the opinion leader's reputation and deemed trustworthiness and third the opinion leader converts the message to a form that is accepted by the community or audience (Kozinets et al. 2010). Opinion leaders have been shown to affect others' consumption behaviors, such as seeking information about products, as well as buying or using products (Lyons and Henderson 2005).

Traditional models underestimate the power of ordinary people by focusing only on a few individuals as opinion leaders (Smith et al 2007). This might mainly be due to the fact that the Internet has changed the marketplace so profoundly. Traditionally, opinion leaders were individuals who could influence other individuals in their close circle (Watts and Dodds 2007). While traditional opinion leaders could only influence up to twelve people at most, the Internet has provided opinion leaders with the chance of influencing an unlimited amount of people (Lyons and Henderson 2005). While it used to be restricted only to a limited few, the Internet has given ordinary people a greater chance to be visible in media (McQuarrie, Miller, and Phillips 2013). The two-step flow model does not offer a precise explanation of how exactly opinion leaders exert the influence that helps shape trends and opinions within communities, and the role of opinion leaders is in diffusion processes is still somewhat unclear (Watts and Dodds 2007). The study conducted by Watts and Dodds (2007) shows that under certain conditions opinion leaders will be more influential than in other conditions, however these may not be as common as is traditionally thought. Research on innovation shows that while opinion leaders are actually not required in order for diffusion to happen, they might still have an important role in practice. However, this points to a gap in literature, as it is unclear when they are important (Watts and Dodds 2007). Instead of certain individuals having a massive amount of influence, regular

individuals influence other individuals that are receptive to it, so in fact waves happen because of a large mass of people, not because of a few special individuals (Watts and Dodds 2007). Research by Smith et al (2007) shows that the pyramid model does not work and it, in fact, is the large masses who have the biggest potential for influencing others. There are however differing views on the topic of opinion leaders, as some researchers still place great value on them. For instance, according to research conducted by Cheong and Morrison (2008) it might be beneficial for companies to try to influence opinion leaders who in turn will influence other consumers, they also suggest that positive advertisement targeted at opinion leaders can help fight bad word of mouth. This study aims to clarify the role of bloggers and vloggers as influencers within the fashion and beauty industry.

2.2 Word-Of-Mouth and Social Media

"In marketing, word of mouth (WOM) is the act of consumers providing information about goods, services, brands, or companies to other consumers." (Babić Rosario et al. 2016 p. 297). Word of mouth can display itself in many forms, such as reviews, blog posts and images (Babić Rosario et al. 2016).

Because of word of mouth, marketing messages do not only flow from marketer to consumer, but also amongst consumers (Kozinets et al. 2010). Since it is so easy to access word of mouth these days, and consumers are motivated to look for this information, it is of great importance that companies take word of mouth into consideration (Gu et al. 2012). Word of mouth can play many different roles, it can facilitate adoption of novelties, direct consumer behavior and make people become more aware of a certain product. Word of mouth can also be used as an indicator for businesses in knowing whether their product is a success or not (Godes and Mayzlin 2004).

The Internet has given individuals the chance to look for information and advice from individuals that they normally would never have a chance to meet in reality (Cheong and Morrison 2008). As more and more people write online about products and brands, managers have come to realize the importance of learning how this affects their businesses and of how they can use word of mouth to their advantage (Cheong and Morrison 2008). Because traditional advertising is expensive, while word of mouth is often free, it is lucrative for companies to focus

on achieving good word of mouth, especially when introducing a new product (Onishi and Manchanda 2012).

Consumers view both negative and positive word of mouth as reliable information as they believe that other consumers will provide a more complete picture and as they place value on other consumers' experiences (Cheong and Morrison 2008). The main reason, according to research, why consumers look for other consumers' opinions online is to reduce risk and make optimal choices (Babić Rosario et al. 2016). Research has shown that word of mouth is an important part of the purchase process when a product involves high involvement from the consumer (Gu et al. 2012). The advantages of word of mouth that exists on web-pages that aren't connected to the company, such as objectivity, better reputation and more information, make them popular amongst consumers (Gu et al. 2012).

Social media communications have impacted consumer behavior in a multitude of ways. They have shaped consumer awareness, how consumers search for and acquire information and make purchase decisions, as they continuously affect formation of opinions and attitudes as well as post-purchase emotions (Mangold and Faulds 2009). The Internet has given individuals the chance to look for information and advice from individuals that they normally would never have a chance to meet in reality (Cheong and Morrison 2008).There are many modern day examples showing the huge impact that consumer to consumer communication can have with the help of social media, because while the amount of people that could be influenced by a person used to be extremely limited, these limits have basically disappeared because of social media (Mangold and Faulds 2009).

As more and more people write online about products and brands, managers have come to realize the importance of learning how this affects their businesses and of how they can use word of mouth to their advantage (Cheong and Morrison 2008). Babić Rosario et al. 2016 find in their research that a positive relationship exists between electronic word of mouth and sales. However, researchers disagree on, for example, what is the most important aspect (such as volume or valence) of word of mouth (Babić Rosario et al. 2016).

The advantages of word of mouth that exists on web pages that aren't connected to the company, such as objectivity, better reputation and more information, make them popular amongst consumers (Gu et al. 2012). Social media has greatly changed companies' abilities to control consumers and has impacted what kind of communication strategies will work on them

(Mangold and Faulds 2009). Consumers tend to judge the information provided by other consumers as more reliable than information coming directly from the business (Cheong and Morrison 2008). Consumers view both negative and positive word of mouth as reliable information, as they believe that other consumers will provide a more complete picture and as they place value on other consumers' experiences (Cheong and Morrison 2008). Many scholars have recognized the importance of consumers influencing each other and agree that it might be even more important than marketing efforts driven by companies themselves (Kozinets et al. 2010). Consumers place great importance on the sender of the word of mouth message as this helps them decide whether the information is relevant and reliable (Babić Rosario et al. 2016).

Social media has led to consumers not being as accepting about traditional advertising, as they can look for information in alternative places (Mangold and Faulds 2009). In word of mouth marketing, marketers use interaction between consumers to their advantage by influencing consumers (Kozinets et al. 2010). Marketers have to find and connect with the right influentials in order to encourage word of mouth (Smith et al. 2007). Consumers will often search for information from a multitude of sources before approaching the retailer and have often already made up their minds before getting information directly from the retailer (Gu et al. 2012). Word of mouth marketing might be more complex than other forms of paid promotion, because it has elements that are unique and less contained than other forms (Kozinets et al. 2016).

This study aims to clarify what role blogs and vlogs play in the realm of social media and word of mouth and how this affects consumers.

2.3 Blogs and Vlogs

Blogs are websites that include items such as text, photos, links and comments and usually have a specific theme, which can basically be anything (Droge, Stanko and Pollitte 2010). One form of blogging are video blogs, or so called vlogs, where individuals film themselves talking to the camera and upload the videos on channels such as YouTube in order to be viewed by others (Frobenius 2014).

Blogs are interesting from a researcher's point of view in the way that they allow us to observe how individuals use technology in order to communicate with others (Gurak and Antonijevic 2008) and from a marketer's point of view as they can be used as an effective

marketing tool (Morimoto and Trimble 2012). They have three central components, the first component is the original material called posts, the second component is links to other webpages, the third component is a comment section where readers of the blog can participate (Droge et al. 2010) and are organized in a reversed chronological order (Gurak and Antonijevic 2008). Blogs can provide its readers as well as its author with information, entertainment and a platform for expression (Droge et al. 2010).

In recent years blogging has solidified its place as an important platform for word of mouth (Onishi and Manchanda 2012). The influencers and their audience create a virtual community between people who would never meet otherwise (Droge et al. 2010, Gurak and Antonijevic 2008). Blogs and their communities form a new type of market segment, and are important for marketers especially when they grow in readership. They can also be seen as a reference group, as they have the power to share information, reward (and punish) and express meanings (Droge et al. 2010). Blogs are not expected to be objective in the same way as other sources of information and opinion sharing is welcomed (Johnson and Kaye 2004).

In regard to brands and products, influencers gain their audience through publicly sharing their consumption of products online (McQuarrie et al. 2013). Research conducted by Johnson and Kaye (2004) shows that a majority of people see blogs as being at least moderately credible as well as more credible than information gained from more traditional sources of media. Readers of the blog also have an important role, as they can sometimes introduce novel ideas as well as provide entertainment (Droge et al. 2010). Blogs are also powerful in that they have no borders in the traditional sense, the information can reach anyone anywhere (Droge et al. 2010). This is of great importance as blogs have the power to bring together dissatisfied customers and can so be viewed as a danger for companies as they form a more structured type of attack against companies (Droge et al. 2010).

Blogs have enabled regular people to have a voice without having to go through traditional media, and is, as such, a new channel for sharing information (Droge et al. 2010), however, at the same time, critiques of blogs see this as an issue as influencers do not necessarily have the same ethical requirements as other forms of media (Johnson and Kaye 2004). Blogs provide freedom in the sense that anyone can start their own blog as it doesn't require a lot of technical skills, they can be written by private individuals as well as by organizations (Droge et al. 2010).

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Research conducted by Morimoto and Trimble (2012) shows that purchase intent for products presented in a blog is higher when the blog is written by an individual rather than a corporation, possibly because they are seen as more neutral. As paid product endorsements on blogs become more usual, this question of neutrality becomes interesting and as such this current study will explicitly focus on private individuals who write blogs or create vlogs.

2.4 Communication Tactics that Vloggers Use

Evidence shows that an important motivation for influencers in posting videos is to communicate and form relationships with their audiences (Frobenius 2014) this is also echoed in a study conducted by Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht and Swartz (2004), where they found that an important reason for individuals to blog is to form or be part of a community. In a study Frobenius (2014) looked at the tactics that vloggers use in order to engage consumers and get them involved, such as asking consumers to comment, rate videos, and subscribe to forums. Frobenius finds that while the nature of the communication is restricted in many ways, YouTubers have been creative in making the space work for them, using different methods such as words of address, gaze and volume of voice to make clear who they are communicating with, whether it's another person in the room or old followers versus new followers and making gestures that correspond with the virtual space (such as pointing to comment box instead of a physical box), thus bringing them closer to followers. The ways in which bloggers communicate might be even more limited as they do not have the same opportunity to use their bodies to communicate as vloggers do. However, Trammell and Keshelashvili's (2005) findings echo those of Frobenius' in terms of getting audience members involved by asking them to participate, for instance through asking for their opinions.

The way vloggers communicate also makes them appear ordinary and expert at the same time (Tolson 2010), including elements of both traditional speech as well as appearing spontaneous, talking in a natural manner and bringing forth their commonality which he argues might make them seem more authentic. Trammell and Keshelashvili (2005) also find that A-list bloggers tend to use tactics that make them seem ordinary, while still appearing to be competent at the same time.

2.5 Beauty and Fashion Blogging and Vlogging

Beauty, fashion and lifestyle blogging and vlogging has become a big phenomenon in the last decade and continues to experience huge growth (Statista 2017b). While viewership of beauty related content keeps growing, brands' share of voice on YouTube keeps shrinking, only amounting to 2,5% in June 2016 (Statista 2017b). Share of voice refers to buzz and conversations generated by content on YouTube. Popular beauty and fashion influencers reach audiences in millions, for instance Zoella has over 11 million subscribers. Companies also invest large sums of money in order to advertise through beauty and fashion influencers. All these aspects make beauty and fashion v/blogging an important and relevant topic to study, not the least because there is a lot that is still unknown. While v/blogging has been studied to some degree, very little is known about beauty and fashion v/blogging, what kind of relationships these influencers form with their audiences and how this affects consumers' purchasing behavior. This study aims to clarify the role of beauty and fashion influencers in terms of how audience members relate to them what their part is in purchase decisions relating to fashion and beauty.

2.6 Followers and their Relationships to Beauty, Fashion and Lifestyle Influencers

While research on relationships between beauty, fashion and lifestyle influencers and consumers is a new topic, relationships between celebrities and their followers has been studied before. Banister and Cocker (2014) identify nine different types of relationships, both positive and negative, between celebrities and followers. Since beauty, fashion and lifestyle influencers can be seen as a new type of celebrity, these nine types of relationships will be compared to the relationships that are formed between audience members and influencers.

3. METHODOLOGY

Data collection consisted of 15 in-depth interviews with fans of beauty, fashion and/or lifestyle blogs and vlogs. Each interview lasted between twenty-seven minutes and two hours thirty-seven minutes, and were conducted in a semi structured format. Total duration of the

interviews was twenty hours and two minutes. Conducting semi structured interviews can be motivated by the fact that it allows flexibility, and so allows the interviewer to ask more questions when something novel and central to the topic comes up in the interview (Berg and Lune 2012, p. 110). Interview questions started by more general demographic questions, followed by general vlog and blog following habit questions, to more specific questions about favorite bloggers and vloggers as well as consumption habits. The questions were designed according to guidelines in Berg and Lune, 2012, avoiding affectively worded questions, double-barreled questions and complex questions. The questions were also pretested to make sure that they were understood and appropriate. The participants were identified through snowball sampling, this method is suitable when looking for participants who have a specific characteristic (Berg and Lune p.52). In this study, all the participants had to be active followers of beauty and fashion blogs or vlogs, which makes snowball sampling a suitable method.

Since vlogging and blogging is an international phenomenon it was suitable to include participants from multiple countries. The participants were located in Canada, Norway, Finland, UK, the Netherlands and France. All participants were female, due to the female oriented nature of the study, the age ranged between 19 and 26 and the participants had different educational backgrounds, ranging from vocational education to university degrees. Four out of the 15 participants were still students, while the rest were working full time. All participants were watching vlogs or reading blogs at least once a week, with a majority of them engaging in these activities multiple times per week. All participants had to be active followers of blogs and/ or vlogs and had reached the age of majority, there was no other exclusion criteria. Participants were given a 30-dollar gift card as compensation for their participation.

Participant	Age	How long been following	How often reads blogs or watches videos	Time spent in one sitting
Eve	24	7-8 years	Every day	Up to 30 minutes
Julie	26	7-8 years	Every day	2 hours
Mary	25	5-6 years	1-2 times/week	up to 4 hours
Norah	24	8years	Every day	30 minutes-hour
Jenny	25	8 years	Every day	30 minutes-hour
Anna	25	8 years	2-3 times/ week	5-10 minutes
Susie	25	10 years	Every day	15-40 minutes
Tina	25	5-6 years	Every day	up to 4 hours
Lisa	25	8 years	3 times/ week	30 minutes
Joanne	25	4-5 years	Every day if not busy (otherwise rarely)	Depends how busy
Patricia	25	8-9 years	Everyday	At least 30 minutes
Sarah	24	11 years	Everyday	Up to 2 hours
Diane	25	4 years	Everyday	at least 15-20 minutes
Claire	19	5 years	Everyday	Up to 2 hours
Christine	24	3 or 4 years	Once a week	1-2 hours

TABLE 1: Participants' following habits

The second part of data collection consisted of analyzing videos of popular beauty, fashion and/ or lifestyle vloggers. These vloggers were identified through the in-depth interviews. They consisted of those vloggers that participants mentioned as their favorite. If the participant mentioned more than one vlogger, the one that was mentioned most was chosen. Not all participants had a favorite vlogger, and those vloggers who vlog in another language than

English were excluded. Five newest videos as well as five most popular videos were chosen per vlogger. This amounted in 90 videos from nine vloggers.

Vlogger	Age	Posting on YouTube since	Number of subscribers
Tanya Burr	28	2009	3.6M
Jaclyn Hill	27	2011	4.4M
Tati	35	2011	3M
Lisa Eldridge	43	2009	1.6M
Kenza Zouiten	26	2013	154K
Negin Mirsalehi	28	2016	183K
Zoella	27	2009	11M
Irene Khan	30	2010	240K
Lauren Elizabeth	23	2011	1.2M

Table 2: The vloggers

Each video was carefully analyzed. I started by watching the video, pausing whenever there was something noteworthy. I noted use of language, how they addressed the audience as well as other people in the room. I also noted interruptions in their presentation and visual elements, such as background and angle. Moreover, I noted how products were presented and whether sponsorship was mentioned as well. I paid specific attention to how vloggers and bloggers address and communicate with their audience members. These notes resulted in 208 handwritten pages. I later compared this to previous research conducted by Tolson (2010) and Frobenius (2014). The videos included many different types, such as tutorials, hauls and daily or weekly vlogs. Blogs were not included since vlogs were deemed as having more elements of nonverbal communication and because they are not as popular within beauty and lifestyle as vlogs are.

The spiraling research approach (Berg and Lune 2012, p.25) was used in this thesis, going between the stages of theory, data collection and analysis in order to adjust questions and

analysis when needed. Each of the interviews was transcribed and thereafter coded and grouped into relevant sections and finally analyzed, looking for patterns in the data.

Proper ethical procedure was followed. Volunteers were informed of what the participation entailed before signing on. The participants were all of adult age and participated out of free will after reading and agreeing to the information and consent form. The study was approved by the ethics committee prior to any interviews being conducted. All participants were given the chance to withdraw at any given time without consequence and the participants' identities were protected by giving them pseudonyms as well as keeping all the data in a secure folder in a locked computer.

4. FINDINGS

The findings consist of three parts. The first part focuses on the relationships that are formed between influencers and audiences. This part is based on both data collected through interviews and data collected from the vlogs. This section shows methods in which influencers engage their audience and the ways in which their communication makes them seem ordinary and authentic. The second part consists of the findings from the interviews conducted with the followers of blogs and vlogs. This part gives reasons for why consumers follow blogs and vlogs. The third part also consists of findings from interviews conducted with the followers of blogs and vlogs. This part clarifies the role that blogs and vlogs have in the consumption of beauty and fashion products and discusses the perceptions on sponsorship in beauty and fashion blogs and vlogs.

4.1 How Influencers Build Relationship with Their Audience

This part describes the types of relationships that are formed between followers and influencers and how these relationships are cultivated by the influencers. The findings are that the relationship often has similarities to friendship or admiration and can be cultivated when the influencer seems ordinary and expert at the same time. The audience has to perceive the influencer as being similar, authentic, and expert in order for there to be a meaningful relationship.

4.1.1 Audience Influencer Relationships

A paper by Banister and Cocker in 2014 studies relationships that exist between consumers and celebrities. In their paper, they identify nine different types of relationships that consumers might have with celebrities. These are divided into three categories. The first category is everyday celebrity relationships: *best friendship*, that is formed with celebrities that are similar to them in, for instance, personality, appearance, background or interests; *compartmentalized*, which is a situational relationship dependent on context, and *childhood relationships*, which often evoke nostalgia and has changed shape over time. The second category is inspirational consumer-celebrity relationships: *aspirational*, in which the celebrities are something that the follower aspires to be, the celebrity has the follower's ideal lifestyle; *admiration*, in which there is perceived distance between the celebrity and their own life but there is an element of fantasy, this is similar to aspirational but more distant. A third type of this category is *illusory*, these types of relationships still have fantasy in them but can be played out partly through consumption of products which leads to having an actual relationship with the celebrities in question. The third category of types of relationships are the negative celebrity relationships: *antagonistic* relationship, in which the person has undesired similarities with a celebrity and tries to distance themselves; *'not for me'*, in which the celebrity isn't relatable and doesn't represent what the consumer wants to be, with elements of distaste and finally *guilty pleasures*, that are relationships kept in secret from others in case people will view it negatively.

Eve, Julie, Mary, Norah, Jenny, Anna, Susie, Tina, Patricia, Sarah, Diane, Claire and Christine all have best friendships with influencers. The fact that so many of these women have best friendships isn't rare considering that I studied relationships with their favorite influencers and all the participants are women. Banister and Cocker (2014) found that these types of relationships with celebrities are especially important for women. In studying traditional TV watching, Lee and Lee (1995) also found that ritualized viewing of TV shows includes feelings of friendship towards characters of the TV show as well as feelings of knowing someone really well. Because watching videos or reading posts by favorite influencers happens routinely and is almost like a ritual for many, for example after coming home after a long day at work, this could also help explain feelings of friendship and of knowing the person. The participants often explained that they liked a certain celebrity because of similar interests, relatable background, life goals and personality.

[...] I really like her way of thinking, she...she really thinks about the environment and like is animal loving and so she tries like these different kinds of vegetarian foods and like vegan stuff and she's a makeup artist so she...that's what she...she's trying to push in her work as well so I definitely think her blog is inspiring because obviously it's you know, important stuff for myself as well and she's really open about you know, her skin condition and having you know struggles with her skin and it's like something I can relate to because my skin has never been perfect [...] (Anna, interview)

I'm like a creeper who follows them and looks all their pictures and they do not know me. I kind of almost wish that there was...that I would be able to communicate with these people but at the same time it's ok that I don't, it's...it's a very funny...it's a really interesting relationship, it's almost like when you read an autobiography of someone and you feel like you got to know them and they almost feel like they became your friend because when reading or hearing about their stories you can relate and you can almost say oh my god I totally understand where you're coming from but you're not actually having that active communication so I almost wish like I could but at the same time it's not that big of a deal if I don't. It's almost... I'll just watch another video or just read it or like the exchange happens although it's like only one way verbal, it's not two way but it al...it does kind of satisfy my emotional craving if you will so if one of them is talking about a certain issue and I like what I'm hearing or like I can...I can relate then there's like a satisfying factor that comes into it even though I can't really discuss the topic with them. (Julie, interview)

Participants often compare it to something similar to friendship. They feel like these people are someone they could be friends with if they got the chance to meet them in real life and they feel like they get to take part in the influencer's life as Mary explains.

[...] like if I met them in the street I think I would like get along with them, same thing, it's crazy, cause you haven't really met them but they're just like you watch them so consistently and you like see them evolve the way that like I don't know, you would like talk to like a friend on the phone and see them evolve. (Mary, interview)

Anna, Susie, Lisa and Patricia also have childhood relationships with some influencers. These relationships are long-time relationships that have gone through big changes but still stand strong because of reluctance to let go.

> [...] I started reading it when she was like super provocative and like it was kind of like thing and then I...it just like stuck on to me because now she is more of like you know normal...normal woman so she blogs about her life, it's not that interesting to me actually but it's just more like I feel like I know her because I've been reading it for so long so that's why I read it so that's just more like knowing what she does with her life (Susie, interview)

Joanne has more of an aspirational relationship with her favorite influencers. The influencers represent the kind of person she wants to be and the lifestyle she wants to have and she wants to consume the same products that they consume.

> [...] if I go to Hawaii I would like to stay in the same hotel as them or like eat the same, in the same place as so I guess in somehow they make you trust them because I want to like go to the same places as them. (Joanne, interview)

Though not central for this study, Julie and Sarah also mention 'not for me' relationships with some influencers. These are relationships where they don't find the influencer relatable even though someone else might enjoy watching their content. They feel some level of distaste for the influencer in question.

> If I can sense that they're being genuine and that if I can sense that I find that they're actually really nice caring people, I like that. If I can't sense that then my personality doesn't really click with theirs and I don't follow them. So like Jaclyn Hill for example, she does amazing beauty, like I don't think I've seen another YouTuber do a similar job, like she's that great in...in beauty, but I just don't connect with her personality [...] (Julie, interview)

The other types of relationships, compartmentalized, admiration, illusory, antagonistic and guilty pleasures were not found in this study even though it doesn't rule out that these types of relationships also exist. This might be due to the fact that focus was on favorite influencers.

Followers of influencers also realize that there is an asymmetric quality to this relationship as well, since they know intimate information about the influencer but the influencer knows nothing about them. Even though it in some way feels similar to face to face interactions it is actually parasocial interaction (Colliander and Dahlén 2011). Even though some of those who identify the relationship as similar to friendship admit that it would be nice to meet influencer in real life communicating with the influencer online is not deemed important. Writing comments is often seen as unnecessary, lost in the masses, and direct communication might raise uncomfortable feelings because of the relationship deemed as one sided, where the influencer doesn't even know who the other person is. Communication is often also left to those fans that are obsessed with the influencer.

> [...] you see I'm awkward even just talking about it right now, I don't know I think it's maybe because they like...at the same time you're like, I don't know. As much as I can get carried away while watching the videos and...and like feel like they're my friend, I think my like reality brain sets in and then it's like, ok you're just like writing something random to like someone you don't know on YouTube [...] (Mary, interview)

In some instances, readers will lose interest in their favorite influencers, this often happens because the influencer is not deemed relatable anymore, this is in no surprise due to relatability being linked to authenticity and trust. This can be due to the influencer and follower growing in different directions, where topics that the influencer is talking about don't resonate with the audience member anymore. Alternatively, it can be due to the influencer becoming so successful that they lose their relatability, change, or don't seem inspiring anymore. In this case their success is not relatable, thus putting them closer to a traditional celebrity than a "real person". In these situations, audience members will often still continue following the influencer, but it will be more because of habit than interest or inspiration.

> I think it's...habit, I've just done it for so long, I sometimes don't even think, I just type the blog in on my browser and just do it automatically...yeah...force of habit (Lisa, interview)

This might however not happen if the audience member has another influencer that catches their interest instead, as the reader accepts that the relationship has come to an end, or if the relationship with the influencer was never that strong to start with.

[...] I got to invest in other YouTubers I like so then they started taking less of my time and then I started being involved more in others so then I feel like I'm always like keep changing unless it's someone who's really solid, like Zoella that I...or Ingrid, that I've been watching for years...the rest they keep stretching and like as soon as like they start getting big I start and then they start being a little bit more superficial I stop like I don't like their videos anymore and then I just find someone new [...] (Sarah, interview)

4.1.2 How Vloggers Cultivate Relationships

Tolson (2010) and Frobenius (2014) have both studied the manners in which vloggers communicate with their audience, taking two different perspectives. Frobenius (2014) studies how vloggers involve followers. He finds that involvement happens through asking followers to participate, making loyal followers feel like insiders, inviting new followers to become insiders, as well and using humor. He also finds that the medium used affects speech, body language and tone of voice. Tolson (2010) finds that vloggers' success lies in appearing ordinary and expert in the same time. While the way of talking is very ordinary and conversational, there is also a level of expertise, with the vlogger making a speech that switches between formal and informal, using lists of three which is a common element of political speeches, discourse markers and rhetorical questions. Together these form a person who is ordinary but also an expert. My data finds very similar methods for involving audience members and identifies expertise, similarity and authenticity as important factors for following blogs and vlogs. Similarity and authenticity are both linked to appearing ordinary while the fact that expertise is such an important reason for following vloggers and bloggers strengthens Tolson's (2010) findings that vloggers manage to showcase expertise.

Since YouTubers don't know who they are addressing this affects their language, as Frobenius (2014) explains. Because there is uncertainty they use a lot of if-clauses when describing followers as well as address them in a general manner, which refers to the audience as a whole (e.g. you, you guys). This can be seen in most videos, for example "I love you guys [...]

"(Tanya Burr, April 10, 2017), "[...] hit the thumbs up button if you enjoy this [...]" (Tati, April 8, 2017); "[...] if you want another video [...]" Jaclyn Hill, September 3, 2012). Tolson (2010) explains that addressing in such a direct manner also is a way of building co-presence. This type of co-presence can also be built through referencing time, for instance "today", and space, for instance "here" according to him. Referencing time can be seen in almost any video, especially in the beginning when presenting the topic for the video, for instance "Hey guys, so for today's video I'm going to be [...]" (Jaclyn Hill, May 15, 2016) or "[...] today I decided to do [...]" (Zoella, May 1, 2017)

One prevalent and effective way to involve the audience as well is to ask questions, ask followers to comment, ask them to like a video and asking them to subscribe (Frobenius 2014), this can be constantly seen in my data as well. Some examples include "Yeah, make sure you write down below who won" (Tanya Burr, December 8, 2013), "give the video a thumbs up if you enjoyed it [...]" (Zoella, April 21, 2017), "[...] please subscribe to my channel, you know how much I appreciate you guys [...]" (Jaclyn Hill, May 8, 2017), "[...] does anybody else have that? Like am I the only one?" (Jaclyn Hill, September 3, 2012)

Other more subtle tactics that Frobenius (2014) presents for engaging consumers, includes making loyal followers feel like insiders, by reminding them of information that only they as active followers could know. This can also be seen in videos studied as part of my thesis with phrases such as "[...] now, if you guys know me, you know I've been wearing [...]" (Tanya Burr, April 3, 2017), "You guys know I like [...]" (Negin Mirsalehi, April 26, 2017) or referring to people by name in their close circle that they've previously presented to audience members. Subscribers form the established audience (Frobenius 2014), the insiders. In our data it can be seen that vloggers constantly invite others to become part of this gang, with almost every video ending with an invite to subscribe to the video or by sharing information with them that insiders already know "[...] this is my sister by the way, for those who didn't know [...]" (Negin Mirsalehi, May 12, 2017). Frobenius finds evidence in his data of the established group being made to teach new members how to behave in the group, this is however not prevalent in my data. Referring to old videos is also a way to make followers feel like insiders (Frobenius 2014), this tactic is found in half of his data and is also very prevalent in my data, often occurring more than once in a video.

Because the interaction is actually happening in a digital place and not in the physical place where the video is filmed, vloggers have to show audience members that they can imagine the audience's perspective as well (Frobenius 2014). This happens through for instance pointing down when talking about the comments section or description box, this is another way for vloggers to ask for action from followers. Even though this happens sometimes, it is more often just referred to as "below" than actually pointed, in my data. In the capture below Kenza Zouiten is telling her followers where they can find the links to items that she shows in the video, and pointing down towards the description box.
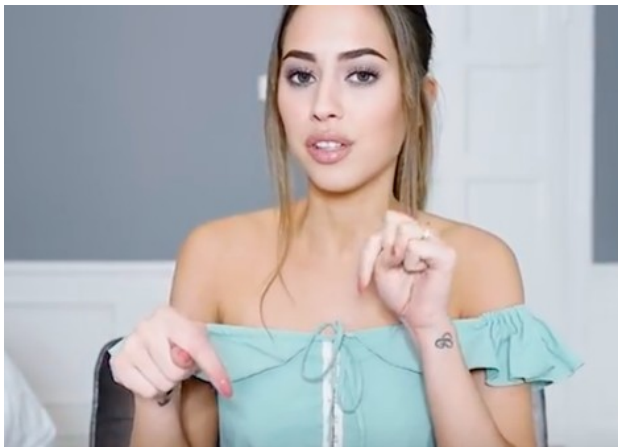

FIGURE 1: Screenshot: "I will put links to the stuff in description"
Kenza Zouiten, Apr 16, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-LZ9MdfhT7M

Having another person in the physical space where the vlogging is filmed has big implications. According to Frobenius (2014) gaze can be used in this virtual place to enforce who they are talking to, when there is another person in the room. This can be strengthened by talking about the person in the room in third person and can also help audience members understand what is going on since they do not see the entire space that the vlogger is in. Different participant roles can also be shown through changes in volume of voice. Another person in the physical place where the video is filmed does not occur very often in Frobenius data, however it happens a lot in our data. For instance, boyfriends will often participate from behind camera, by actually commenting on what is going on, or walking in and out, to and from the screen (see for instance Tanya Burr, December 8, 2013 or Zoella, April 13, 2017). The vloggers also often have guest vloggers, which makes the communication very different as the vlogger spends much of

the time talking to the other person instead of talking to the camera. This makes the viewer feel more third party than being the one who is talked to. An interesting element is for instance making an expression at the camera if the other person does something stupid or funny. This can be seen in Zoella's video for instance, April 6, 2017 when she has a guest, Miranda, on her vlog. Miranda jokingly tells Zoella how she pounded at many doors to find Zoella, and Zoella, while responding in a normal fashion to Miranda, looks at the camera with a jokingly horrified expression.

FIGURE 2: Screenshot: Looking horrified

Zoella April 6, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b0vPzYhxy9c

Both volume and gaze are very important aspects to this, as Frobenius notes, the gaze determines who the vlogger is talking to very clearly and voice is often used to either shout something to a person in another room or whispering something to the audience members that the vlogger doesn't want the other person to hear.

According to Frobenius (2014) another tactic for engaging consumers is to include humor. Though all vloggers have their own way of being funny, this is a tactic often used in videos. For instance Tati, a famous YouTube vlogger with over 2.5 million subscribers, includes special effects and music to make not so pleasant everyday situations more humorous, this can for instance be seen in her video, April 11, 2017, where she tells the story about how she broke the screen on her phone and the aftermath, "[...] there was me in my high heels on the ground like picking it up like I'd dropped my infant baby [...]". While telling the story she also shows how it happened (pictured below) and uses music and black and white coloring. She acknowledges that even though she is jokingly making a big deal out of it, it's not really a big deal and she can get it fixed.

FIGURES 3a-d: Screenshots: Broken phone

Tati, April 11, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GOf-uYywTME&t=206s

According to Kowalczyk and Pounders study (2016), celebrities sharing everyday situations makes them seem more relatable and authentic. This is a very normal element in vlogging as many of the vloggers do daily or weekly vlogs where they go about their normal lives, filming their normal activities (for instance hanging out with dog and family, Negin Mirsalehi May 12, 2017; cooking dinner for husband, Tanya Burr, March 22, 2017)

FIGURE 4: Screenshot: Hanging out with dog and family

Negin Mirsalehi, May 12, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_fouZYrrhR8

FIGURE 5: Screenshot: Cooking dinner for husband

Tanya Burr, March 22, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bvU7iESE7o&t=2s

Tolson (2010) notes that there are many qualities in YouTubers' video presentations that make them ordinary, these are the setting where the video is filmed (often home), the way they talk, spontaneity in speech, how they describe themselves to the public and not trying to hide flaws in presentation but rather explaining to followers why there is a flaw. These elements are very present in my data as well, ("[...] slap that bitch on and you'll be good to go [...]" Jaclyn Hill

talking about putting on eyeshadow, April 18, 2017; "Hello everybody, today...oh wow got a bruise on my arm where'd that come from [...]" Zoella interrupting her presentation on the topic of the video when she notices a bruise on her arm, March 2, 2014).

Ordinarity can also be seen in the way that products are presented in videos. Even though a lot of the time videos are entirely or partly dedicated to presenting products, both sponsored and unsponsored, the presentation is completely different than in traditional ads, as Tolson (2010) notes in his study on how vloggers communicate, the vloggers show the products to camera, hiding their own face, putting swabs of makeup on the back of their hands while being filmed usually with one camera and holding her gaze at the camera most of the time. This is also a re-occurring feature in the current study in videos where products are presented to the followers, such as favorites videos and haul videos.

What is evident is that many of the same elements from the early days have stuck, while new more luxurious elements have been incorporated and balancing these two becomes exceedingly important for vloggers as is evident in the interviews with followers of blogs and vlogs.

Participants' explanations for why some influencers are their favorites are strikingly similar, with personality often being mentioned as important. Common words to describe what aspects of personality is important are words such as nice and funny as well as words referring to authenticity and trust such as honest and genuine. The aspect of having been part of the influencer's journey is also important for many of the readers as they feel that they have gotten to be a part of the influencer's success story. As inspiration seeking is a reason for following vlogs and blogs in the first place it is not surprising that an important aspect of favorite influencers is finding the influencer inspirational, either because of how far they have come in life or because of their skills that are, more often than not, self-taught, which is consistent with findings that inspiration is linked to stars who have reached a level of success that seems obtainable (Lockwood and Kunda 1997). Three important aspects of favorite influencers are perceived by followers; similarity, authenticity and expertise. These echo the communication practices of vloggers.

Similarity

Followers need to feel similar to their favorite influencers. This can either relate to similarity in characteristics (sex, age), similarity in issues they are struggling with, similar life, similar outlook or similar style as well as feelings of inspiration and the influencer being open to share intimate details. Many talk about the aspect of growing up together and everyone agrees that age is an important factor for this reason.

> [...] the age is...is a pretty...big aspect in a way since I followed them since I was a teenager myself and they were teenagers so like through that you kind of you know grow together and like understand the same things or like experience the same things as they do so yeah age is probably a big, or is...is a deal breaker I think. (Jenny, interview)

> I think age is a big one, like I tend not to watch vloggers who are like over thirty or like the ones who have kids and stuff and who like spend some of their videos speaking about like you know about how it is to have kids and what you would wear to like a graduation or something like that, like I tend to focus more on makeup tutorials that are related to like specific things so like new years eve makeup looks, going to work make up looks, what to do if you get sunburned on vacation, how to apply fake tan, like things that are more relevant to like what someone in my age group would be doing [...] (Eve, interview)

> [...] We both love beauty like we're both passionate about it, we're both curious about things, we wanna test things, you know we wanna find out things, we wanna learn new things, things like that [...] (Norah, interview)

> [...] Kenza she has like told a lot about her like personal life, like her problems with her like father and family and everything which makes her more like humane so it's easier for like people to relate to that kind of a person who actually like you know lets other people in on her and then like also she's like if you look at her like photos and videos she's like super like natural in them and she's like not trying to be or at least like that's what it feels like, she's not trying to be like someone else, she's just being like herself, like she's being like...funny and like goofy and everything so that's for me what I...it's like you put yourself out there as who you really are instead of like trying to be some kind of like polished media PR like image of yourself. (Susie, interview)

It is interesting to note that in their study on fashion bloggers McQuarrie et al. (2013) found that feigning similarity is a method used by bloggers to still appear like regular individuals when reaching success. This is in accordance with Tolson's (2010) findings as well as, of course, aspects that are important for followers.

Authenticity

An important aspect that is mentioned many times during the interviews is authenticity, which relatability is part of (Ilicic and Webster 2016). Ilicic and Webster (2016) define authenticity as being true to yourself. This is not an absolute, but rather based on perceptions by others. It is no surprise that many perceive influencers as being authentic and relatable as it is connected to being self-made, which most influencers undoubtedly are. Another important aspect, also mentioned in Ilicic and Webster's paper is being honest and open about imperfections, in order to be relatable, this is something that gets mentioned as important in the interviews multiple times.

> [...] a lot of people have problems in their life so maybe they'll feel more...they can iden...identify with them, like maybe feel more connected with the...the vlogger and no I'm not alone...alone in this, like other people have problems too, so I think it's super helpful, especially with kids, like in school and everything, a lot of these vloggers talk about bullying and...I don't know, everything that can happen in the school, boys problem, girls problem blahblahblah and when they talk about it and these kids watch it, it might help them get over the problem, for sure. (Claire, interview)

Kim and Song (2016) found that individuals perceive celebrities who talk about their personal lives to be more socially present in the life of these individuals, which might also help explain why sharing personal details is so important for the success of an influencer.

According to a study conducted by Kowalczyk and Pounders (2016) similarity and relatability is connected to how authentic celebrities are perceived to be, in order to appear as authentic, celebrities cannot only maintain a glossy image, but have to instead share their everyday lives. This might be easier for influencers than traditional celebrities, as their entire brand is largely built on describing their personal lives, talking about similar issues that their followers might have, and sharing their routines on camera and in text and photos. Kowalczyk and Pounders (2016) also find that having access to constant information from celebrities about

their lives makes celebrities more relatable. As many popular influencers tend to post something at least on a weekly basis this might make them even more relatable.

> I think that they have done a really great job at like being very authentic, at least in my eyes and that's like...that's the whole, at least to me it's like the whole advantage of watching other girls like you and I who like don't necessarily work in the field or don't like...who have like an un biased opinion, I think they, the ones that I've named have done a really great job at staying authentic even though they have an incredible reach where...where they are now and they're really funny [...] (Mary, interview)

Ilicic and Webster (2016) argue that celebrity brand authenticity can be defined as how true to oneself consumers perceive a celebrity to be in the way that they behave towards consumers and in how they interact with consumers. In order to look authentic, celebrities have to seem genuine towards the public and behave according to what consumers believe are their held values (Ilicic and Webster 2016). Authenticity is also connected to honesty and trust.

Expertise

Participants also mention expertise as being an important factor. In order to appear as having expertise, the influencer has to show that they know what they are doing and are invested in it. The influencer has to be an expert at v/blogging, this is showcased through quality of content as well as how much experience the influencer has had v/blogging. The influencer also has to show that she knows what she is talking about. These are also related to being invested in what they are doing. Being invested also comes out in aspects that improve quality of the video, post or pictures. Quality includes things such as camera quality, lighting in video, voice, background, editing quality of pictures, while experience is related to how long the influencer has been active and how natural they are in front of the camera. Sarah explains that because of the tough competition that exists these days in blogging and vlogging, they have to be on their top game if they want to make an impression.

> [...] I've been spoiled, they have to like...so many of their videos are aesthetically pleasing and they make their background and set it up in a way that looks nice on camera so when somebody who doesn't have a nice background it's like aww...like you could have done that because

everyone is upping their game you need to be at the level or higher so again cause there's so much competition that like you need to still be as good as everyone else or if not better. (Sarah, interview)

Expertise is also related to trust. According to participants, quality and experience can also induce feelings of trust, which is another important reason for why influencers need to be at their best when it comes to expertise.

[...] camera quality and actual like video quality I find influences credibility so like if someone's doing it on like a webcam in like dim lighting I tend to think that they're just like a novice, like I could film a video like that so I don't have more.. like I would have the same or more knowledge than they do, so I think that just because like I... I don't know, I guess just because like they have made an investment in like the environment they film in, they have a bit more credibility cause it's like what they do for a living. (Eve, interview)

[...] like when they're talking about a subject it's as, it's almost as though they've researched it. They know...like when they're showing like a fashion haul they know exactly how to do it, they try on the clothes and it's part of the video, so they talk about the material, like a sweater that they bought and then they show a picture or video of them wearing it and I feel like newer, like more inexperienced vloggers would not necessarily know to add that component already, so it's nice that when you watch the video, you already know to expect that you'll see a clip of her wearing it so that you can see how it fits. When they're talking about or when they're doing like funny videos and things like that you can see that it doesn't...there's not a lot of breaks I guess if you will, like you can see that there is like a lot of portions that are just straight filming and I feel like when you've been doing videos for a while you know how to roll with it kind of thing. Yeah, I think that's where I know, or I think I know that they're experienced. (Julie, interview)

Being an expert and having worked hard to achieve a certain status is linked to perceptions of authenticity (Ilicic and Webster 2016), which is mentioned as an important factor time and again throughout the course of the interviews, so it is not surprising that many of the participants mention expertise as an important factor. Lunardo, Gergaud and Livat (2015), studied how personality affects the appeal of a celebrity. One of the aspects that was found to

increase appeal was competence, which includes experience, this also helps us understand why audiences want quality and influencers who are experienced.

The data shows that similarity authenticity and expertise are also linked together. Followers need to feel that the person they are following is authentic. The feeling of authenticity is often strengthened by perceived similarity and expertise.

4.2. Motives for Following Blogs and Vlogs

[...] mostly what I like getting out of it is...is just like the daily inspiration, it's also like a, like a mental break from things as well, from work and from [my master's] thesis, and you sit down and you watch something or read something that you also really like so you get to explore different parts of your personality and different like interests that you have and like I don't necessarily need to go to the mall and like buy a shirt to like shop because that's something I like, I can just watch YouTube video and learn about different styles, learn about different materials and I like that bit...that as well and I can do it from anywhere, from home, from a coffee shop, at school like whatever, and I can just pull up my phone, pull up my laptop and just like read about or watch a video and...and just feel inspired [...] (Julie, interview)

The interviews reveal that there are three reasons for reading blogs, often intertwined in each other, inspiration, entertainment and information. Inspiration is related to seeing how they put things together and getting inspired by their lifestyle. Entertainment is related to being amused over the content, having a good time or killing time, while information is related to learning new skills, learning about new products or getting to know more about the influencer. Even when followers run out of reason to follow vlogs and blogs they will often keep watching out of habit.

Julie's example above shows all three reasons for watching videos. She explains that the videos bring her daily inspiration. The videos also allow her to escape her reality for a while and take a break from everything, just as other forms of entertainment would. While relaxing, videos and posts also allow Julie to learn more about topics that she is interested in, right from home without having to move around in order to find the information that she wants.

The interest in vlogs and blogs usually starts with influence from others or because of need for information. Influence from others could be friends following the same vlogger or

blogger or an influencer suggesting a fellow influencer. Information includes people who are looking for tips, such as looking for ways to apply makeup, tips for clothing trends or help with skin issues as well as looking for more information about a certain person (the influencer) that they have seen on other social media sites for instance.

Blog and vlog following is often described as a private moment during the day, after work, before bed and other instances when they want to spend a moment to themselves. Followers also turn to their v/blogs when needing to be entertained, for instance when having a break or taking the bus. Rewatching happens seldom, unless it's needed to learn how to do something, a video or post is really funny or inspiring, or if a person wants to get information on a certain product. People will follow the same v/blogs for years, rarely changing who they follow and if it occurs it's because of either the influencer changing or because the audience member has changed and does not find the topics interesting anymore.

4.2.1 Information

As individuals have been shown to go to other consumers for information in order to reduce risk and make better choices (Babic Rosario et al. 2016), it's no surprise that it is also an important motivation for reading blogs and watching vlogs where products and items often have center stage. While consumers search for information about products and different skills, they also seek information about the influencer, this could be linked to voyeurism which would be consistent with the findings of Bagdasarov, Greene, Banerjee, Krcmar, Yanovitzky and Ruginyte (2010), who found a connection between voyeurism and reality-tv.

> [...] I just became curious and you know she's...she's so talented, she's a blogger, she's a vlogger, she...she's a social media star, she...she does makeup, she does hair, she does photography, she attends models for her own pictures so that really interested me, that caught my attention. (Diane, interview)

Anna's example below is an example of wanting to gain information from blogs or videos. This time the reasons, however, for wanting to learn is not only personal but also professional. At the same time, however, it's intertwined with inspiration.

[...] again like maybe with beauty it's the industry that goes like, it doesn't...doesn't stand still, it's the same thing with fashion, so kind of you know again with the inspirational thing and just seeing ok what's happening for this season and it's kind of more also like educating myself to be like on the top...top of my own game to research and know what's like let's say in, ok well both beauty and fashion what are...what are the upcoming trends for you know the next season [...] (Anna, interview)

4.2.2 Inspiration

The findings show that inspiration is often a result of either the influencer's talent, success, lifestyle, fashion or beauty choices or stylistic components of the video or post. Research conducted by Hall and Towers (2017), show that online sources have an important role when consumers are looking for inspiration to buy fashion online. Even though blogs and vlogs were not looked at in this study separately, it is not surprising that one of the reasons for looking at blogs and vlogs is inspiration in terms of finding new ways to wear old items or finding new items altogether.

[...] it's nice inspiration it's like the items that you would never think that will look good on you at some point because of them you're like considering it to give it a try and then when you try it out you're like oh it's actually not that bad, it's really nice. (Tina, interview)

Research shows that the success of superstars can be inspiring as long as it seems like something a person can reach themselves (Lockwood and Kunda 1997). It might be possible for influencers to appear more ordinary as they share a lot of their everyday lives, this helps make their success seem more attainable. Bloggers and vloggers start off as regular people and viewers are able to follow them from the beginning, which might help explain why people find their growth, success and talent so inspiring.

[...] I have great respect for these women I think it's great that they started so small but they really put in a lot of effort to come to the point that they are right now and that that's just nice to watch, it's nice to see the entire journey that they have been going through so you as a loyal follower let's say like that, yeah you see everything what she has been going through and then that's kind of an inspiration for you as well, not in terms of I'll also become fashion vlogger, no, in terms of hey if

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you want to become successful and strong independent woman you can do it, it just needs a lot of hard work to do it and that's...yeah that's what I love (Tina, interview)

4.2.3 Entertainment

Watching vlogs and reading blogs for entertainment is linked to having a break from reality, having fun, relaxing, avoiding boredom and enjoying private quality time. These reasons echo those of watching traditional television if we compare them to findings by Lee and Lee (1995), where they ironically study how and why people watch TV and its implication on interactive television.

Mary's example is another one of entertainment. In this case she can relax at home while still feeling similar to what she would feel like hanging out with friends, in a way that's easy going and allows her to escape her own world for a while.

> [...]it's like just fun and I don't know, it's like, I've said it I know a million times but it's like hanging out with a friend, it's like easy-going and you don't have to like...I don't know sometimes if you've had like a really long day, you don't really like wanna come home and like do something really intense or watch something really intense so I think that's like, it can be really really relaxing [...] (Mary, interview)

4.2.4 Habit

Even when people no longer find much reason for watching videos or posts, they still continue to do so. This, participants explain, is because they continue watching some vlogs and blogs out of habit, since they have been doing it for so long. Even as one participant compares it to as being as interesting as *"watching news on a slow news day"* (Lisa, interview), she still admits to automatically going back regularly. Just as watching a certain TV show can become a routine (Lee and Lee 1995), so can a certain influencer's video or post. The example below from Anna explains it more.

> [...] I had like this conversation with some friends that started to read blogs the same time, like it's an old habit that you just click into the blog because you're so used...used to reading it so I think it's like for me it's an habit more than maybe not...not so much seeking for inspiration or you

know finding that person that like interesting anymore, it's like just a habit to click into the blogs, now and then, yeah [...] (Anna, interview)

4.3 Purchasing Products Recommended by Influencers

I feel like that comes with time so like when I first started watching Tanya Burr and Zoella videos I didn't go out and purchase any of the products that they mentioned. I think that comes with time, like as you watch their...their videos, as you read their blog content and as you also read some of the reviewers who leave comments to see like what how they, what, how they feel and what they think of the content that's produced and...and showed, I think that's when you start to develop a certain like ok, I feel like I can totally trust what they're saying here but you also have to keep in mind that everyone has a different take on things so like let's say I got a product that worked really well for Tanya Burr and some of her reviewers and didn't work for me like that lipstick fiasco thing, you need to keep that in mind, that you might not like a product that they like or like clothes for example, sometimes they'll talk about certain clothes materials and so I don't like I don't really know how certain materials like feel like when people describe me something that's made with like I don't know...I don't know the first word that comes in my mind is polyester, but like if you didn't know what polyester felt like and they say oh it's made out of polyester, I couldn't really judge that, like I would need to feel it and see the material up close, but yeah I think when I purchase products it's really it comes with time, after I've developed some sort of like connection or like relatability with them [...] (Julie, interview)

With time, active followers of blogs and vlogs can also become active consumers of products, as interviews show. Authenticity has been linked to increased purchase intention (Ilicic and Webster 2016, Kowalzyk and Pounders 2016) so it is no surprise that authenticity is mentioned time and time again as an important factor in the interviews. The trust is built up with time and successful product experiences.

Even though beauty and fashion are topics that are often linked together there are differences in the behaviors they lead to. Fashion does not necessarily lead to the purchasing of products but works instead as inspiration This is often due to the products being too expensive, so consumers try to buy something similar instead, even though this is the case in my sample, it might not be the case in other samples as products recommended in blogs and vlogs often sell out fast as some of the interviewees note.

[...] I never buy exact same products because most of the time it's really expensive things, I would go...I... I would go and like...before I buy something I'm gonna look at every single website to see where's the cheapest thing that looks the same and then I will buy it, I would never spend a fortune on clothes, but...yeah no, no, I'll take some copy of it and just wear it, it looks the same anyways (Claire, interview)

Furthermore, fashion by influencers can also help in reassuring that the consumer has made right fashion choices

[...]I bought it and then after I bought it I saw a couple of bloggers having the same bag but then in a different color and but I really liked it and everything even though I was really happy in the first place with my bag but I'm even more happier now because it looked good on them so maybe it is actually...how do you call it...a recognition at some point (Tina, interview)

In those instances that a purchase happens the links play an important role, with many participants admitting that they often use the links to find more information about the items as well as buying the products.

Yeah, so...so like I watch her vlogs and her videos on...on like a daily and when I see pieces that I really like I'll...I'll...She usually links all of them, which is really nice too, not all youtubers do this, but she will link to everything that she's wearing in the video, which is awesome and so you just click on the link and it brings it to you but her pieces are usually like crazy expensive, like she recently bought a pair of...of like leather leggings that I think are over like 500 pounds, something like ridiculous like that so obviously like I could never afford that in a million years but like I link to them to see how much they are and then when I go shopping I look for those items or something that looks similar, for sure. (Julie, interview)

Recent research conducted by Hall and Towers (2017) shows that purchasing fashion is a complex process with multiple sources and shopper journeys. However, this complexity is not captured in my data. This might be due to the fact that I concentrate purely on vlogs and blogs and these sources are most often used as purely inspirational. This current study catches the complexities of purchasing beauty better as the role of vlogs and blogs might be more

multidimensional when it comes to beauty than fashion. Babic Rosario et al. (2016) found that the identity of the poster is important in determining whether the information is relevant and reliable. My data supports this both in fashion and beauty. As fashion bloggers and vloggers are often seen as trendsetters their choices of items may be deemed relevant and reliable. Beauty tips will also be seen as more relevant and reliable when it comes from the right source. Babic Rosario et al. (2016) further find that consumers turn to word of mouth to reduce risk and make good choices. This might help explain why consumers turn to fashion influencers for inspiration and why they look for information about beauty products from vloggers and bloggers.

The power in beauty blogs and vlogs lies in the fact that consumers can see results of products with their own eyes and leads to more direct purchasing than within fashion, since the product needs to be the same in order to have the same results.

> There's so much...like there's so much. I don't know, I think...ok the thing I...that I use on my eyebrows... Like everyone on YouTube uses it, like I have seen so many vlogs and I was super resisting to it, cause it seems really hard to use and it was like fairly expensive and then it runs out quickly and like it involves a lot of steps, it's not just like putting pencil, it's like you have to have a brush and you have to have this and then highlighter and then like the gel to put on afterwards but like I watched so many videos of people using it and liked the results and heard such great things that I ended up buying it and now it's like the holy grail product of my makeup kit and it's like I use it every day and I don't care now, it's like almost become like a monthly expense for me like I lump it into like my rent and my food, these products that like don't really need but because I've heard so many people talking about them that I just bought it. (Eve, interview)

Purchasing usually starts by a complex process, which usually includes favorite influencers or other influencers as well as retail websites and other online reviews. Even with trust towards their favorite influencers, similar for audience members is the need of more than one source.

> [...] really like all the expensive products or higher end products that I have I wouldn't buy unless I knew from like multiple sources that it was a good one so if you know three or four out of the like ten vloggers who I follow all review that one product and all have the same thing to say about it, I'd buy it [...] (Eve, interview)

This is often motivated by the fact that feelings towards products are subjective, which is enforced by influencers, as this quote shows

> I always do backup research unless I mean when I first start listening to a person they always say well the people who I watch, they always say it's very subjective to...to every person [...] (Norah, interview)

These examples show that in the question of beauty products the influencers bring awareness to products and so work as a kind of a hook, which is followed by a complex process. This echoes the findings of Godes and Mayzlin (2004), they find that word of mouth can facilitate the adoption of new products, direct consumer behavior, and bring awareness to products. Given how important brand recall and brand recognition is for consumer purchase decisions being made favorably in terms of the brand (Keller 1993), influencers have the possibility to make a huge difference in consumers forming connections in their heads, when it comes to cosmetics, since they reach so many individuals, even if they rarely are the sole reason for a consumer purchasing a product.

Individuals can find more information about products from other sources than their favorite influencers. These include retail stores, other influencers, unknown consumers online and friends. Gu et al. (2012) found that consumers look for a multitude of sources before making a purchase decision, our findings echo this.

The perceived trust relationship that exists between influencers and audiences might also make buying products recommended by influencers more comfortable than buying products recommended by retailers.

> I don't really trust people...it...it's funny cause I like...Sephora...people who work at Sephora or like at the pharmacy or at MAC or something, they're trying to sell you something, which is usually what vloggers are trying to do anyways, they are endorsed by these companies to sell you products, maybe it's just a weirder...like a different context that doesn't feel like they're selling you something. It's been your choice to like interact with them through a video as opposed to like walking into Sephora and being bombarded by like fifteen sales associates and it's like...I don't know, it's odd...it's odd to think about...I don't really trust Sephora, people who work there...or I

don't trust them as much, I'd say, it's...I don't know, they're not as credible to me [...] (Eve, interview)

This, however, is not agreed upon with everyone, some see retailers and influencers as similar types of sources, depending on personal preferences as well as past good or bad experiences. Those who have had bad experiences at retailers seem more likely to rely on influencers entirely, instead of retailers, showing that followers might not be as forgiving towards retailers as they are towards influencers.

While individuals have their set of favorites, they might, however, also watch other videos. Some participants explain that they only follow their favorites while others have a set order with few favorites on top, more influencers in the middle and many one-time encounters at the bottom. What is surprising is that these one-time encounters might be just as important for purchasing decisions as the favorite influencers, a consumer does not always turn to her favorite influencer for product recommendations. This is especially true in those instances when consumers are actively looking for product recommendations or solutions as this quote below shows

So I have like the...the vlogs that I subscribe to and those are like probably the vloggers who I like trust the most, who I attribute like the highest authority to, they're the ones who...they've done their own skin care lines afterwards and they've collaborated with make...real makeup artists and real companies and stuff so I tend to trust them a bit more because they're more prominent and they're a bit more credible in my opinion but if I was having like a really specific problem that wasn't addressed in one of their videos then I would probably just search it up, you know, if I was having like a what to do about like upper lip hair you know, and nobody had, nobody who I followed had like a video or blog about it I would probably just search it on YouTube [...] (Eve, interview)

The more common way of becoming interested in products is stumbling upon them when looking at vlogs or blog posts, which is more related to product recommendations from favorite influencers.

Consumer reviews are an important aspect in the purchasing process that starts with influencers. This includes comments below videos and posts as well as corporate websites and

product review sites. The importance of product reviews by consumers is often motivated by the fact that an opinion is formed based on more than one individual, showing that while individuals trust influencers they still believe that their opinions are subjective and therefore the power of the masses is more reliable as this quote below shows

> With bloggers it's different because it's...they don't have the masses, it's just one person saying it and [you don't] always agree with one person...so I would say like just reviews with random people is better (Lisa, interview)

Consumer reviews seem to be the most popular means for making a purchasing decisions while friends might also influence purchase behavior, this comes up seldom during the interviews though. Studies show that consumers want to read many different consumer reviews in order to avoid being misled by one wrong review as well as consumer willingness to receive reviews from regular people because of the perceived level of credibility and authenticity (Burton and Khammash 2010).

Brands will also play an important role in purchase decisions as well as the research process, with some interviewees mentioning that known brands are more trusted than unknown brands. This is no surprise since even low levels of brand awareness can help convince consumers about a product (Keller 1993)

4.3.1 Sponsorship

Previous studies have found contrasting evidence on whether affiliation with companies bothers consumers. Kozinets et al. (2010) found that this varies according to communal norms, while Dolbec and Fischer (2015) argue that it depends on whether commercial logics is part of the belief system in the field of choice and find proof that this is the case for the fashion industry. According to the current data, this seems to apply to beauty as well, as influencers being sponsored by companies does not seem to affect perceived honesty, trust or purchasing behavior either, even though participants do admit that it might make them pay more attention to how influencers review products.

[...] I'd be slightly more skeptical about it and I'd probably like...I'd...I'd probably seek out information from other sources so that's when I would ask someone who worked at Sephora or ask a friend of mine if she's ever used it and like check the reviews on Sephora websites cause you can read like reviews on products, to see if they were being genuine about it but I still would probably buy it or think about buying it [...] (Eve, interview)

In order to seem authentic, celebrities have to be open and honest (Ilicic and Webster, 2016), this is supported by our data as well, as every participant agrees that while it is acceptable for influencers to receive money and other benefits from companies, they should be very open about it in order for followers not to lose trust in them. Participants also explain that this gives them the possibility to determine independently whether the information is trustworthy or not.

4.3.2 Shifting Blame

While it might be problematic from an influencer's point of view that they alone might not be able to convince consumers, it is also a big reason for the level of forgiveness extended to influencers when products don't work out. Both followers and influencers shift the responsibility to the follower by agreeing that feelings towards products is subjective. Influencers acknowledge that not everyone is going to like the product, and so protect themselves, while followers accept that because everyone is different, they might have a bad experience and so must take on the responsibility of doing extra research. If they do not do the research then it is their own fault if the product doesn't work.

[...] I also understand that skincare is extremely individual and even though we kind of have...we have the same skin type and like skin concerns it doesn't mean it's good on me even though it's good on her so obviously I kind of knew the risks but I was like just amazed of the results on her skin and I was like ok I... I need to try it [...] (Anna, interview)

This is however not the only reason found to explain why products didn't work out in some instances and as the quote below shows, consumers can be quite creative in explaining to themselves why a certain product did not work out for them.

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I think if it's justified, like something like...for instance, like we have different skin types then honestly I'm fine but if it's something like I was promised this thing that is amazing and it's not I do feel like, I have felt in the past like, like almost like let down or like, like maybe my product is bad, like when realistically most brands try at least to...to be really consistent with the products that they launch, like I have said like maybe I just have a bad one cause obviously everybody else seems to love it but I think there's like a certain disappointment that it...that it didn't and it's working out for everybody else (Mary, interview)

Surprisingly, even when no good explanation is found and bad experiences result in disappointment, it still ends up only having only minor effect on an established relationship between an influencer and an audience member even if it does make the consumer act more carefully in the future.

[...] like this was a really big disappointment cause I was really expecting more from them, because they had received such high reviews from a number of people and so when I, when it happened I was just more weary of ok sometimes like they're being paid for this...this kind of thing or maybe they put a product underneath before using the lipstick that I don't know about and they don't mention it, so it just made me more aware. It didn't really put off completely from not watching their videos, it just made me more aware of purchasing in the future. (Julie, interview)

Past research has shown that individuals with high brand self-connection viewed the brand more favorably when the brand didn't perform, since they feel highly connected to the brand and feel that a threat to a brand is a threat to themselves (Cheng, Barnett White and Chaplin 2012), this might help explain why consumers desperately try to look for other reasons for products not working well, instead of directly blaming the influencer, who can be considered as a brand, and why the relationship is not necessarily damaged after a bad experience with a product that was recommended by the influencer. This is even the case when consumers know that the blogger or vlogger receives money or products from companies.

There is, however, instances when audiences do require ethical responsibility of influencers and are not as forgiving. This came up in interviews especially when speaking about responsibility towards younger audience members.

[...] not only that I don't believe in the product but I don't believe in the like message that that company is promoting, I don't think it's...it's alright to like...I don't think it's alright to encourage girls to like drink tea and they'll be skinny when in reality we all know like if you eat good foods and you you know have an active lifestyle and you work out a lot then...then that's gonna give you the body that...that you're you know you're dreaming of or whatever, so I think those...the type...those are the types of messages I get irritated with because I just don't agree with them and I don't think like that ethically it's the kind of messages we should be promoting out there, especially to young girls who are on a lot of these platforms [...] (Mary, interview)

In their study in 2016, Thomas and Fowler find that negative effects on a celebrity's image when a brand transgression or controversy occurs depends on how responsible they perceive the celebrity to be, this might help explain why consumers do not get annoyed about a product not working well but do get annoyed if influencers present wrong kinds of products that are deemed unethical or damaging in some way due to the fact that every product might not be good on everyone but influencers still choose which products they talk about on their sites and channels. Promoting controversial products might also be seen as being inauthentic as it might be seen as not being true to oneself, or selling oneself short on personal values, which both are important factors of perceived celebrity brand authenticity identified in Ilicic and Webster's paper (2016).

One of the aspects that makes audience members trust the influencers more is the willingness of the blogger or vlogger to provide bad reviews of products.

I think I like hearing them say negative things about products just to like deter you from... from certain things, I think...I wouldn't be disappointed in a product if a blogger said it was good and I bought it and I didn't find it good but if they said everything was good, then I'd sort of say like there's got to be a lie somewhere, I don't know. Yeah...I think I'd rather see like I'd trust them more if they...if they reviewed products that they didn't like as well and they outwardly said that they didn't like them. (Eve, interview)

In their 2010 study Kozinets et al. suggest that it might be beneficial for companies to not focus too much on achieving positive reviews, which this study supports. All participants agree that negative reviews are an important aspect in building trust towards influencers. This is

particularly interesting since influencers rarely talk negatively about products and since companies might not want to associate with influencers who talk negatively about products in fear of getting publicly critiqued themselves.

4.3.3 Reduced Purchasing Behavior

The findings indicate three reasons behind why consumers start buying less products. The first one is that they might simply have bought enough products and are therefore not interested in buying more products anymore

> [...] like again four years ago I was way more into the beauty thing cause I was really new and then I feel like...and like obviously you get inspired by the products that they use and I have definitely ordered some products that were recommended by some...by some vloggers and bloggers as well until this day like they mention a product and you read about it to find out really if it's going to be working for you or not, so definitely. And...over the years, I think I've just...I've amassed enough beauty products, that now I'm looking into fashion [...] (Julie, interview)

Another reason is that even though consumers do not blame influencers for bad experiences, nor do they stop listening to their advice, they still realize that they need to be more careful in the future, which results in less products being bought

> [...] like I got those products and then it kind of made me realize ok I can't just keep purchasing these products. I'm not, I've never really bought that many to begin with, but like especially with those lipsticks, it made you realize like ok, I just spent 30 bucks on some product I'm never going to use again so like I need to really make sure it's something that I want and I need to really make sure that it's something that I want to use [...] (Julie, interview)

Another reason is that they simply don't watch as many videos or read as many blog posts anymore, because of time constraints or uninterest

> [...] well I think it's like because when I was a housewife without noth...like with any...anything to do like my time was watching vlogs and like because I wanted to lose time I just spent like my time searching for the same products [...] (Joanne, interview)

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This reinforces the belief that posts and videos work as hooks for consumers to buy products and once the hook is gone it leads to less products being purchased.

5. DISCUSSION

This part discusses theoretical, as well as managerial implications, limitations as well as future research and finally provides conclusions.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

V/blogging is a relatively new area of study in consumer behavior and as far as I know, influencer effect on consumer purchasing behavior within beauty and fashion has not been studied before. This research provides ideas for why consumers follow vlogs and blogs. It also identifies types of relationships that are formed between audiences and influencers. Furthermore, the study shows what effect all of this has on purchasing behavior in fashion and cosmetics, especially showcasing the complex role that influencers have in affecting consumer purchase behavior.

This study replicates that of Frobenius (2014) and Tolson (2010) and similar conclusions can be drawn in terms of how vloggers cultivate relationships with their audience members. However, the study is extended by taking into account the audience as well, through interviews, and shows that there is a match in how vloggers communicate and what aspects are important for audience members. The data shows that similarity, authenticity and expertise matters the most for audience members when following blogs and vlogs. This is a new finding in the literature on influencers and shows that there is indeed a lot of similarities between traditional celebrities and influencers.

This study shows that followers form some similar types of relationships with influencers as in the study conducted by Banister and Cocker (2014) in terms of relationships between followers and celebrities. Most often they form best friendships with favorite influencers. Some audience members also have childhood relationships, this points to the longevity of the relationship that can exist between an influencer and a follower. The study also finds an

aspirational relationship and a couple of 'not for me' relationships. The other types of relationships, compartmentalized, admiration, antagonistic and guilty pleasures are not found in my data even though these types of relationships might exist as well.

This study also clarifies the different roles of different sources of product information. While blogs and vlogs work as hooks, it is often consumer reviews that finally tip the scale in the right direction. Data also shows that the traditional view on influencers being just regular consumers might be changing due to their growing success. My study shows that previous findings in word of mouth literature applies to blogs and vlogs. Blogs and vlogs facilitate adoption of novelties, direct consumer behavior and affect product awareness. This was also found to be true for word of mouth in research conducted by Mayzlin and Godes (2004). People also turn to blogs and vlogs in order to reduce risk and make optimal choices, and the source of the message is important in determining whether the message is reliable as found to be true for word of mouth in research conducted by Babić Rosario et al. (2016). Gu et al. (2012) found that consumers go to multiple sources before making a purchase decision which is also shown to be true in my study. Disagreement between researchers exists on what aspects are the most important in WOM (for instance volume, valence) (Babić Rosario et al. 2016). My study shows that purchase decisions rely heavily on volume when it comes to cosmetics and fashion. Droge et al. (2010) found that blogs are effective in introducing novel ideas, my study shows that this also applies to blogs and is true for both beauty and fashion.

Kozinets et al. (2010) found that acceptance of sponsorship varies depending on communal norms, while Dolbec and Fischer (2015) argue that acceptance depends on whether there is commercial logics and find that this in fact is true for fashion bloggers, my study further extends it to beauty bloggers as well as fashion and beauty vloggers.

5.2 Managerial Implications

Online marketing today is taking a big part of companies' marketing budgets, and many cosmetics and fashion businesses have realized the value of influencers. My thesis clarifies many important aspects about the trust bond that is formed between consumers and influencers. It also clarifies feelings towards sponsorship and purchasing products online as well as what role vlogs and blogs play in the purchasing process.

My data shows that followers are not as gullible as companies might believe. Consumers are very aware of the fact that influencers constantly are sponsored by companies and also look for a lot of information before making a decision in regard to purchasing products. While influencers do have an important role in spreading information about products and bringing awareness, and while this must be acknowledged by companies, it is often not the influencers that directly impact the purchasing decision. A lot of the times the influencer will only work as an inspiration or as a hook, creating interest in a certain product but consumers will do more research based on it. This is a reason why companies must also find a way in which the consumers actively talk about their products online and throw out many hooks.

This study shows that there is wide acceptance for sponsorship within both fashion and beauty. While it might have been looked at in a more negative light in the past, it is now accepted as a norm in the fields of fashion and beauty. Companies must be aware that sponsorship is important but might be more complicated than what it seems on the surface, especially when it comes to beauty products. While sponsorship is widely accepted, it might still make individuals more skeptical towards products, so companies must find a way to overcome this for instance through having different sources talking about the product.

One aspect that might prove itself to be problematic for companies is the fact that companies must accept the existence of negative product reviews. While companies definitely do not want to see negative reviews of their products, consumers will not trust influencers unless they have negative reviews about products, as well as positive. This research suggests that companies should not shy away from influencers who are critical.

This study shows that there might be reason to target influencers even more specifically when it comes to cosmetics as there is evidence that consumers might trust product recommendations more when the person recommending the product has similar skin issues as themselves.

Brands that aren't widely known might also have a harder time being accepted especially when sponsored and might risk being met negatively by consumers, which is why they should pay more attention to consumer reviews.

This study also suggests that in general audiences are very forgiving towards influencers, even when products do not work. The consumer will look for reasons elsewhere, within herself, or other situational factors. There are suggestions that the transgression has to be serious in order

to actually affect the relationship between influencer and consumer. This is promising both from the influencer's point of view as well as from sponsoring companies' point of view because it the damage to the influencer as well as the company is limited. However, consumers are only forgiving as long as they feel like influencers are still ethically responsible.

In order for the influencer to be successful, they have to appear ordinary and authentic while still appearing to be experts in the topics they are talking about. Good quality in terms of camera and editing is also important as is the presentation in front of the camera. Influencers should also aim to be similar to their target audience.

5.3 Limitations

This research has multiple limitations. While this study might give us direction as to why individuals follow blogs and vlogs and how this affects purchasing behavior, it does not by any means give all the answers. I cannot exclude the possibility of the existence of other types of purchasing behavior and relationships.

Focusing on favorite influencers means that I might not have uncovered all types of relationships that exist. For instance, there is a possibility that other relationships outlined by Banister and Cocker (2014) might have also been visible had I focused on other influencers than the favorites. Because the data shows that other categories than favorites exist we can only assume that these might affect purchase behavior differently and important aspects might have been missed. For instance, while the data shows that one off interactions might be important as well, these interactions did not receive enough attention in the current study.

Sampling was done through snowballing and might not represent all types of audiences. For instance, none of my participants took part in actively communicating with their favorite influencers. However, we only need to look at popular videos to see that there are thousands of followers that leave comments under videos. Therefore, questions relating to active communication between followers and influencers remain unanswered. Questions relating to differences between active and passive followers remain also unanswered.

While vloggers point of view was collected through videos, no bloggers, vloggers or company representatives were interviewed for this study. This might have provided us with more insight into questions such as how relationships are cultivated and mechanics of sponsorship.

While this study includes a lot of celebrity literature and many similarities between influencers and traditional celebrities exists, one cannot ignore the differences between these two categories. While influencers often have to rely purely on their personality in order to gain followers, traditional celebrities gain popularity through their talents and personality is often secondary. Therefore, as much as there is similarities between these two categories there might be differences as well. These similarities and differences are not extensively studied or discussed in my thesis.

5.4 Future Research

The current study could be extended in a multitude of ways. To start off, it would be interesting to quantify this study in the future with larger sample sizes. It would also be interesting to interview large scale bloggers and vloggers as well as company representatives in order to get their points of view. What is of interest is also to conduct similar studies in other product categories such as electronics as this category of blogging also has a big following.

This study focuses on favorite vlogs and blogs but not much focus is put on other vlogs and blogs. This would be an interesting continuation to the study, as findings show that other vlogs and blogs, and more diverse types of relationships, also may play an important role in purchasing decisions. My data shows for instance that one off relationships can be meaningful too and deserve more attention in future research.

The data shows that there is an interesting tension between being successful, while still being able to be seen as authentic. Where does the limit go and how can influencers stay authentic while still being increasingly successful? This would be an interesting question for future studies. Additionally, it would be interesting to further study differences between traditional celebrities and influencers. This is especially interesting in terms of relationships between celebrities and followers. This is interesting considering how strongly influencers rely on their personalities in order to become successful.

During the study, it also became clear that Instagram has taken a more predominant role and many of those who follow blogs and vlogs are focusing their attention increasingly on Instagram, therefore it would be interesting to make a similar study within beauty and fashion focusing on Instagram to see if the effects are similar and in what way they differ. For instance,

do the shorter monologues in terms of descriptions below pictures versus longer monologues in blog posts and videos create different types of relationships between followers and influencers and does it affect levels of involvement.

My data shows that influencers' can have a reach beyond just getting consumers into buying beauty and fashion items. They can also influence consumers in terms of what restaurants they choose to eat in, what hotels to stay in and where to travel. Companies have realized it, as they often invite influencers to travel to their destinations or promote other types of products as well, as can be seen in many blogs and vlogs. This would be an interesting topic to study further in the future.

Furthermore, my data shows that there are very loyal followers who do not actively participate in terms of commenting on posts and videos. It would be interesting to study those individuals who do actively participate through commenting as well as studying differences between active and passive loyal followers of v/blogs.

With success, influencers have also started making their own products, such as skincare, books and clothing. While these have not been a central theme in this study, the participants have generally had a positive reaction to influencer branded products and they might be an interesting topic to study in the future.

While much is discussed about influencers helping companies sell products, there is another, side to blogging and vlogging. Followers explain how influencers sharing their own experiences can help in dealing with personal issues such as anxiety or skin problems and provide comfort which should get more attention by researchers in the future.

5.5 Conclusion

This study shows that followers usually turn to blogs and vlogs when they want entertainment, information or inspiration. The following activity is normally private and done when participants want to spend lonely quality time. Followers usually have favorite influencers, these are typically individuals who are close to them in age, are relatable in style, backstory or personality and who inspire them either through their success or talent. Individuals form different types of relationships with influencers, these include both friendship, admiration as well as distancing relationships. The positive relationships last as long as neither one of the two

(influencer or follower) changes too much and becomes unrelatable, which is when it can turn into either a habitual relationship, with minimal feelings or a distancing relationship.

Fashion and beauty products have different paths in regard to the role of blogs and vlogs. While fashion blogs often work more as inspiration and require less research, consumers go through a complex process of researching beauty products and a blogs and vlogs' most important role is to spread awareness about products. This is regardless of whether or not the products are sponsored. Sponsorship is widely accepted as long as influencers are open about receiving sponsorship and an important part of the trust relationship stems from them providing negative reviews as well. Consumers are forgiving towards bad product experiences. This is due to the fact that liking products is seen as subjective, which is enforced by influencers, as long as the followers feel like the influencer is being responsible in what types of products they showcase. Bad experiences might however lead to either more research being carried out next time or less products being purchased in the future. When video viewing drops, buying products often drops as well, which shows that the two indeed are linked. Beauty and fashion blogs and vlogs might also inspire consumers to consume other types of products.

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