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The new influencers:

Are bloggers becoming the next celebrity endorsers?



PANTENE



Abstract

With the increasing influence of bloggers, companies are starting to take advantage of this and use these for endorsements rather than their traditional endorsers, celebrities. However, since bloggers traditionally have been writing product or brand recommendations purely based on their own preferences, to some of their readers the question of sincerity and thus credibility may arise. This brings up the following problem statement: *With the increasing use of blogger endorsers rather than celebrities, how can this affect the young American consumers' perceptions of the endorsed product and brand? How can paid brand endorsements in return affect the credibility of the blogger?* In order to illuminate the statement of problem, the thesis explores the following hypotheses; 1: *Blogger endorsements are more effective than celebrity endorsement*, and 2: *Bloggers who are paid to endorse brands or products are considered less credible by the readers*. In order to explore the given problem statement and two hypotheses, the thesis takes on a critical rationalistic approach and uses the hypothetic-deductive method in order to falsify or corroborate them.

The analysis is divided into two parts. The first part analyses the first three parts of the questionnaire from the perspectives of McCracken's Meaning Transfer Model, the Source Credibility Model, and Mowen and Brown, Kelley, and Tripp et al.'s theory regarding multiple brand endorsements and the attribution theory. This is done with the purpose of being able to falsify or corroborate hypothesis 1 concerning blogger endorsements and how this can compete with celebrity endorsements in terms of effectiveness. Subsequently, the second section of the analysis will concentrate on the fourth part of the questionnaire in order to falsify or corroborate hypothesis 2. By analysing this data in accordance with the Source Credibility Model, Dialogic Public Relations theory, and Mowen and Brown, Kelley, and Tripp et al.'s theories regarding multiple brand endorsements and the attribution theory, it is possible to examine how paid endorsements can affect the credibility of bloggers.

In the first part of the analysis, the thesis finds evidence that bloggers are considered as more credible and effective brand endorsers than celebrities, as these have a higher level of perceived trustworthiness and expertise, and furthermore have a higher level of likeability from having similar lifestyles as their readers, unlike celebrities who previously have been connected with a high level of trustworthiness as a result of them being likeable. This means that the first part of the analysis corroborates hypothesis 1. The second part of the analysis shows that bloggers who are paid for brand endorsements are generally speaking considered less credible. However, it is possible for the blogger to maintain an ethical relationship with its readers through dialogue, truth-telling, and with

the use of disclosures. This means that the second part of the analysis both corroborates and falsifies hypothesis 2. By combining these two results it is possible to answer the problem statement above. Bloggers are seemingly more persuasive to the young American consumer, compared to celebrities, as these have a higher level of trustworthiness, expertise, and likeability, which ultimately has a positive effect of the endorsed brand and purchase intentions. However, if the blogger does not have a strong, ethical relationship with its readers, it is rather likely that brand endorsements can damage its perceived credibility. In order to maintain an ethical relationship with the readers, in which both the blogger and brand benefits from the endorsement, the blogger must make use of dialogic principles, such as the use of disclosure and truth-telling.

Key words: blogger endorsement, consumer behavior, social media, online influencers, blogging

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1. Introduction

If we go ten years back in time, when the general consumer was looking for information for their next purchase, one would normally turn to advertisements, magazines, or look to their favorite celebrity and follow their recommendations on the products that they prefer using. Today, it is a rather different story. One of the most used sources of information is blogs, and 61% of the American online consumers have made a purchase based on recommendations from a blog (Writtent). But who are these new influencers?

Blogs have existed since the beginning of the world wide web, but it is not until within the past decade that their popularity has increased. By October 2005 there were approximately 19.6 million blogs, a number which has been doubling every five months since then (Britannica). Previously they were known as personal blogs in which the blogger would log about their day. It was regular girls, with regular lives, sharing their favorite lipstick, shoe, movie, book, or camera with their readers. Although the majority of blogs today still are purely a hobby for the owner, some bloggers do happen to make a living of their blog and are not only regular people, but also slowly starting to achieve celebrity status. Bloggers like Zoella, Bethany Mota, Estée Lalonde, and Kristina Bazan all have millions of followers, who all follow their advice about which new beauty or fashion trend or product to follow. Reaching thousands of people, not only through their blogs, but also through the new short blogs like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, or video blogs on Youtube, there is no doubt that bloggers have a massive impact on influencing today's consumers. Companies have also realized the influence that bloggers have with their followers. Today blogs are becoming more and more like magazines, with advertisements, sponsored posts, free products, and companies fighting to make a deal with the biggest bloggers, who for one contract can make between 200.000 and 1 million dollars, slowly pushing aside the traditional celebrity endorsers (Fashionista). But how does these new influencer compare with celebrities in terms of credibility and effectiveness? According to online magazines, bloggers are far more credible, but what is the consumers' opinion on this?

In November 2015, blogger, youtuber, model, and Instagram sensation Essena O'Neill, uploaded a video to her Youtube channel called *This is why I quit social media*. In this 17 minute long video, Essena explains how her whole blogging career purely evolved around making as much money from as many sponsorships on her blog and Instagram as possible (Youtube). This made me think whether this was the case of all bloggers, and if sponsorships have any impact on the credibility of

the blogger. Are bloggers influenced by the money received from brands, and how does the general blog reader perceive the credibility of bloggers when their product or brand endorsements have been sponsored by a company? This thinking brings up the following problem statement and two hypotheses:

1.2 Problem statement

With the increasing use of blogger endorsers rather than celebrities, how can this affect the young American consumers' perceptions of the endorsed product and brand? How can paid brand endorsements in return affect the credibility of the blogger?

1.2.1 Hypothesis 1

Blogger endorsements are more effective than celebrity endorsement

1.2.2 Hypothesis 2

Bloggers who are paid to endorse brands or products are considered less credible by the readers

2. Methodology

In order to thoroughly examine the problem statement, the succeeding paragraphs will present the choice of method and theoretical considerations. The focus herein is on clarifying and elaborating on the theoretical and methodological considerations I had prior to the study. I will start with a clarification of the included theories and the motivation for selecting these theories. The next section encompasses theory of science, selection of case, and the reasoning behind the choices in relation to the questionnaire, which is a part of the empirical framework.

The purpose of this study is to examine the young American consumers' perception of blogger endorsements, how it can aid in changing their perception of a brand and product in comparison to celebrity endorsements, and how endorsing a brand in return can affect the credibility of the blogger. For the sake of creating a structured analysis, this will be divided into two parts. The first part will commence with an examination and clarification concerning how effective blogger endorsements are to the young American consumer, especially in comparison to celebrity endorsements. The second part will examine how brand endorsements can have an impact on the perceived credibility of the blogger. Throughout the entire analysis, the theoretical framework will be the foundation for examining the young American consumers' perception of blogger endorsements and blogger credibility. The considerations behind the theoretical framework will be presented in the next section.

2.1 Theoretical considerations

In this section the theoretical foundation of the thesis will be presented, and clarified in relation to the two hypotheses and the problem statement. In this study, I will make use of five different theories to examine the thesis statement and the two hypotheses. The theories are as following:

- McCracken's Meaning Transfer Model
- Uses and Gratifications
- Source Credibility
- Mowen and Brown, Kelley, and Tripp et al.
- Dialogic Public Relations Theory

The first part of the analysis will evolve around hypothesis 1 and seek to understand whether blogger endorsements are more effective than celebrity endorsement, and why. To answer this, several theories are to be used in combination. McCracken's Meaning Transfer Model will be used in order to understand the movement of cultural meanings from a celebrity to a product through endorsement. The Source Credibility Model will be used to examine the perceived credibility of celebrities. Furthermore, Mowen and Brown, Kelley, and Tripp et al.'s theory regarding multiple brand endorsements and the attribution theory will examine the influence of multiple product endorsements on the celebrity's perceived credibility. Finally, the Uses and Gratifications theory will be used in order to understand why people use blogs.

The second part of the analysis will examine hypothesis 2 about how paid sponsorships can affect the credibility of the blogger. Again, Mowen and Brown, Kelley, and Tripp et al.'s theory regarding multiple brands endorsements and the attribution theory will examine how paid endorsements can affect the credibility of a celebrity, or in this case a blogger. Further, the Source Credibility Model will examine the perceived credibility of bloggers. Finally, the Dialogic Public Relations Theory will examine the importance of dialogue and ethics on blogs.

By combining the above five theories, it will be possible to analyse the empirical data in relation to the problem statement and two hypotheses, and ultimately understand whether bloggers are more powerful brand endorsers than celebrities, and how brand endorsements in return can affect the credibility of the blogger. However, it should be noted that not all the theories are of American origin, but also of Canadian and European, while the questionnaire is only conducted on American consumers. Because of this the thesis will be transnational, which however will not be considered an issue, since it can be argued that America, Canada, and Europe all are part of the Western world, and as a result of this will to some extent have very similar attitudes towards the topics examined in this thesis.

2.2 Methodological considerations

Since this thesis will search to falsify or corroborate the two hypotheses, it will proceed on the grounds of critical rationalism, which operates within the method hypothetical-deductive (Collin and Køppe 2003, 98). Critical rationalism originates from a phenomenon or practical problem, with a focus on understanding or explaining a given problem in order to formulate assumptions about this, and ultimately examine the grounds of the problem. Critical rationalism proceeds on the

assumption that people are not able to examine a subject without already having a pre-understanding regarding this, as one will always have a certain amount of knowledge or an expectation regarding something in order to be able to examine this (Collin and K ppe 2003, 101). Furthermore, one will never come to a final conclusion or truth, as one should always be critical towards the knowledge that has been gained (Collin and K ppe 2003, 103).

The method used in this study is the hypothetical-deductive, which is characterized by having a pre-understanding regarding the subject. This meaning that you start from the position of the theoretical assumptions in which empirical consequences are deduced from. If the empirical framework does not support your theoretical assumption, it will be falsified and a new one has to be presented, and further tested. Consequently, you always keep moving back and forth while still learning more and more about the reality (Collin and K ppe 2012, 288). In this study, I have built the hypothesis upon my own pre-understanding and assumptions regarding the young American consumers' perception of blogger endorsements, and further combined it with the extensive theoretical framework within the area of consumer behaviour and public relations. By using the empirical framework and further applying the theoretical framework upon the empirical data, I will be able to falsify or corroborate the hypothesis, learning more about the processes of blogger endorsements, consumer behaviour and public relations.

2.3 Selection of case

To clarify the focus in this study, the following section is an amplification of why I have chosen the case of blogger endorsements.

The current blog and social media trend is of decisive importance when studying the case of blogger endorsements. Social media has a massive influence on today's society, and especially young consumers, also known as the millennials which is a group made up of people born from 1980 to 2000. Although having grown up without social media, this group is highly active online, and covers 53.3% of the total blogging population (Writtent). Because if this it is believed that this group of people will be more likely to be influenced by bloggers compared to other generations. The choice of blogger endorsements as a specific was obvious as bloggers today are slowly starting to be considered as celebrities, and we notice more of them doing brand endorsements alongside celebrities.

As it will be clarified in the empirical data in section 4.1, a blog refers both to a personal website, but also to short blogs on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and video blogs on Youtube. Due to the scope of this study, it is essential to delimitate the focus in order to thoroughly analyse this subject. Thus, I have chosen to consider blogs as the traditional form of a personal website, and not short blogs. This specific form of blogs have been chosen as it is less likely that the respondents are yet to consider short blogs as blogs and further recognise endorsements done on these media. Therefore, the use of several type of blogs may result in unclear and mixed responses to the questionnaire.

The previous sections have explained the choices regarding choosing blogger endorsements as a case. In the following section I will outline my considerations concerning conducting a questionnaire, which is a significant part of the empirical framework.

2.4 Field research

The analysis will be based on empirical data which has been gathered through field research. The field research will be made in order to critically answer and understand the problem stated in section 1.2. In the following sections, I will account for the theory and thoughts behind doing a questionnaire.

2.4.1 Qualitative and quantitative method

In field research, one must differentiate between the qualitative and quantitative method (Harboe 2011, 45). The purpose of qualitative field research is to find data to explain the given problem statement in depth. This is usually done through interviews and focus groups with open ended questions that will allow the respondents to explain their answers, as well as allowing the interviewer to ask further questions for words or phrases that needs to be elaborated. Qualitative data can normally not be put into systems and be compared, as these are typically written texts, and only conducted on a limited number of people have been interviewed. In other words, the qualitative method rarely allows one to create statistics and generalise a group of people (Harboe 2011, 47-48).

The quantitative method on the other hand is far more objective and representative of a group of people as one can put the responses into statistics. Data gathered using the quantitative field research are useful in giving a representative insight into specific issues. These are usually gathered

through surveys with multiple choice questions, ranking question, or yes/no questions. Unlike qualitative researched, quantitative field researches are gathered from a larger number of respondents, which allows the researcher to draw generalisations for the general population related to the group of respondents (Harboe 2011, 45-47).

In order to understand the effectiveness of blogger endorsement and how sponsored posts can affect the bloggers in a negative way, the field research for this thesis will be consisting of a questionnaire and thus the quantitative method. Questionnaire are generally perceived as being quantitative researches, as they have the purpose of examining general trends in society and can be put into graphics and statistics (Bryman 2004, 246). However, the qualitative method will also be used in order to gain more in depth information about the consumers and their preferences. This will be done by allowing the respondents to clarify their answers with their own words in a few of the questions (Bryman 2004, 470). When making a quantitative research and making use of close-ended questions, one must be aware of the fact that only giving the respondents a limited selection of answers will not always be the right answers for all respondents. This is why some of the questions will allow the respondents to give the answer “other”. Further giving the respondents the option of clarifying some of their answers using their own words depends on the respondents being willing to do so, which may not be the case for all respondents, as open-ended questions does demand more participation and time from the respondents, compared to close-ended questions. This may cause some issues if the respondents are not able or willing to answer the open-ended questions that appear in the questionnaire. By using both open-ended questions, there is a risk of receiving less responses because of the more time and participations the questionnaire demands from the respondents (Bryman 2004, 470). However, this risk may be necessary and worth taking in order to get a further insight into the young American consumer’s perception of blogger endorsements. The thoughts behind the structure of these questions will be elaborated in section 2.4.3.

2.4.2 Questionnaires

The main purpose of the questionnaire is to provide an empirical foundation to analyse whether blogger endorsements can influence the consumers’ perception of a brand, and if this endorsement can result in the blogger seeming less credible and trustworthy to the consumers. The questionnaire will consist of 39 questions. These questions will mainly be closed questions, meaning that you have to tick off a relevant box that matches your answer. The use of closed questions allows me to compare the results and calculate statistics. However, the disadvantage of this type of questions is

that I might fail to obtain the individual answers (Eric et al. 2011, 833). Consequently, open questions will be used in a few of the questions by adding the option of comments, which allows the respondent to clarify their answer in their own words. This is important for the validity of the questionnaire, as it makes the result more accurate and gives an opportunity for individuality (Eric et al. 2011, 833).

The questionnaire will be available for the respondents through the internet, specifically on Facebook. It will be directed towards young people living in America. In continuation hereof, I am aware of the fact that the questionnaire reaches a rather limited amount of respondents in comparison with the amount of people living in the US, and as a consequence hereof it will not be possible to conclude anything general on the basis of the limited amount of answers. I do, however, consider it an advantage that the respondents have been chosen randomly, as it may eliminate uncertainties regarding validation of the answers. However, I do recognise that it may not represent a representative cross section of the American population, as the contacts on my Facebook and people sharing the questionnaire are mainly from the Southern states of the US or from the Boston area. As a reason hereof, I cannot entirely come to a complete conclusion for a whole group of people. However, I do believe that this small segment of respondents will be able to represent a general attitude towards blogger endorsement.

The duration of the questionnaire is from April 5th 2016 through April 19th 2016. This time frame has been chosen, as it provides the respondents with a rather long period to answer, and it leaves me with enough time to work thoroughly with it in the study. Additionally, I am aware of the fact that most people will probably answer the questionnaire within a relatively short period of time after it has been disputed. This is due to the fact that the questionnaire will disappear from the news feed on Facebook, and therefore it will not be as accessible for the respondents as if it was just posted.

2.4.3 Structure of the questionnaire

According to Eric et al. there are a few things to keep in mind when seeking to carry out a successful questionnaire with many useful responses. The structure of the questionnaire has to be brief, consisting of short clearly written questions and be easy to answer. For this questionnaire the questions have been limited to 39, why it is of high importance that the questions are formed in a way that will make the respondents willing and able to answer, as this is a rather high number of questions. The primary function of the questionnaire is to gather quantitative information in order to examine the respondents' perception of blogger endorsements, as well as receive information and insight into how the consumers believe this endorsement can affect the credibility of the blogger

(Eric et al. 2011, 836). The answers from the questionnaire can be used for statistics, which will be useful when comparing the results to each other (Eric et al. 2011, 832). However, questionnaires are not entirely quantitative as they can also operate within the qualitative method, by giving the respondents the opportunity to freely formulate their opinion, such as in open questions or by adding comments. A questionnaire is structured in a number of questions directly related to the area of focus. These are usually self-administered, and can be distributed in a variety of ways. The questions can take two major forms, closed - being yes/no, rating, multiple choice, or open, which increases the accuracy and individuality by letting the respondents answer in their own words (Eric et al. 2011, 832-833).

For this study, the majority of the questions are within the quantitative method, being closed questions with mostly multiple-choice options or rating scales. These forms of questions have been chosen, as they will allow the opportunity of comparing the respondents' answers and calculating statistics. However, for some questions the qualitative method will be included by giving the option for further clarification in the form of a question that asks the respondents to clarify the answer. This structure has been chosen, as I want to gain a deeper understanding of the respondents' opinion towards the area of focus, which is possible when providing them with the opportunity of freely formulating their opinion. Finally, the quantitative data can be grouped in diagrams, which enable me to compare the variations in answers, and create an overview of the respondents' perception of blogger endorsement. Also, when having closed questions in the questionnaire, I have a greater chance of capturing the attention of the respondents and also limiting the feeling of wasting time.

2.4.4 Design of the questionnaire

The questionnaire consists of 39 questions, divided into four sections. In the first section, the respondents are asked ten questions about their gender, age, and occupation. Along with that, the respondents are asked about their habits when it comes to reading blogs. This, I did for "2 reasons, the first being a potential of intrusion and the second because they generally are easy to answer" (Eric et al. 2011, 834). The purpose of these questions is to find a correlation between these data and the results from the rest of the questionnaire.

The second part of the questionnaire consists of nine questions with the purpose of understanding the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements. The respondents are first asked to state which type of advertising they find most effective, most trustworthy, and most appealing, and why. The rest of the

questions seek to understand whether celebrity endorsements can influence the consumers' purchase behaviour and the perception of the endorsed brand.

The third part of the questionnaire consists of eight questions that aim to understand why and whether blogger endorsements are more effective than celebrity endorsements. The respondents are asked whether blogger endorsements are more relatable, easier to connect with, and more credible than celebrity endorsements. Further, two questions ask whether a positive or a negative review on a blog can influence the consumer's purchase intention. In the last question in part three, the respondents are asked whether the blogger's behaviour has any influence on their perception of the brand that they endorse. This is the same question as asked in section 2 about celebrity endorsements, which makes it possible to compare the difference in the results on whether blogger endorsement has a stronger influence on the consumer's perception of a brand, compared to celebrity endorsement.

The fourth and final part of the questionnaire consists of 11 questions that seek to study blogger endorsement from a more critical perspective. In the first two questions, the respondents are asked whether they have previously noticed sponsored posts on blogs, and whether the reviews they read are of products purchased by the blogger or received for free. The next six questions ask the respondents whether they believe that sponsored posts influence the credibility of the blogger, and whether they prefer blogs being free of brand influence. The final question asks whether the respondents believe that brands or readers are more important to bloggers. The purpose of this question is to know which stakeholders' interests should or are being served first, from a reader's perspective.

2.4.5 Target group and respondents

As previously mentioned, the target group of this study is the young American consumers. This specific target group has been chosen due to several factors. Firstly, young Americans belong to a group of people, which is also known as the millennials, a group made up of people born from 1980 to 2000. Although having grown up without social media, this group is today highly active online, and covers 53.3% of the total blogging population and is therefore considered representative to answer the problem statement of this thesis (Writtent).

The respondents have to some extent been chosen randomly. The questionnaire has been shared with my personal relations in the US, who have then distributed it to their relations. Thus, I have used a combination of a convenience sample, or a non-probability sample, and a random sample, also known as a probability sample (Walonick 1997-2010, 20-21). Non-probability refers to the fact that I have relied on the few respondents that I sent the questionnaire to personally. Probability sample refers to the fact that my contact persons in the US from here have distributed randomly, which means that every member of the American population had a chance of responding to the questionnaire (Walonick 1997-2010, 20-21). However, from the perspective of my contact persons, the sample can be categorised as a non-probability sample, as they may have selected the respondents subjectively from their own personal connections.

My contact persons in the US are all of American origin, and based in either the Southern states or Boston area, thus being able to reach a somewhat representative demographic segment of the young American population. The responses are believed to provide an accurate representation of the respondents' perception of blogger endorsements, as all randomly chosen respondents have agreed to answer the questionnaire, leading me to the assumption that all answers have been considered thoroughly.

2.5 Secondary material

Apart from the survey, this thesis will be using secondary data from already existing sources. These are to be collected through desk research. The secondary material will consist of online scientific journals and articles on the topic. This material will supplement the primary data from the questionnaire and will be used to explain the theory and results in the analysis, and will be clarified in a separate section in the empirical data (section 4.1). The secondary empirical data is used in order to serve as a support of the primary data and research. However, is important to point out that since the secondary data has been gathered through desk research, there is a risk that this has not been written objectively, but with a rather strategically purpose. Because of this, I aim to be critical towards all sources in the search for secondary empirical data which can aid in falsifying or corroborating the hypotheses and problem statement of this thesis.

3. Theoretical framework

This following section will present the chosen theoretical framework which will be applied to the empirical data in the analysis.

3.1 Meaning Transfer Model

In 1989 McCracken introduced the meaning transfer model, which takes a closer look as celebrity endorsements and how the culture of the celebrity endorser is passed onto products through endorsements. The meaning transfer model reveals “[...]that the secret of the celebrity endorsement is largely cultural in nature, and that the study of the celebrity and endorsement is improved by a cultural perspective” (McCracken 1989, 320). This is the core of the theory from McCracken, which will be used in this study.

3.1.1 Meaning movement and the endorsement process

The meaning transfer model introduces the meaning movement and the endorsement process, which represents a movement of cultural meanings in consumer societies. This process can be divided into three stages.

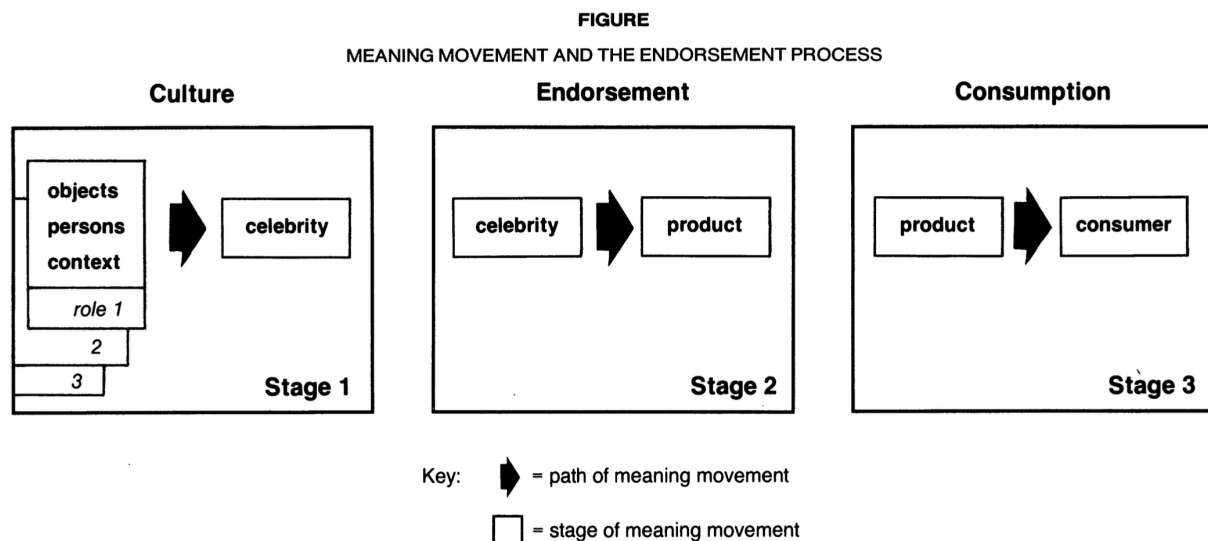


Figure 1

Stage 1

The first stage *culture* deals with the meanings and values that a celebrity can add to an endorsement, and asks the question “why celebrities should be used for an ad” (McCracken 1989, 315). According to McCracken, celebrities contribute with lifestyle, personality, and configurations

of meanings which anonymous models lack. The reason for this can be found in the public persona that they have created, either through acting, or their general public career roles and performances. Through their public performances, celebrities are charged with meanings, which is passed along to the ad. “The meaning that the celebrity endorsement gives to the product was generated in distant movie performances, political campaigns, or athletic achievements” (McCracken, 1989, 315). Because of this, McCracken also points out the importance of typecasting for the success of a celebrity endorsement, as this can add meanings to the character of the actor. “Without typecasting, actors are unable to bring clear and unambiguous meanings to the products they endorse. Without typecasting, they have no meanings to give the transfer process” (McCracken, 1989, 316). (McCracken, 1989, 314-316)

Stage 2

The second stage of the meaning transfer is the *endorsement*. This is when the personality of the products is shaped. In this process, the meanings, or the culture and values, of the celebrity are transferred onto the product through the endorsement. In order to succeed in creating the desired image of the product, it is important to both use a celebrity with values that correspond with the desired values of the product, along with focusing on these values in the endorsement. In other words, “[...] the ad must be designed to suggest the essential similarity between the celebrity and the product so that the consumer will be able to take the last step in the meaning transfer process” (McCracken, 1989, 316).

Stage 3

The last phase in the process is *consumption*. In this step, the consumers recognise the meanings of a product and transfer it onto themselves. However, consuming a product is not always enough in order to take possession of its meanings and incorporate them into the self. “The consumer must claim the meanings and then work with them” (McCracken, 1989, 317). This they must do through rituals or experimentation. Celebrities play an important role in the final stage and the incorporation of the meaning into the self. The reason for this is that they have created the self in the first stage. Through the things they do, either through movies or general public appearance, have contributed to them having constructed an attractive and accomplished self. This constructed self serves as an inspirational figure to the consumer. “Consumers are themselves constantly moving symbolic properties out of consumer goods into their lives to construct aspects of self and world. Not surprisingly, they admire individuals who have accomplished this task and accomplished it well.

Celebrities are proof that the process works” (McCracken, 1989, 317). In other words, through stage 3 *consumption*, the consumers are labouring to do what the celebrity endorser have done in stage 1. It is because of this, McCracken points out the importance and effectiveness of celebrities as endorsers rather than an anonymous model or actor. Celebrity endorsers are key players in the meanings transfer process, especially in the *consumption* phase because “They are exemplary figures because they are seen to have created the clear, coherent, and powerful selves that everyone seeks” (McCracken, 1989, 318).

I have now gone through McCracken’s Meaning Transfer Model and how celebrities’ culture and meanings can pass onto the products and consumers through endorsements. In the following section Katz et al. and McQuail’s Uses and Gratifications theory will be accounted for.

3.2 Uses and Gratifications

The Uses and Gratifications theory is a widely used approach, which assumes that the audience are not passive consumers of the media, but rather have a power over how media can be interpreted and integrated into their own lifestyles. In other words, the audience can achieve gratification by choosing media that meets their desires and needs (Katz et al., 1973-74, 513-14). Whereas other approaches seek to understand what media does to people, the main question in the Uses and Gratifications theory is “What do people do with the media?” (Katz, 1959, 2).

The Uses and Gratifications theory was developed from several prior communication theories and researches. The early researches of Uses and Gratifications dates back to the 1940s and the study of patterns in radio listeners, to the latter studies of television watchers. The most recent interests for Uses and Gratifications theory is the link between the reasons for media consumption and achieved gratification. (West et al., 2010) This is what is in focus in both the researched from Katz et al., and McQuail, which are the two reproaches that will be used in this thesis.

3.2.2 Blumler and Katz’ Uses and Gratifications

In Uses and Gratifications Research (1974), Blumler and Katz suggested that media users seek out media sources to satisfy the needs of the user, and that media can serve the functions of surveillance, correlation, entertainment, and cultural transmission, or socialisation, both on the the macro- and the micro-sociological level (Blumler and Katz, 1974, 512). Furthermore, they provided

a framework of five elements for understanding the correlation between media users and the media, also known as “uses and gratifications model” (Blumler and Katz, 1974, 510). Along with serving as a framework for understanding the correlation between the media and the audience, these five elements also explain the activity of the audience as a consequence of their involvement in the media.

1. “The audience is conceived of as active, i.e., an important part of mass media use is assumed to be goal directed [...] patters on media use are shaped by more or less definite expectations of what certain kinds of content have to offer the audience member” (Blumler and Katz, 1974, 510-11). This element is based on the assumption that the audience is an “active audience”, in other words, the audience is goal oriented and seeks to achieve their goals by fulfilling their needs through media consumption.
2. “In the mass communication process much initiative in linking need gratification and media choice lies with the audience member. This places a strong limitation on theorizing about any form of straight-line effect of media content on attitudes and behavior" (Blumler and Katz, 1974, 511). This elements claims that the audience is more powerful than the media, as the audience uses the media, rather than the media uses the audience. The audience only absorbs what they can take advantage of, and does not let the media influence them otherwise.
3. “The media compete with other sources of need satisfaction. The needs served by mass communication constitute but a segment of the wider range of human needs, and the degree to which they can be adequately met through mass media consumption certainly varies” (Blumler and Katz, 1974, 511). This element claims that the audience has several needs, some that cannot be fulfilled through media consumption, but rather through face-to-face communication, which is considered the biggest competitor to media sources in fulfilling needs.
4. “Methodologically speaking, many of the goals of mass media use can be derived from data supplied by individual audience member themselves- i.e., people are sufficiently self-aware to be able to report their interests and motives in particular cases, or at least to recognize them when confronted with them in an intelligible and familiar verbal formulation" (Blumler and Katz, 1974, 511). This elements points out the fact that the audience is able to verbally explain their motives behind media consumption as they are very familiar with those. In other words, the audience does not let the media dominate them, but rather turns to media in order to shape their own identities.

5. “Value judgments about the cultural significance of mass communication should be suspended while audience orientations are explored on their own terms” (Blumler and Katz, 1974, 511). This final element encompasses that the audience themselves creates and determines the value of the media, as they put in the value of the media through the choice of consumption.

3.2.3 McQuail’s Uses and Gratifications

The above introduced framework by Blumler and Katz served as a theoretical foundation for continuing in developing Uses and Gratifications. In Mass Communication Theory (1983), McQuail introduced his adaptation of Uses and Gratifications, where he builds upon the audience actively making motivated choices through their media consumption. In this, McQuail introduced four dimensions that serve as a classification of why people consume media in order to find gratification.

Information

The audience consume media in order to find information on several things. Media can inform the audience about happenings in the immediate surroundings of the audience, as well as around the world. Media can be used when seeking for advice on products or the like, which ultimately can assist the audience in their decision making. The audience can also turn to media to find general information of interest or curiosity, or even for self-education on a specific topic (McQuail, 1983, 82-3).

Personal identity

The audience also consumes media for personal identification reasons. Media can both be used in the reinforcement of personal values of the user, and by gaining an insight into one’s own identity. Furthermore, media is also consumed for the audience to find other individuals who can serve as behavioural role models, or whose values the audience can identify itself with (McQuail, 1983, 82-3).

Integration and social interaction

Media can also be consumed for social reasons. It can both serve as a substitute of real-life relations, but also assist in the audience identifying with others in real-life. This is either through serving as a basis of conversation or social interaction, or enabling the audience to connect with family, friends, and society. Furthermore, media can also aid the audience in gaining a sense of belonging, along with helping this to carry out social roles (McQuail, 1983, 82-3).

Entertainment

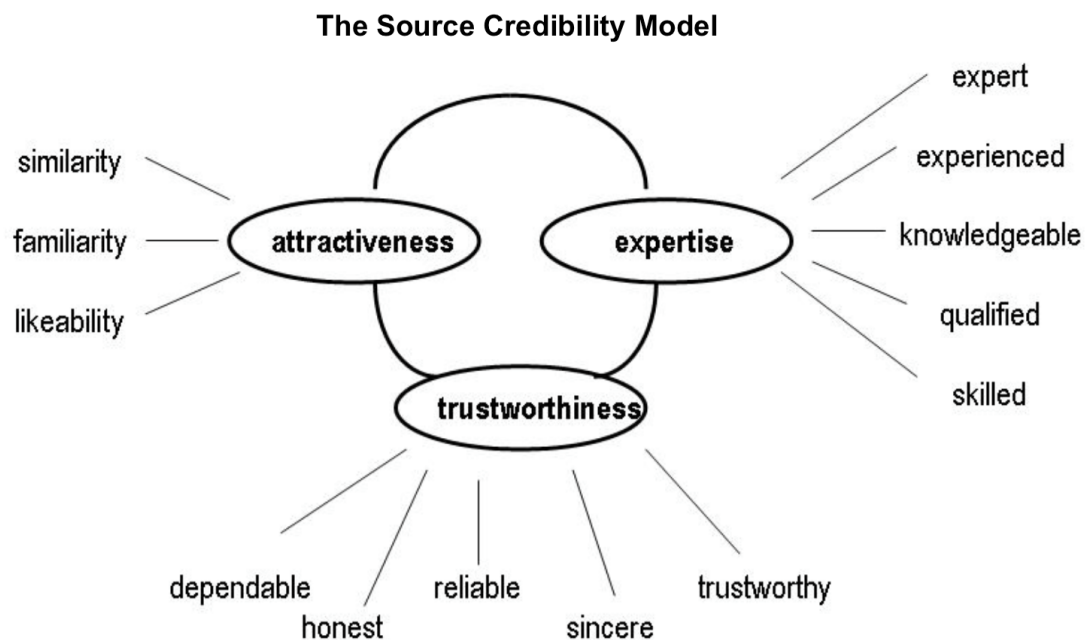
Finally, entertainment is also a major reason for media consumption. Media allows the audience to escape reality and possible problems in real life, and give the audience the possibility to relax. Along with that, media can serve as a timer filler. Finally, media also can give the audience intrinsic cultural or aesthetic enjoyment, emotional release, or sexual arousal.

Along with the four dimensions above, McQuail added another dimension to his definition in the third edition of *Mass Communication: An Introduction* (1994); “Personal social circumstances and psychological dispositions together influence both [...] general habits of media use and also [...] beliefs and expectations about the benefits offered by the media, which shape [...] specific acts or media choice and consumption, followed by [...] assessments of the value of the experience (with consequences for further media use) and, possibly [...] applications of benefits acquired in other areas of experience and social activity” (McQuail, 1994, 235). This fifth dimension serves as explanation for how the audience seeks out different media for different gratifications that can fulfil their individual needs. In other words, the audience seeks the media for gratifications for not only one reasons, but for several. The audience might seek to one media source for information, and another for entertainment.

I have at this point gone through Katz et al. and McQuail’s Uses and Gratifications theory. The following section will present the theory of source credibility.

3.3 Source Credibility

The Source Credibility Model was created to explain the importance of credibility of the source in order for the receiver of a message to accept this. It encompassed the relationship between the perceived level of expertise and trustworthiness of the source. “”Source credibility” is a term commonly used to imply a communicator’s positive characteristics that affect the receiver’s acceptance of a message” (Ohanian, 1990, 41).



Source: Adapted from Ohanian (1990)

Fig. 2

3.3.1 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is defined as “the degree of confidence in the communicator’s intent to communicate the assertions he considers most valid.” Trustworthiness depends on the receiver’s level of acceptance of the source and the message, in other words the receiver’s perceived honesty, integrity, and believability of the source (Ohanian, 1990, 41). The perceived level of trustworthiness has an effect on attitude change in the sense that when the endorser is perceived highly trustworthy, an opinionated endorsement is more effective than a non-opinionated endorsement (Ohanian, 1990, 41). According to McGinnies et al. (Ohanian, 1990, 41), an endorser who is considered both trustworthy and an expert generates the most opinion change, yet an endorser who is not considered an expert still is considered persuasive only from being trustworthy. Along with that, Friedman et al. (Ohanian, 1990, 41) concludes that celebrities are more likely to be considered trustworthy as a result of them being likeable.

3.3.2 Expertise

The perceived expertise, or competence, of the source is the element that is considered to be the most critical factor in the perceived credibility (Gilbert et al., 1998, 344). Expertise is especially of high interest to marketers seeking to influence consumers. The reason hereof is that higher levels of perceived expertise results in higher levels of perceived credibility, which has a positive impact on attitude change, and ultimately purchase intention (Ohanian, 1990, 42). Expertise is by Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953 (Ohanian, 1990,41)) defined as “the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions”. The expertise of the source depends on its perceived knowledge, skills, or experience on the material it is covering, along with and whether it is making valid assertions. According to Biswas et al (2006, 19), assertions from an expert endorser creates a higher level of agreement on the subject than the same assertions from a non-expert endorser.

3.3.3 Source Attractiveness

The source attractiveness model is a part of the source valence model introduced by McGuire in 1985 (Ohanian, 1990, 41). Source attractiveness is not directly a part of the source credibility theory, but still has relevance to this case as it “contends that the effectiveness of a message depends on source’s “familiarity”, “likability”, “similarity,” and “attractiveness” to the respondent” (Ohanian, 1990,41). *Familiarity* refers to the degree to which the receiver already has knowledge of the endorser prior to the endorsement. *Similarity* is the degree to which the receiver of the message sees a resemblance between the source and the receiver. *Likability* is the degree of affection that the receiver holds towards the source, this usually being because of physical appearance. A high level of attractiveness of the source can have a positive impact on the brand and products that the source is associated with. Along with that, attractiveness also influences the receiver towards positive attitude change (Ohanian, 1990,42).

I have now gone through the source credibility theory and the source-attractiveness model, and how trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness can influence the consumer’s perception of the endorser’s credibility and persuasiveness, and ultimately influence purchase behaviour. In the following section several theories concerning multiple brand endorsements will be accounted for.

3.5 Mowen and Brown, Kelley, and Tripp

From the previous introduced theories it can be concluded that the endorser's trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, and meanings are important and influential factors when analysing the effectiveness of an endorsement. However, as celebrities often tend to endorse more than one brand or product, the following paragraph will examine how multiple brand endorsements influence the consumer's perceptions of the celebrity's credibility and likeability, along with their attitude towards the endorsement and brand.

3.5.1 Multiple brand endorsements

Both Tripp et al. (1994) and Mowen and Brown (1981) have revealed that a higher number of celebrity endorsements has a negative influence on the consumer's perception on the celebrity and the endorsement. "When as many as four products are endorsed celebrity credibility and likability, as well as attitude toward the ad, may attenuate" (Tripp et al., 1994, 546).

The brand evaluation and the perception of the endorser's trustworthiness is more likely to be evaluated by the consumer in the case of multiple product or brand endorsements by the celebrity (Mowen and Brown, 1981). According to Kelley's (1973) attribution theory, the reason for this can be found in the endorsement's distinctiveness. Distinctiveness refers to the level of uniqueness in the relationship between the endorser and the product. If a celebrity only endorses one product, the relationship between celebrity and product is distinctive. But, according to the attribution theory, multiple brand or product endorsements affects the distinctiveness negatively, as the relationship between the endorser and product loses its uniqueness. "[...] single product endorsements (even if viewed multiple times) constitute distinctive actions since the spokesperson endorses on brand and not other brands or products. In contrast, multiple product endorsements constitute nondistinctive actions because the endorsements generalise across products with the celebrity constant" (Tripp et al., 1994, 536). According to Tripp et al., low distinctiveness might result in the consumer viewing the endorsement and product less favourably, which ultimately results in less purchase intention. Along with the relationship between product and endorser being less distinctive in the case of multiple product endorsements, this can also influence the consumers to question whether the endorsers really believe in the positive characteristics of the endorsed brand or product. "[...] the number of products a celebrity endorses, apart from the number of exposures to the celebrity

endorser, negatively influences consumer perception of the endorser and the advertising itself" (Tripp et al., 1994, 546).

As the attribution theory points out, one issue when it comes to celebrities endorsing multiple brands or products is the fact that the consumers might question the underlying reasons for the endorsement (Tripp et al., 1990, 543). In Tripp et al.'s research on the subject, the reactions on multiple product endorsements tended to be connected with the adjective "more", referring to the endorser receiving more money, fame, exposure. Although their research shows that monetary motives not directly creates more negativity towards the endorser, its motives are still questioned. "Consumers doubt whether the endorser actually likes, uses, or purchases the products endorsed" (Tripp et al., 1990, 543). In other words, the likeability of the endorser might not be affected directly by celebrities doing multiple product endorsements for monetary reasons, yet the trustworthiness and expertise of the endorser might indirectly be affected. Looking at this from an attributions theory perspective (Kelley, 1973), the fact that the consumers link multiple endorsements with monetary reasons refers to external attribution, while the fact that the consumers question the trustworthiness and expertise of the celebrity refers to internal attribution. Although Tripp et al.'s research showed that multiple endorsements for monetary reasons does not directly create more negativity towards the endorser, this still indirectly affects the trustworthiness and expertise of the endorser, which ultimately results in less intentions to purchase the endorsed product (Mower and Brown, 1981).

I have now gone through Kelley, Tripp et al., and Mowen and Browns perspective on how multiple brand or product endorsements influences the consumer's perceptions of the celebrity's credibility and likeability, along with their attitude towards the endorsement and brand. In the following section the dialogic public relations theory will be accounted for.

3.4 Dialogic Public Relations Theory

With the rise of the influence of social media and bloggers, endorsements and dialogic communication has been of high interest to public relations practitioners (Rybalko and Seltzers, 2010). Kent and Taylor discusses this "ethical form of communication" (2002), and argue that "dialogue is considered more ethical because it is based on principles of honesty, trust and positive regard for the other rather than simply a conception of the public as a means to and end" (Kent and Taylor, 2002, 33).

3.4.1 Dialogic tenets & ethical principles

Kent and Taylor point out the fact that dialogue “is not a process or a series of steps. Rather, it is a product of on going communication and relationships” (Kent and Taylor, 2002, 24). Yet, dialogue as an orientation does include five features;

Mutuality, “or the recognition of organization-public relationship” (Kent and Taylor, 2002, 24).

This refers to an the acknowledgement that organisations and their publics are inextricably tied together, and is characterised by a *collaborative orientation* and *spirit of mutual equality*. A *collaborative orientation* is the most central feature of *mutuality*, and includes that “All individuals engaged in a dialogue should have positions of their own and should advocate for those positions vigorously” ((Kent and Taylor, 2002, 25). *Spirit of mutual equality* refers to the acknowledgement of all parts of the dialogue as equals, rather than having some parts of the dialogue exercising power of superiority ((Kent and Taylor, 2002, 25).

Propinquity, “or the temporality and spontaneity of interactions with publics” (Kent and Taylor,

2002, 24). *Propinquity* advocates for a type of rhetorical exchange, and is created by three features: *immediacy of presence*, *temporal flow*, and *engagement*. *Immediacy of presence* suggest that parties involved in dialogue should discuss issues in the present, rather than after the decision making.

Temporal flow involves the understanding of the past, present, and the seek for constructing a future which is both equitable and acceptable for all participants involved. Finally, *engagement* refers to all participants of the dialogue being willing to commit fully to the dialogue, and all parties respecting each other risk attachment and fondness “rather than maintaining positions of neutrality or observer status” (Kent and Taylor, 2002, 26). *Engagement* means engaging in one’s community, which ultimately means that all parties involved will benefit “because decisions serve multiple publics” (Kent and Taylor, 2002, 26).

Empathy, “or the supportiveness and confirmation of public goals and interests” (Kent and Taylor,

2002, 24). *Empathy*, or sympathy refers to the support and trust that must be present in order for dialogue to succeed, an is characterised by *supportiveness*, *communal orientation*, and *confirmation* or acknowledgement. *Supportiveness* involves all information being available and open to all, and for all participants being able to engage. Further, *supportiveness* is described as “more akin to a conversation between lovers where each has his or her own desires but seeks the other’s

good”(Kent and Taylor, 2002, 27). *Communal orientation* refers to the acknowledgement that organisations and its publics are linked together and that organisations must engage in local communities in order to benefit from these. *Confirmation* is the visible acknowledgement of the voice of others, rather than ignoring it, and can vary “in degree from a smile or a handshake to an evocative action” (Kent and Taylor, 2002, 28).

Risk, or the willingness to interact with individuals and publics on their own terms” (Kent and Taylor, 2002, 24). Genuine dialogue is a rather problematic concept, as it does include relational risks. This feature is characterised by *vulnerability*, *emergent unanticipated consequences*, and *recognition of strange otherness*. *Vulnerability* refers to the participants in dialogue being vulnerable to manipulation by other parties of the dialogue. However, *vulnerability* also means that the participants are able to built relationship and change. “Dialogic participants have to be willing to emerge from exchanges as new, changed, and reborn. Each encounter offers the possibility of growth” (Kent and Taylor, 2002, 28). *Unanticipated consequences* refers to the fact that dialogue communication is spontaneous, which means that the interaction of participants may result in unexpected outcomes because of each participant’s personal beliefs, values and attitudes (Kent and Taylor, 2002, 28). Finally *recognition of strange otherness* refers to the acceptance of all participants being different from oneself, and should therefor be accepted as being unique and valuable, which ultimately results in a giving dialogic exchange (Kent and Taylor, 2002, 29).

Commitment, “or the extent to which an organisation gives itself over to dialogue, interpretation, and understanding in its interactions with publics” (Kent and Taylor, 2002, 24). *Commitment* is the final of the five principles of dialogue, and is characterised by *genuineness*, *commitment to the conversation*, and *commitment to interpretation*. *Genuineness* refers to the need of dialogue to be honest and forthright. An organisation must disclose the good of a relationship with a brand, as “organizations and publics that deal truthfully with one another are much more able to come to mutually beneficial solutions” (Kent and Taylor, 2002, 29). *Commitment to conversation* refers to the parties agreeing on conversations being held for mutual benefit and understanding, rather to defeat the other parties. “Indeed, sharing the same meanings or working toward common understandings is crucial to dialogic relationship”(Kent and Taylor, 2002, 29). *Commitment to interpretation* refers to dialogic exchanges being intersubjective, thus all parties involved will have their own interpretation and understanding of the exchange. Not only should the parties acknowledge the different interpretations, but also make an effort to understand these and their

beliefs. “[...] commitment to interpretation also means that efforts are made to grasp the positions, beliefs, and values of others before their positions can be equitably evaluated” (Kent and Taylor, 2002, 29).

The five features presented above are all crucial tenets in incorporating dialogue into ethical public relations (Kent and Taylor, 2002, 30). Smudde (2005) applied this normative approach of dialogic public relations theory to blogging, and argued that within blogging “successful and effective public relations is ethical and dialogic, creating candid, open, simple, and clear messages to manage perceptions of an organization” (Smudde, 2005, 38). According to him, the dialogic public relations theory is the ideal ethic communication between internal and external publics, as this “is likely to increase trust that it is acting in the interests of other and thereby foster their willingness to act in the interest of the organization” (Heath & Bryant, 1992, 263 (in Smudde, 2005, 37)). However, Smudde’s article mainly concerns blogging within organisations rather than organisations collaborating with bloggers through sponsorships. Cenite et al.’s research on ethical beliefs amongst personal and non-personal bloggers can fill in this gap, as it introduces four ethical principles in blogging; *truth-telling*, *accountability*, *minimising harm*, and *attribution* (Cenite et al., 2009, 579). Truth-telling involves honesty and completeness in reporting, and the importance of gathering and reporting correct information (Cenite et al., 2009, 579). Accountability involves bearing the consequences of one’s actions through writing, whether it being through comments or if they are sued for the content on their blog (Cenite et al., 2009, 579). Minimising harm refers to the blogger being careful with sharing private, confidential information, and in general bear other individual’s feelings in mind and treat people with respect through their writing (Cenite et al., 2009, 579). Finally, attribution involves the issue of plagiarism and the importance of giving proper credits when necessary (Cenite et al., 2009, 579).

3.4.2 Dialogic principles

In *Building Dialogic Relationship Through the World Wide Web* (1998), Kent and Taylor introduces five principles of dialogic relations theory, offering tools that are required to be incorporated into the website for fostering the relationship between the organisation and its public.

Dialogic loop is the ideal starting point for a successful dialogic communication between an organisation and its publics. The dialogic loop “allows publics to query organizations and, more importantly, it offers organizations the opportunity to responds to questions, concerns and

problems” (Kent and Taylor, 1998, 326). For the dialogic loop it is in other words of high importance to not only offer information through the website, but also respond to the wishes that the public might have for further information.

Usefulness of information; although response is of high importance to the relationship between the organisation and its public, the general content of information offered should also be important. “Sites should make an effort to include information of *general* value to all publics - even if a site contains primarily industry, or user, specific information” (Kent and Taylor, 1998, 327). The public should be interested in visiting the site for its content rather than “smoke and mirrors” (Kent and Taylor, 1998, 327). In other words, the website should offer the visitor with on-going useful value and information.

Generation of return visits is equally as important to the website as having valuable content, but is a rather easy way for the public relations practitioner to foster the dialogic relationship between the organisation and its public. The generation of return visits relies on the website being updated regularly, whether it being with new information or new comments. “Sites that contain limited/unchanging information, are no longer useful after one visit and do not encourage return visits. Sites that contain constantly updated and “valuable” information for publics appear credible and suggest that an organization is responsible” (Kent and Taylor, 1998, 329).

The intuitiveness / ease of interface is a rather fundamental part of fostering the bond between the organisation and its public. “Visitors who come to Web sites for informational purposes, or even for curiosity, should find the sites easy to figure out and understand” (Kent and Taylor, 1998, 329). This is easily mastered by having a clean layout, which offers the visitor with a table of contents which makes the site more accessible for the visitor to find the information needed. Along with that, the graphics on the website are of high importance. These must be minimal, yet not “boring corporate brochures” (Kent and Taylor, 1998, 330). However, content should be considered of highest importance, in order to not create a negative image of the organisation and ultimately fail to foster dialogic relationships.

Conservation of visitors; Public visiting the site of the organisation should be interested in remaining on the site long enough for the relationship being able to develop. External links that lead the visitor away from the site are rather critical in this step, as they might never come back after

leaving the site. Therefore, the website should only contain clearly marked essential links to keep the visitor on the site for as long as possible. On top of that, sponsored content of advertising should not take all the attention from the actual content on the site, but instead they “should place sponsored advertising, or institutional advertising, at the bottom of pages or behind other clearly marked links to avoid the “attractive-nuisance” factor, and the tendency of users to be led astray. Sponsored advertising is one way that visitors are lost”(Kent and Taylor, 1998, 331).

The entire theoretical framework for this thesis has now been presented. In the next chapter, the empirical data is to be accounted for, and further serve as a foundation for the analysis.

4. Empirical data

In this chapter, the empirical data will be presented. In order to find an answer to the problem statement, the theory will be applied to both secondary data on the subject, as well as a primary self conducted questionnaire.

4.1 Blogs and blogger endorsements

The secondary material will in this chapter serve as a clarification and a background for the topics touched upon in this thesis. The information will be gathered from several articles, rather than one, in order to keep it as objective and informative as possible.

4.1.1 Blogs

A blog is an “online journal where an individual, group, or corporation presents a record of activities, thoughts, or beliefs” (Britannica). The idea of blogs have existed since the beginning of the World Wide Web, but it is not until the past decade that they have gained popularity. By October 2005 there were approximately 19.6 million blogs, and this number has been doubling every five months since then, with 70,000 new blogs being created each day. The blogs can go under themes like fashion, travels, tech, beauty, home decor, cooking, wellness, lifestyle, family, and many more (Bloglovin’). Furthermore, today blogs are not only limited to websites, but also videos on Youtube, along with short blogs, like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, which have been gaining popularity over the past few years (FTC).

Blogs can be considered an update, or an extension of Word of Mouth Marketing (WOMM), which is defined as “the most powerful medium on the planet. It’s the actual sharing of an opinion about a product or service between two or more consumers. It’s what happens when people become natural brand advocates. It’s the holy grail of marketers, CEOs and entrepreneurs, as it can make or break a product. The key to its success: it’s honest and natural” (Marketing Tech Blog). With the rise of the consumers’ presence online, a new word-of-mouth has been developed, the electronic word-of-mouth. The consumers are more likely to search online for reviews or ratings on a product or service, both on blogs and social media. “88% of people trust online reviews written by other consumers as much as they trust recommendations from personal contacts. Simply put, online recommendations are becoming the new norm of word-of-mouth referrals” (Switch Up Media).

According Marketing, in Australia, independent bloggers are ranged as higher key social media influencers compared to celebrities, and the top six Australian bloggers “have a larger combined audience than the highest-selling magazine, newspaper and TV program collectively” (Marketing). Bloggers have a higher interaction rate than the previously preferred endorsers, celebrities, and this counts not only for the major bloggers. This interaction rate, or engagement gives the bloggers the power to change the consumers’ perception of a brand or a product, “Bloggers now have the power, compared to traditional talent, to change brand perception and increase awareness for brands” (The Australian Financial Review). Especially female influencers tend to have a bigger following, or “fans” than their male colleagues, “We find that grown men have less of a tendency to follow people on social media compared to female influencers who acquire a lot of young “fans” to follow, comment and share. Brands and advertisers are wanting more integrated content across all channels. An influencer may have five main channels but it’s rare for followers to engage with all channels on a regular basis” (The Australian Financial Review).

4.1.2 Blogger endorsements

Companies have over the recent few years also discovered the influence that bloggers have on their audience, and because of that they are starting to look to bloggers rather than celebrities for endorsements (Business News Daily). There are multiple ways that a blogger can endorse a product, from affiliate links, receiving products, sponsorships, or ambassadorships. Gifting goods to bloggers is a rather easy way for a brand to expose its products to the right customers. However, the blogger is not obligated to endorse a gifted product through editorial coverage. If the company is looking for guaranteed exposure on the blog, such as a review, other compensation than a free product is expected. Companies can also team up with bloggers on sponsored posts, in which the blogger is paid to speak about the brand, a product, or a campaign in his or her own words. This allows the blogger to make the post more personal and appealing to its readers. One example of this is Prada’s Stop and Smell the Florale campaign for their new fragrance, Prada Candy Florale, in which selected bloggers were asked to write a post on their blog about moments where they stopped and smelled the florals around them. Several companies also choose to set up affiliate program, in which the blogger is paid a percentage of products sold through links from their blog. (Hub Spot)

A new trend that is slowly starting to show amongst cosmetic brands, is the use of bloggers as brand ambassadors, a role which until now has only been possessed by celebrities. Examples of these are Aimee Song who in April 2016 was announced as the new ambassador for Laura Mercier, Chiara Camilla Bonde Riis

Ferragni has teamed up with Pantene, Adrielle Charnas is the ambassador for Tresemmé (Fashionista), Estée Lauder announced Korean blogger Irene Kim as their first global beauty contributor in July last year (Cosmopolitan), and Swiss blogger Kristina Bazan was in October named the new brand ambassador of L'Oréal (Augure).

Bloggers are the ideal choice for brand ambassadors, as they are considered being one of us (Augure). Although some bloggers today may have achieved the same level as that of a celebrity, there is still one major difference between those categories. According to Augure, bloggers are great brand endorsers because of the closeness that they have with their audience, in comparison to celebrities. Celebrities seem unattainable, “if you see a celebrity wearing something, of course you want it, but if you see a blogger wearing it, then you can have it (or get the feeling that you can actually have it)” (Augure).

4.1.3 FTC

As a result of the increasing use of bloggers for brand and product endorsements, the FTC Federal Trade Commission released in 2009 their Testimonials & Endorsement Report, which explained the requirements for online endorsers, including bloggers, to use disclosures in endorsements, sponsorships, or the receiving of any other payments (Social Media Explorer). In 2013 a new update was released, with the title *.com Disclosures* which further extended the need for disclosures in endorsements to social media, such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook (Social Media Explorer). The reasoning behind making those guidelines and disclosure requirements lies with the reader, as the purpose with disclosures is to assist the readers or viewers in “determining whether a blogger or endorser has a material connection to the brand about which they’ve produced content” (Social Media Explorer). The FTC Endorsement guide state that bloggers must use a disclosure in the case that they have been paid to write about a brand or product, if they agree with a company to review a product, or if their post includes an affiliate link. A disclosure can simply be made by introducing the post saying that it is sponsored (FTC). This disclosure is necessary on any type of blog, including short blogs and video blogs.

4.2 Questionnaire results

As explained in section 4, the majority of the empirical data consists of answers from a questionnaire consisting of 39 questions (section 8.1), framed to get an insight into young

Americans' perception of blogger endorsement and credibility. The questionnaire was conducted in the period from April 5th 2016 through April 19th, and I received responses from 157 respondents in total. These responses provided me with the following empirical data, which will be the basis of the analysis. It should be noted that the data has been grouped for the convenience of gaining a better into the various answers. The differentiation of the 157 answers can be found in section 8, appendix 1.

4.2.1 The respondents and their blog reading habits

Since the questionnaire was conducted randomly, without any knowledge about the readers, other than the fact that they were Americans, the age differentiation, gender, and occupation of the respondents was important to clarify as these data might have an influence on the latter answers, and the respondents' opinions.

Question number 1(section 8.2.1) is to clarify the gender of the respondents. The respondents consist of 65,6% female and 34,4% male. Question number 2 is to clarify the age range of the respondents (section 8.2.2). The question is ranked in groups, as shown in the diagram below, in order to compare the answers. The groups are ordered as followed; "younger than 18", "18-22", "23-26", "27-32", and "older than 32". The group "23-26" contains the majority of the respondents, as 42.7% of the respondents are placed in this age range. The group "18-22" comes next, with 35.7% of the respondents being placed in this age range. The two groups "older than 32" and "27-32" are the two groups with the least amount of respondents, as only 13.4% and 8.3% respectively are placed in this age range. None of the respondents are below the age of 18.

You are aged between? (157 responses)

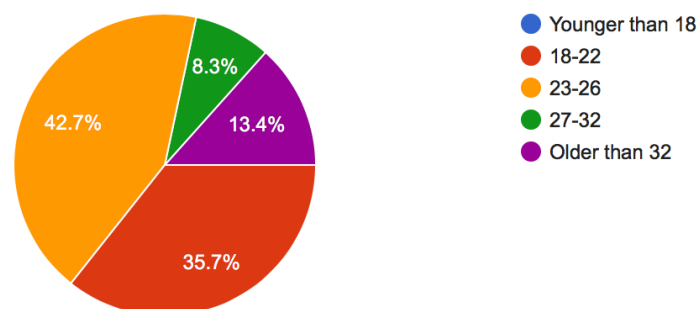


Figure 4

Furthermore, the respondents were in question 3 asked on their current occupation (section 8.2.3). The question is ranked into five groups, as shown in the diagram below, in order to compare the answers. The groups are ordered as followed; “Student”, “Employee”, “Entrepreneur”, “Unemployed”, and “Other”. The group “Student” contains the majority of the respondents, as 48.4% of the respondents are placed in this group. The group “Employee” comes next with 36.8% of the respondents being placed in this group. The three groups “Entrepreneur”, “Unemployed”, and “Other” have the least amount of respondents, ranging from 2.6% to 8.4%. Hereby, it can be summarised that the majority of the respondents are aged between 18 and 26, students or employed and female.

What fits your current situation? (155 responses)

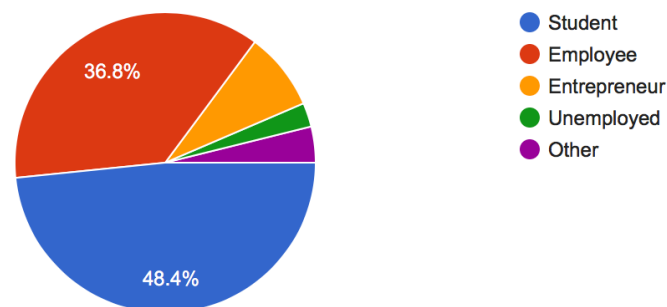


Figure 5

The focus of this study is blogs and blogger endorsements, and the young American consumer's perception of these. Question 4 to 10 regards the respondents' online and blog reading habits. In question 4, the respondents were asked how much time they spend online on average per day (section 8.2.4). The responses were ranked into five groups, as shown in the diagram below, in order to compare the responses. The five answers were “Less than 1 hour”, “1-2 hours”, “3-4 hours”, “4-5 hours”, and “5+ hours”. The group “3-4 hours” contains the majority of the respondents with 40.8%, and is followed by the group “5+ hours” with 31.8% of the respondents being placed in this group. 14% and 11.5% of the respondents belong in the groups “4-5 hours” and “1-2 hours”,

respectively. Only 1.9% of the respondents claim to be online for more than five hours.

How much time on average per day do you spend online? (157 responses)

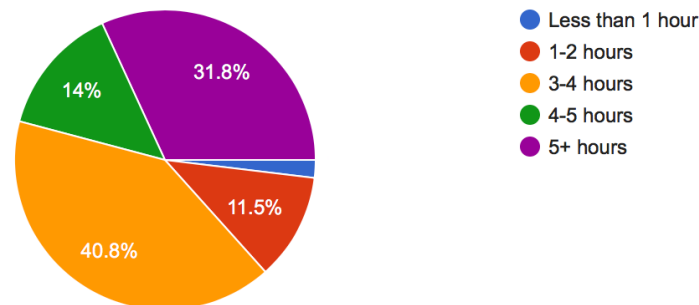


Figure 6

This question is followed by the respondents being asked how many blogs they read on average per day (section 8.2.5). Again, the responses were grouped into six different groups, being “none”, “1”, “2-4”, “4-6”, “6-8”, and “more than 8”. The differentiation between the responses to this answer are rather close. The two groups; “2-4” and “1” have an equal amount of responses, which is 30.6%. The group “none” comes right after with 24.8% of the responses belonging in this group. Least of the responses answered that they belonged in the groups “4-6” (9.6%), “more than 8” (3.2%), and “6-8” (1.3%).

How many blogs do you read on average per day? (157 responses)

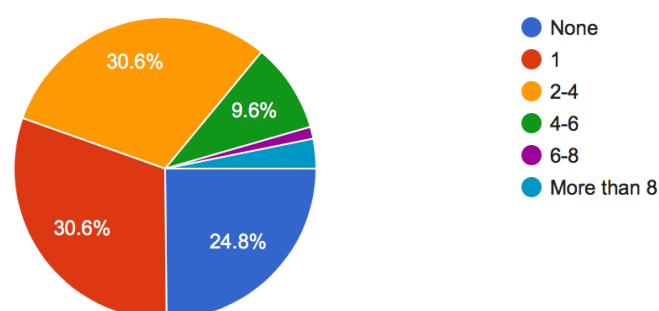


Figure 7

In question 5 there respondents were asked on the type of blogs that they mostly read (section 8.2.6). The answers were grouped into 9 groups, being “Fashion”, “Beauty”, “Tech”, “Cooking”, “Travel”, “Political”, “Personal life”, “Art”, “Health & wellness”, “Home decor”, and “Other”. The most popular type of blog to read turned out to be Travel blogs, with 20.5% of the respondents

belonging in this group. Next are tech blogs (14.6%) and political blogs (13.9%). The two groups “Personal life” and “Other” have an equal amounts of responses, which is 10.6%. 9.3% of the respondents have answered that they mostly read “Health & wellness” blogs. The least popular categories of blogs are “Cooking” (6.6%), “Beauty” (5.3%), “Fashion” (4%), “Art” (3.3%), and “Home decor” (1.3%).

Which type of blog do you mostly read? (151 responses)

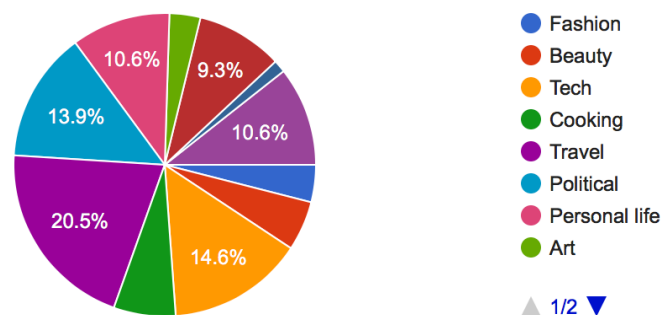


Figure 8

In question 7 the respondents were asked about their main reason to read blogs (section 8.2.7). The answers were grouped into five groups, being “To socialize”, “To find specific information”, “As a pastime/hobby”, “For product/brand reviews”, and “Other”. The majority of the respondents (47.1%) responded that they read blogs “To find specific information”, which is closely followed by “As a pastime/hobby”, with 35.3% of the respondents belonging in this group. 10.5% of the respondents read blogs “For product/brand reviews”, and the least popular reasons to read blogs are “Other” (5.2%) and “To socialize” (2%).

My main reason to read blogs is (153 responses)

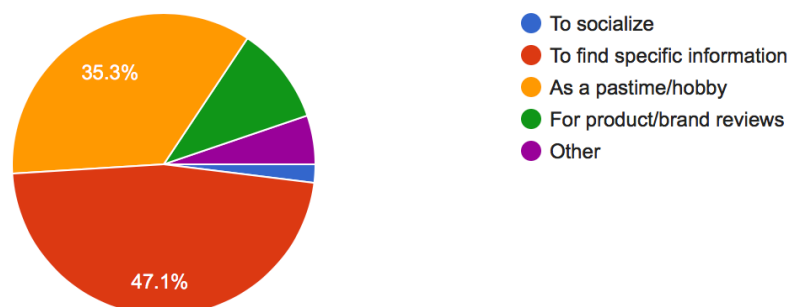


Figure 9

In question 8 to 10 the respondents were given three statements to which they were asked to tick one box for each statement, depending on how strongly they agree or disagree with the statement. The scale went from 1, strongly disagreeing, to 5, strongly agree.

In question 8, the respondents were given the statement “I actively search blogs for reviews on brands or services I am interested in” (section 8.2.8). To this 26.3% of the respondents ticked the box 4, stating that they agree, 23.1% of the respondents ticked 5, stating that they strongly agree, 20.5% ticked 3, stating that they are indifferent, 18.6% ticked 1, stating that they strongly disagree, and finally 11.5% of the respondents ticked the box number 2, stating that they disagree. From this question it can be concluded that the majority of the respondents agree to some extent that they are actively searching blogs for reviews on brands or services.

In question 9 the respondents were given the statement “I often comment on blogs” (section 8.2.9). To this statement 67.5% of the respondents ticked the box 1, stating that they strongly disagree, 11% of the respondents ticked the box 2, stating that they disagree, 10.4% of the respondents ticked the box 3, stating that they are indifferent, 8.4% of the respondents ticked the box 4, stating that they agree, and finally 2.6% of the respondents ticked the box 5, stating that they strongly agree.

In the final question of the first part of the questionnaire, the respondents were given the statement “Bloggers often respond to my comments” (section 8.2.10). To this statement 56.1% of the respondents ticked the box 1, stating that they strongly disagree with the statement, 20.6% of the respondents ticked the box 3, stating that they are indifferent with the statement, 12.9% of the respondents ticked the box 2, stating that they disagree, 5.8% of the respondents ticked the box 4, stating that they agree, and finally 4.5% of the respondents ticked the box 5, stating that they strongly agree with the statement.

4.2.2. The effectiveness of celebrity endorsement

The second part of the questionnaire concerns celebrity endorsements and consists of nine questions. In question 11, the respondents were asked which kind of advertising influences their purchase intention the most (section 8.2.11). The responses were divided into the following groups; “Funny”, “Informative”, “Emotional”, “Celebrity endorsed”, and “Other”. The majority of the respondents answered that informative advertises influences their purchase intentions the most, as 65.8% of the respondents chose this answer. 24.5% of the respondents answered “Funny”, and 7.1% of the respondents answered “Emotional”. The answers “Celebrity endorsed” and “Other” had the

least influence on the respondents' purchase intention, with only 1.3% of the respondents choosing this answer.

Part 2

Which kind of advertising influences your purchase intentions the most?

(155 responses)

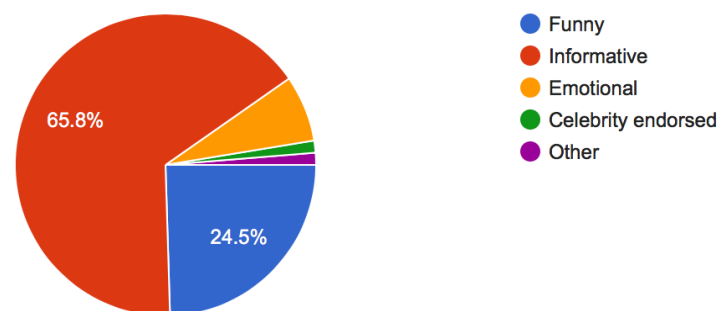


Figure 10

In question 12, the respondents were asked to clarify their reasoning behind their answer to question 11 (section 8.2.12). The respondents who claimed that their purchase intentions are influenced by celebrity endorsed advertising stated that the reasoning behind this was mainly because of familiarity with the endorser. "Because my attention is always drawn to a familiar face or voice, especially if I like the celebrity" (section 8.2.12). One respondent who answered "informative" stated his reasoning behind this type of advertising over one that is celebrity endorsed, "Just because some one endorses a product, doesn't mean it's the best. I prefer to have information about a product and make my decision based on that" (section 8.2.12). This is supported by another respondent who points out the lack of credibility of celebrity endorsements, "I trust more in people who have actually used a product instead of a paid endorsement" (section 8.2.12). Another respondent points out that the informative ads are more serious compared to other types of advertisement, such as celebrity endorsements, "because it is more serious, not a joke, and not a paid celebrity endorsement" (section 8.2.12).

The respondents who answered that "Funny" or "Emotional" advertisements are more likely to influence their purchase behaviour, as these are more likely to make a memorable or positive impression on them. "If an ad can make me laugh I'm more likely to remember it" (section 8.2.12) and "It catches my attention better. Something that makes me laugh sticks with me longer than something that is merely informative or celebrity endorsed" (section 8.2.12). One respondent

claimed that a funny advertisement makes him/her obligated to return the favour, "If you make me laugh, I feel obligated to return the favor, somehow. Probably some psychological element going on. Reciprocity or something" (section 8.2.12).

One respondent points out that a mixture of emotional and informative ads have the biggest influence on its purchase behaviour, "It's actually informative and emotional. I like it when I see real people using a specific brand" (section 8.2.12). One respondent claims that emotional advertisements are more tangible, "It is easier to identify with emotions and provides a more tangible incentive to buy what they might be advertising" (section 8.2.12).

In general, the respondents who answered "Informative" highly base this on being more trustworthy and detailed, "I strive to make purchases that are best for me personally and my wallet. I may be intrigued by funny or emotional commercials but not convinced to make a purchase solely on those characteristics" (section 8.2.12). "I am usually looking for specific information, so advertising that answers my questions is the most effective" (section 8.2.12). In general it seems as if the respondents are not influenced by advertisements, but rather prefer doing their own research on a product, "I like to make my own decisions after gathering lots of information" (section 8.2.12). "I am more driven by review and facts about the product to ensure I am getting a good investment/product" (section 8.2.12).

Finally, the respondents especially prefer hearing other people's honest opinions on the products, "I like personal opinions and perceptions of products, but from an efficiency point of view" (section 8.2.12). "I want to know what someone who has purchased the product and is only affected by its performance things of it" (section 8.2.12). "I want to hear what people who have been there or are holding the item in their hand say- but only if it is detailed" (section 8.2.12). Some of the respondents turn to blogs to find information, "I'm going to look for information in the first place if

I am going to read a blog” (section 8.2.12).

Which kind of advertising do you find most trustworthy? (156 responses)

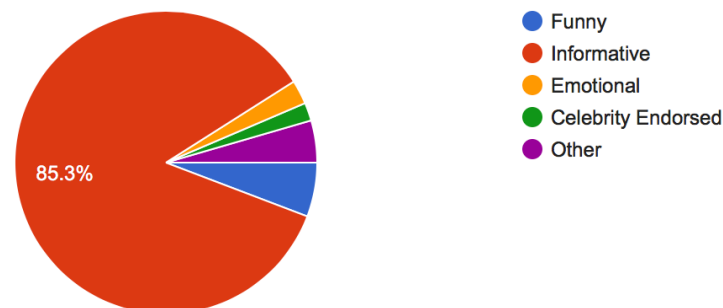


Figure 11

In question 13 the respondents are asked which type of advertising they find most trustworthy (section 8.2.13). The answers for this question are divided into the same groups as in question 11, “Funny”, “Informative”, “Emotional”, “Celebrity endorsed”, and “Other”. For this question, 85.3% of the respondents find informative advertising more trustworthy than the other categories. Only 5.8% of the respondents find funny advertisements trustworthy, 4.5% find other types of advertisements trustworthy, 2.6% of the respondents find emotional advertisements trustworthy, and 1.9% find celebrity endorsed advertisements trustworthy.

In question 14, the respondents were asked to clarify their answer to question 13 (section 8.2.14). The respondents who answered “Celebrity endorsed” supports their answer by saying “Since a celebrity is ready to put his name and reputation n the line to promote this product I assume that it must be quite good” (section 8.2.14). One respondent does not believe that their role models would lie to them, “If the type of person I look up to says they use, they aren’t lying” (section 8.2.14). The respondents who answered other than celebrity endorsement supports their answers with the statements, “Too informative often means it’s sponsored, as are celeb endorsements” (section 8.2.14). “The more technical, the more reliable. Celebrity endorsed content is generally paid for and is unreliable” (section 8.2.14). A respondent finds it doubtful that the celebrity uses the promoted product, “because it is doubtful the celeb actually uses the product” (section 8.2.14). One respondent also states that paid endorsements not necessarily equals true information, “There is no guarantee that paid endorsements relay true information” (section 8.2.14).

The respondents who answered that funny advertising seems more trustworthy to them, clarifies this with “I think that when there is humour in an advertisement it is fairly likely to show the character of the advertisers. So if they’re funny I’m subconsciously more likely to think “hey, these are good guys!”” (section 8.2.14).

The respondents who think that informative advertising is more trustworthy, claims that this is because that are not able to cover up the facts through humour, emotions, etc. “All of the other types of advertising can easily hide important information. Therefor, the more informative an advertisement is, there more honest and trustworthy it appears” (section 8.2.14). “The other ones could be covering up of distracting you from things through humor, psychological tactics, or famous people” (section 8.2.14). Other respondents believe that credibility can only be achieved through informative advertising, “Credibility comes from true, factual information” (section 8.2.14). “Being informative demonstrates openness and respect for truth in advertising” (section 8.2.14). However, as one respondent states, informative advertising is what one should consider most trustworthy, yet this might not be the case, “I’d like to think I’d find informative stuff the most trustworthy. Not sure if I do though - can’t really gauge my subconscious reaction to this” (section 8.2.14).

Finally, one respondent finds blogger endorsements most credible, as it “Comes from a “normal person” blogger, who I know is picky about what s/he endorses” (section 8.2.14).

In question 15 the respondents were asked if they had ever purchased a product that had been endorsed by a celebrity (section 8.2.15). As shown in the graphics below, as vast majority of the respondents have purchased a product that had been endorsed by a celebrity, with 41% of the respondents answering “Yes” to the question. More than one third of the respondents (37.8%) do not know if they have purchased a celebrity endorsed product, and 21.2% of the respondents have

not purchased a product that had been endorsed by a celebrity.

Did you ever purchase a product that had been endorsed by a celebrity?
(156 responses)

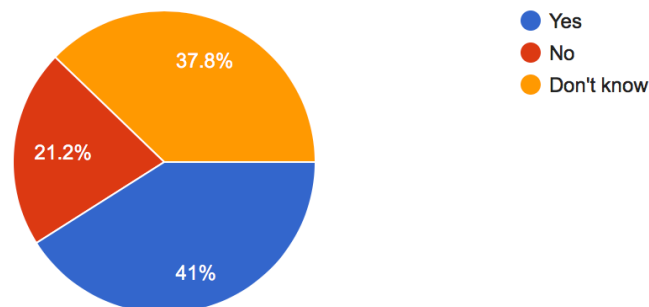


Figure 12

In question 16 the respondents were asked if the presence of celebrities helps them recognise the brand (section 8.2.16). More than half of the respondents believes that the presence of a celebrity helps them recognise the brand, as 54.8% of the respondents answered “Yes” to this question. 31.8% of the respondents does not believe that the presence of celebrities helps them recognise the brand, and 13.4% of the respondents answered that they “Don’t know”.

Does the presence of celebrities help you recognise the brand? (157 responses)

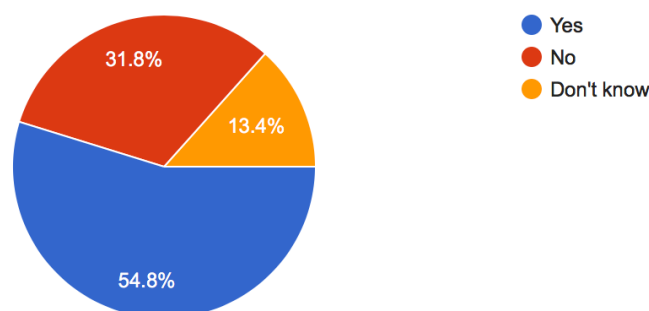


Figure 13

In question 17 the respondents were asked if a celebrity endorsed as has more influence on their purchase behaviour and decisions than a non-endorsed ad (section 8.2.17). The majority of the respondents do not believe that celebrities have any influence on their purchase behaviour and decisions than an non-endorsed ad, as 69.4% of the respondents answered “No” to this question. 17.8% of the respondents do not know if celebrity endorsements influence their purchase behaviour, and 12.7% of the respondents think that the presence of a celebrity has more influence on their

purchase behaviour and decisions than a non-endorsed ad.

Does a celebrity endorsed ad have more influence on your purchase behavior and decisions than a non-endorsed ad?

(157 responses)

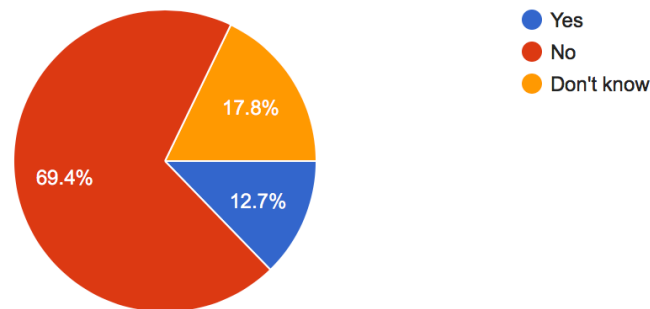


Figure 14

In question 18 the respondents were asked how trustworthy they find an ad that has been endorsed by a celebrity, and rate this on a scale from 1 to 5, 1 being “Not trustworthy” and 5 being “Very trustworthy” (section 8.2.18). The majority of the respondents are indifferent to this question, as 50.3% answered 3. 24.2% of the respondents answered 2, that celebrity endorsed ads are little trustworthy, and 16.6% answered 1, that they are not trustworthy. 8.3% answered 4 that they are trustworthy, and only 0.6% answered that celebrity endorsed advertisements are very trustworthy.

In the question 19, which is the final question in part 2 of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked if the celebrity’s behaviour have any influence on their perception of the brand that they endorse (section 8.2.19). The majority, almost half of the respondents believe that the celebrity’s behaviour have an influence on their perception of the brand that they endorse, as 49% of the respondents answered “Yes” to this question. 40.1% of the respondents think the opposite, and answered “No” to this question. 10.8% of the respondents do not know if the celebrity endorser’s behaviour have an influence on their perception of the brand that they endorse.

4.2.3 The effectiveness of blogger endorsement

The third part of the questionnaire regards blogger endorsement versus celebrity endorsements, and the perceptions the respondents have on bloggers. This part contains seven questions, most of which are statements to which the respondents have to tick one box, depending on how strongly they agree or disagree with the statement, with 1 being “Strongly disagree” and 5 “Strongly agree”.

In question 20 the respondents are given the statement “I find it easier to relate to blogger endorsement than celebrity endorsement” (section 8.2.20). The majority of the respondents agree with this statement, as 39.7% of them ticked the box 4, meaning that they agree. The two boxes 3 and 5 had the same amount of respondents, as 25% of them ticked these boxes, stating that they either are indifferent to this statement or that they strongly agree. 6.4% of the respondents strongly disagree with this statement, as they ticked the box 1, and 3.8% of the respondents ticked the box 2, stating that they disagree with the statement that they find it easier to relate to blogger endorsement than celebrity endorsement.

In question 21 the respondents are given the statement “I feel a stronger connection with bloggers than celebrities” (section 8.2.21). The majority of the respondents agree with this statement, as 37.2% of them ticked the box 4. 31.4% of the respondents stated that they strongly agree with the statement by ticking box 5. 16.7% of the respondents ticked box 3, stating that they are indifferent to the statement. 9.6% of the respondents disagree with the statement and ticked box 2, and finally 5.1% of the respondents ticked box 1, stating that they strongly disagree with the statement that they feel a stronger connection with bloggers than with celebrities.

In question 22 the respondents are given the statement “Bloggers are more credible brand endorsers than celebrities” (section 8.2.22). The majority of the respondents agree with this statement, as 38.7% of them ticked box 4, stating that they agree. 25.8% of the respondents are indifferent to the statement and ticked the box 3. 20.6% of the respondents ticked box 5, stating that they strongly agree. 10.3% of the respondents stated that they disagree by ticking box 2, and finally 4.5% of the respondents ticked box 1 and claimed that they strongly disagree with the statement that bloggers are more credible brand endorsers than celebrities.

In question 23 the respondents are asked to state the reasoning behind their answer to the past three questions (section 8.2.23). The respondents have several reasons to why they consider bloggers more credible or relatable than celebrities. These answers will be divided into several categories as shown below.

“Celebrities aren’t necessarily trying to lie to you”

As one respondent claims, bloggers could be equally as trustworthy or untrustworthy and celebrities, “Bloggers could be equally untrustworthy, celebrities aren’t necessarily trying to lie to you” (section 8.2.23). One respondent simply claims that celebrities are credible, “Celebrities have credibility” (section 8.2.23). Another respondent points out that celebrities are more responsible to what they say about the products they endorse, “A celebrity is less likely to endorse something only for the money, they’re more responsible if the products is bas because they’re well known” (section 8.2.23). The respondents have several reasons to why celebrities are not considered trustworthy or relatable. One respondent claims that celebrities only do endorsements for personal gain, “Celebrities utilize their advertisements to help their personal gain at times. Bloggers tend to be more straight to the point and usually tend to truly express their beliefs without trying to win popularity counts” (section 8.2.23). Celebrities can be paid without using the endorsed product, unlike bloggers who might have tested the product prior to the endorsement, “Although celebrities can be strong advocates for a brand, I sometimes feel that they are paid without actually using the product and actually believing in the product. I make the assumption bloggers have tested or used the product before writing or endorsing it” (section 8.2.23). Finally, one respondent states that celebrities are not real people, “Bloggers are “real” peoples; celebrities are like unicorns” (section 8.2.23).

“They could be a neighbor or a friend”

“Bloggers are real-life people, they could be a neighbor or a friend. Also I feel that a blogger’s purpose is to give me tips & advice whereas celebrities just want me to buy things, almost like a salesperson” (section 8.2.23). Bloggers are more likely to live a life similar to the respondents, “They are real people living real lives with an income similar to mine” (section 8.2.23). They do not expect any other treatment than regular people, “because they are an ‘average’ person, who doesn’t get (or expect) special treatment”. “Bloggers are “real” people like you and me. I can relate much better to them than to someone who makes millions of dollars acting or singing” (section 8.2.23). Real-life people are easier to relate to, “Its easier to connect with average people” (section 8.2.23). “Bloggers are easier to identify as they are ‘real’ people” (section 8.2.23). However, just because they are ‘real’ people, this does not necessarily mean that they are not paid for their endorsement, “Bloggers are real people, so they should be more trustworthy, but then again, they each have strong opinions of their own. And they can endorse certain brands for profit on the side” (section 8.2.23). Bloggers are also more relatable as they have similar needs to the respondents, “Bloggers are more similar to me in their needs than celebrities who are only pretending to use a product to get

paid” (section 8.2.23). They have a lifestyle similar to the respondents, which makes them feel more like a friend rather than an endorser, “These people are more like me and live my lifestyle. You would always trust your neighbor or friends over someone who is complete stranger and so I feel that celebrities can’t speak for how well a product fits me” (section 8.2.23). One respondents believe that bloggers are more credible as they are not paid for their endorsements, “They’ve actually tested the products and aren't getting paid like celebrities” (section 8.2.23). Having tested out the products makes the blogger an expert in the field, “Bloggers generally have more expertise than celebrities who merely act, sing, dance, etc. Of course, this depends on the celebrity as well” (section 8.2.23).

“I still try to acknowledge that bloggers can be compensated for testimony”

However, sometimes bloggers do get paid for endorsements, which one respondent tries to acknowledge, “While I feel there is a stronger possibility that a blogger shares more life experiences with myself, making it easier to connect, I still try to acknowledge that bloggers can be compensated for testimony just like celebrities” (section 8.2.23). One respondent claims that bloggers are more biased if they are paid for an endorsement, “Unless they’re getting paid, they're less biased. I want someone who is clearly not getting paid to promote a product” (section 8.2.23). Finally, a respondent claims that you cannot trust bloggers’ suggestions if they are sponsored, “Bloggers can be paid without advertising that they're being payed, same with instagrammers etc., you really don’t know if you can trust their suggestions” (section 8.2.23). Bloggers are more likely to be biased in endorsements, “Bloggers are more easily bought” (section 8.2.23). However, some respondents believe that although bloggers might be paid to endorse a product, they still have tested the product, “Bloggers are more relatable because they are just people using social media, like I do. But I don't necessarily feel connected to them, because they're still strangers. Technically, they could be getting paid to endorse a product just like celebrities, so that lowers their credibility. But usually they're actually using it at reviewing it in their blog, so their credibility would depend on if the review they gave seemed to completely at the product” (section 8.2.23). One respondent points out the issue of bloggers becoming popular, which has a negative influence on their credibility, “If a blogger is doing well then often time the are paid to blast a product. Sometimes you can find an early blog that is really true to the blogger, but once they've got a ton of followers it gets more tricky” (section 8.2.23). As one respondent points out, the issue with sponsored blog endorsements usually comes when the blogger does not disclose, “I am a blogger, however a lot of them don't disclose” (section 8.2.23). Expertise is more important to credibility than who the endorser is,

“They are equally not credible. If they have some experience in the related field then I would trust them more” (section 8.2.23).

“Anyone can be credible”

A respondent claims that endorsements of any kind, whether it being celebrity or blogger endorsements, cannot be considered credible, “Endorsements from any source seems untrustworthy” (section 8.2.23). However, as another respondent says, being a celebrity or a blogger endorser does not necessarily make you less trustworthy if you believe in the information that you are giving, “Anyone can be credible - just depends on where they get their information and why they endorse something. Their status as a celebrity or a blogger means nothing to an intelligent human being” (section 8.2.23). Another respondent supports this statement, “It depends on their messaging. Bloggers are paid by brands just like celebrities. Sometimes celebrities endorse products p’because they are passionate about the story behind it or its purpose. The more credible endorser is the more informed endorser, celebrity or blogger” (section 8.2.23).

Finally, one respondent states that blogger endorsement has a negative influence of the respondent’s perception of the endorsed brand, “I don’t really know. A lot of bloggers are full of crap, so their endorsement might harm my perception of the product” (section 8.2.23).

In question 24 the respondents were given the statement “If a blogger has interests similar to mine, I am more likely to trust their review” (section 8.2.24). The majority of the respondents agree with this statement, as 45.5% of them ticked box 4. 40.4% of the respondents ticked box 5, stating that they strongly agree with the statement. 11.5% of the respondents are indifferent to the statement, and ticked box 3. 1.9% of the respondents ticked box 1, stating that they strongly disagree with the statement. Finally, 0.6% of the respondents ticked box 2, stating that they disagree with the statement that if a blogger has similar interests to them, they are more likely to trust their review.

In question 25, the respondents were given the statement “I have purchased a product after reading a positive review on a blog (section 8.2.25). The majority of the respondents agree with this statement, as 41.7% of them ticked box 4. 32.1% of the respondents strongly agree and ticked box 5. 10.9% of the respondents ticked box 3, stating that they are indifferent towards the statement. 8.3% of the respondents strongly disagree with the statement and ticked box 1. Finally, 7.1% of the respondents ticked box 2, stating that they disagree with the statement that they have purchased a product are reading a positive review on a blog.

In question 26, the respondents were given the statement “I have decided not to purchase a product or service after reading a negative review on a blog” (section 8.2.26). The majority of the respondents agree with this statement, as 37.8% of them ticked box 4. 35.9% of the respondents strongly agree and ticked box 5. 12.8% of the respondents ticked box 3, stating that they are indifferent towards the statement. 7.7% of the respondents strongly disagree with the statement and ticked box 1. Finally, 5.8% of the respondents ticked box 2, stating that they disagree with the statement that they have decided not to purchase a product or service after reading a negative review on a blog.

Finally, in the last question of part 3 of the questionnaire, the respondents are asked if the blogger’s behaviour have any influence on their perception of the brand that they endorse (section 8.2.27). The majority of the respondents claims that the blogger’s behaviour have an influence on their perception of the brand they endorse, as 68.6% of the respondents answered yes. 19.9% of the respondents answered that they do not know, and 11.5% of the respondents answered no, the blogger’s behaviour does not have any influence on their perception of the brand that they endorse.

Does the blogger's behaviour have any influence on your perception of the brand that they endorse?

(156 responses)

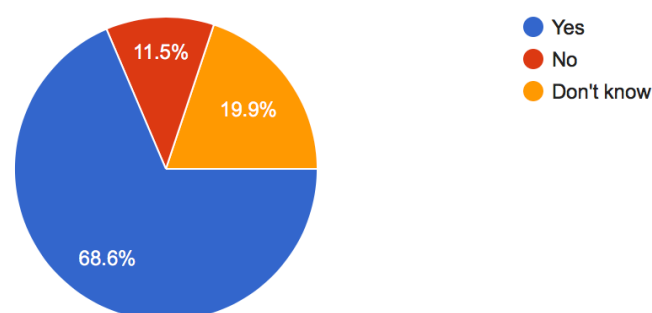


Figure 15

4.2.4 The credibility of the blogger

The fourth and final part of the questionnaire consists of 12 questions and concerns credibility and trustworthiness of the blogger.

In question 28 the respondents are asked if they have noticed bloggers doing sponsored posts prior to the survey (section 8.2.28). The majority of the respondents stated that they have noticed bloggers doing sponsored content prior to the survey, as 74.8% of them answered “Yes”. 14.8% of the respondents answered “No”, that they have not noticed bloggers doing sponsored content prior to the survey. Finally, 10.3% of the respondents answered that they do not know if they have noticed bloggers doing sponsored posts prior to the survey.

Part 4

Have you noticed bloggers doing sponsored posts prior to this survey?
(155 responses)

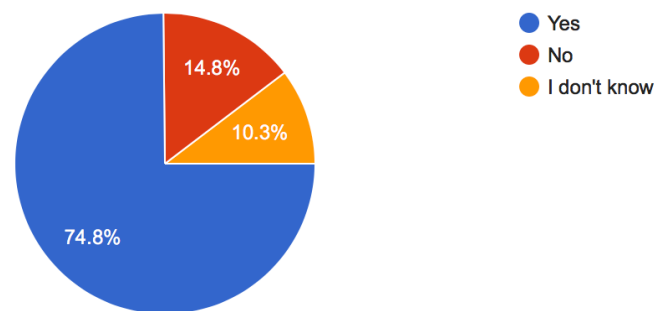


Figure 16

In question 29 the respondents were asked whether the blogs they read review products purchased by the bloggers themselves, or if they have received the product for free (section 8.2.29). The responses for this question are rather unclear. 37% of the respondents answered that they “Do not know”. 36.4% of the respondents answered that the blogs they read review products purchased by themselves, and 26.6% of the respondents answered that the blogs they read review products that

they have received for free.

The blogs that I read review (154 responses)

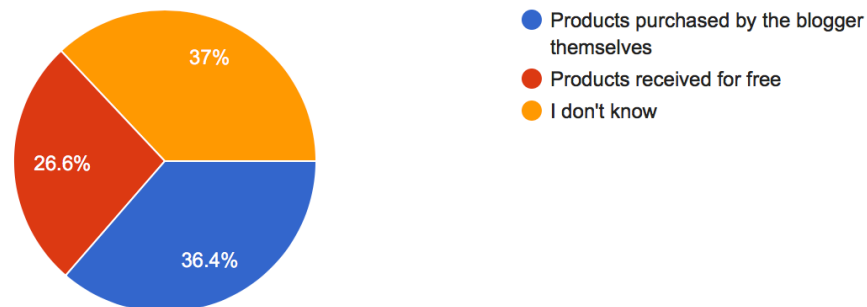


Figure 17

In the next three questions the respondents were given a statement to which they were asked to tick one box, depending on how strongly they agree or disagree with the statement. In question 30 the respondents are given the statement “A blogger that has been sent a product or paid for review is more likely to be biased and review positively” (section 8.2.39). The majority of the respondents agree with this statement, as 36.3% of the respondents ticked box 4. 30.6% of the respondents strongly agree with the statement and ticked box 5. 21% of the respondents ticked box 3, stating that they are indifferent to the statement. 10.2% of the respondents answered that they disagree with the statement and ticked box 2. Finally, 1.9% of the respondents ticked box 1, stating that they strongly disagree with the statement that a blogger that has been sent a product or paid for review is more likely to be biased and review positively.

In question 31 the respondents were given the statement “A blog with a high number of sponsored posts seems less trustworthy” (section 8.2.31). The majority of the respondents either agree or strongly agree with the statement, as the boxes 4 and 5 both were ticked by 35.7% of the respondents. 19.7% of the respondents ticked box 3, stating that they are indifferent to the statement. 6.4% of the respondents answered that they disagree with the statement and ticked box 2. Finally, 2.5% of the respondents ticked box 1, stating that they strongly disagree with the statement that a blog with a high number of sponsored posts seems less trustworthy.

In question 32 the respondents were given the statement “I think that working with brands makes a blogger more reliable” (section 8.2.32). The majority of the respondents answered that they are

indifferent to the statement, as 35% of them ticked box 3. 29.9% of the respondents ticked box 2, stating that they disagree with the statement. 16.6% of the respondents answered that they agree with the statement and ticked box 4. 14.6% of the respondents stated that they strongly disagree with the statement by ticking box 1. Finally, 3.8% of the respondents ticked box 5, stating that they strongly agree with the statement that working with brands makes a blogger more reliable.

In question 33 the respondents were asked to specify the reasoning behind the previous answer in question 32 (section 8.2.33). The respondents gave several reasons as to why they believe or do not believe that working with brands makes a blogger reliable. These reasons will be grouped into several sections below.

“The have a conflict of interest”

One respondent directly states that working with brands makes a blogger less credible, “I don’t think it makes them more reliable, probably the opposite actually. They have a conflict of interests. It’s the same situation than with our politicians, they work with corporations and take their donations but that doesn’t make them more reliable and it makes me question whether they are honest or not” (section 8.2.33). This conflict of interests seems to be based in the fact that the company is looking for positive reviews, rather than negative, “they are being paid by the company to write positive reviews, the company wouldn’t pay them for negative publicity” (section 8.2.33). Negative reviews might have a negative influence on the relationship with the company, “A blogger cannot be completely objective if it will damage their relationship with a sponsor” (section 8.2.33). Several other respondents point out the issue with bias, “Brands may sponsor bloggers to make better opinions of the products with bribes” (section 8.2.33). “Seems that the blogger may be influenced by the sponsors and perhaps less likely to be critical of those sponsors” (section 8.2.33). “money influences content” (section 8.2.33).

“they seem like a shill”

One respondent points out that a higher number of sponsored posts created less credibility, “If a blogger just has a bunch of sponsored post, they seem like a shill” (section 8.2.33). A blog fails at being a blog if it only consists of sponsorships, “A blog that’s only sponsored posts is not a blog” (section 8.2.33). This is supported by another respondent, “Blogs that consist mostly of sponsored posts are as annoying as simple advertising” (section 8.2.33). One respondent compares blogger endorsements with those of celebrities, “It depends on the blogger. Some of them purchase

their own products, and some just get sent by the companies because they see that this blog has such an authoritative say on products in the category. I just can't say carte blanc that a blog is biased because they receive products for free. More sponsored posts make the value of what the reviewer says go down, much like a celebrity that endorses a lot of products" (section 8.2.33). Finally, a respondent points out that sponsorships merely shows that the blogger has a bigger following, "Doesn't make them more reliable just shows they have a bigger following" (section 8.2.33).

"sponsored posts are an important source of income"

In the case of sponsorships, it is of high importance to make use of a disclosure, "I think that some bloggers "sell out". I realize that sponsored posts are an important source of income, but if these posts are not clearly marked and if they don't seem like something the blogger would truly appreciate (based on their reviews of unsponsored goods and services), I become skeptical" (section 8.2.33). One respondent points out why disclosure is of high importance, "Incentives and relationships will always shape bloggers relationship to the product whether they acknowledge it or not. it may be helpful to have an insider view of the product, but it also may be detrimental in terms of the accuracy and veracity of the review. Unfortunately, which of these is the case is often very difficult for the casual reader to determine" (section 8.2.33).

"it doesn't matter how much sponsorships they have"

One respondent has nothing against bloggers receiving free products, but is against sponsorships, "I don't think bloggers who receive products for free are less trustworthy at all, but I think that being paid for a good review certainly makes them less trustworthy. So, collars with honest opinions are fine, but being paid for a review isn't" (section 8.2.33). However, another respondent believes that brand collaborations add credibility to the blogger, "Brands have credibility" (section 8.2.33). A positive aspect to sponsorships might be that the blogger has more experience, "Difficult question: bloggers which receive products for free do more reviews and have more experience to provide better reviews. On the other hand bloggers who buy products (with limited means sometimes) have less incentive to be biased..." (section 8.2.33). This is supported by another respondent, "They are likely to be more knowledgable, but could also be biased" (section 8.2.33). Along with that, another respondent believes that the blogger will stay true to its audience, "they have a strong audience whom they know. they would not recommend something they do not like or think won't work with their audience" (section 8.2.33). Sponsorships do not have a great influence on the blogger's credibility if this has a good connection with its audience, "I think it comes down to a individual

judgement call, if the blogger has established a certain level of trust with their regular audience, then it doesn't matter how much sponsorships they have" (section 8.2.33). Finally, a respondent states that building relationships is the most important part of running a blog, "Most of the bloggers I know are very concerned about their online reputation and they know how quickly a blog can die if people don't trust them. They are far more concerned about their own image than they are about favorably reviewing a product they don't love. working with brands shows me that they build relationships with people/companies they respect and admire. Building relationships is a big part of running a good business or blog" (section 8.2.33).

In question 34 the respondents are given the statement "Bloggers who write both negative and positive reviews are more trustworthy" (section 8.2.34). The majority of the respondents strongly agree with this statement, as 44.6% of them ticked box 5. 39.5% of the respondents ticked box 4, stating that they agree. 14% of the respondents answered that they are indifferent to the statement by ticking box 3. 1.3% of the respondents ticked box 2, stating that they disagree. Finally, 0.6% of the respondents ticked box 1, stating that they strongly disagree with the statement that bloggers who write both negative and positive reviews are more trustworthy.

In question 35 the respondents were asked to rate how influenced bloggers' opinions are by money received from brands on a scale from 1, not influenced, to 5, very influenced (section 8.2.35). The majority of the respondents believe that bloggers' opinions are influenced by money received from brands, as 42.7% of them ticked box 4. 33.8% of the respondents ticked box 3, stating that they are indifferent towards the question. 15.9% of the respondents ticked box 5, stating that they believe bloggers are very influenced by money received from brands. 6.4% of the respondents believe that bloggers are not very influenced by money received from brands. Finally, 1.3% of the respondents ticked box 1, stating that they believe that bloggers' opinions are not influenced by money received from brands.

In question 36 the respondents were given the statement "I think blogs should remain free of brand influence" (section 8.2.36). The majority of the respondents answered that they are indifferent to this statement, as 33.8% of the respondents ticked box 3. 21.7% of the respondents ticked box 4, stating that they agree with the statement. 17.2% of the respondents answered that they strongly agree with the statement by ticking box 5. 15.3% of the respondents ticked box 2 and stated that they disagree with the statement. Finally, 12.1% of the respondents ticked box 1, answering that

they strongly disagree with the statement that they think blogs should remain free of brand influence.

In question 37 the respondents were asked whether readers or brands are most important for bloggers (section 8.2.37). Almost all the respondents answered that they think readers are most important for bloggers, as 93.5% of them ticked this box. Only 6.5% of the respondents answered that they think brands are more important for bloggers.

In your opinion, what is more important for bloggers? (154 responses)

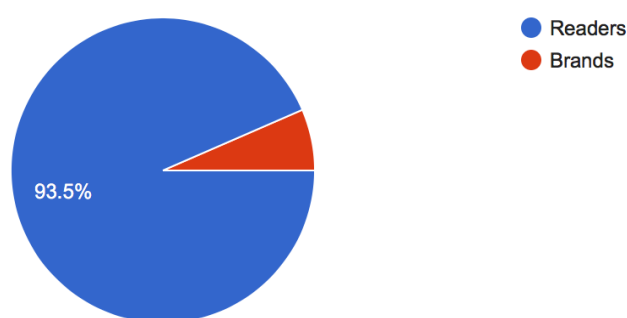


Figure 18

In question 38 the respondents were asked the reasons for their answer in question 37 (section 8.2.38). The respondents gave several reasons as to why they believe readers or brands are most important to bloggers. In general, most of the respondents state that a blog is nothing without its readers. And without readers, there is no need for the support of brands, “Brand support is meaningless without readers. Readers are NOT meaningless in the absence of brand support” (section 8.2.38). Readers are necessary for the blog in order to catch the attention of the brands, “make them attractive for brands” (section 8.2.38). Apart from being more attractive to brands, readers can also make the blogger seem more credible, “Increasing readership allows bloggers to build a fanbase - giving more of a platform and more credibility. With that established, brands will be more likely to pay bloggers for their reviews of products. This is more profitable for the bloggers” (section 8.2.38). This is supported by another respondent, “Bloggers that focus on the readers and provide reliable information are definitely more important. Bloggers may make money off the brands however it is the reader who makes or breaks a blogger. Without the reader the blogger would lose the brand” (section 8.2.38). Other respondents support their answer, arguing that blogs are not advertisements, “In my opinion, a blog’s purpose shouldn’t be the same than an

advertising. It should be all about helping each other out. But if the main source of a blogger's income come from sponsored posts, I don't see how he/she can remain neutral, I feel like they will naturally give more importance to corporations since they rely on them..." (section 8.2.38). Another respondent claims that being an advertisement makes the blogger seem less trustworthy, "The trust of a reader is more important because the blogger has set themselves up to be a relatively objective critic of a product, not a walking/typing billboard" (section 8.2.38). One respondent points out that honesty makes a blogger more trustworthy, "I think it makes the blogger more trustworthy that they make honest product reviews rather than being influenced by brands' compensations" (section 8.2.38). However, as one respondent points out, some people do blogging as their full-time job, which makes brands rather important to them, "Even though some readers care about paid vs. unpaid, most people don't and brands help bloggers make money. I understand the need to make money, so I think brands are incredibly important to bloggers" (section 8.2.38). Finally, a respondent points out the importance of ethics in blogging, "If you don't have readers you don't have a blog. If you don't have brands you might have a poor blog. I suspect most established bloggers have some sort of code of ethics which informs how and when they review products, but for that code to be of any use they need someone to read what they write. I do think some may lose sight of this, but I am fairly convince that readership numbers are king with regard to informing bloggers approaches" (section 8.2.38).

Question 39 is the final question of the questionnaire in which the respondents were asked their opinion on how a blogger could endorse a product or a brand while still maintaining an ethical relationship with its readers (section 8.2.39). This can be a rather tricky issue, as one respondent points out, "I'm not sure. The hard part would be CONVINCING readers that they are honest. The best way to maintain this would be being as honest and frank as possible" (section 8.2.39). One respondent simply answers "Transparently" (section 8.2.39). This is further clarified by two other respondents, "I think being very transparent about the fact that they are being paid to rate this product, it that they are doing it in a completely honest way and have the readers best interest at heart in giving and honest review" (section 8.2.39). "Just like most journalism: a blogger should make his or her biases open, transparent, and known. If that happens, then the reader can try to sort through whatever biases may be present and make an informed decision" (section 8.2.39). The bloggers must disclose when working with brands, "They must present a disclaimer saying that they have been paid or received free goods or services. They must also be as objective as possible, indicating the negatives of the goods and services where appropriate" (section 8.2.39). This is

supported by another respondent, “by disclosing first, then having an unbiased review, that may or may not have some negative comments” (section 8.2.39). There should also be a balance between sponsored and non-sponsored posts, “Being honest about their relationship, disclosing, trying to balance their sponsored posts with non-sponsored posts” (section 8.2.39). Another respondent point out the importance of honesty, “Honestly - every product has good points and bad points. A simple, straightforward disclosure of what was received” (section 8.2.39). Other respondents points out the importance of objectivity, “By providing objective opinions” (section 8.2.39). All products are not great, and this should be stated by the blogger, “Just to be honest. If they get a product that isn’t that great, they shouldn’t be afraid to say how it wasn’t the best” (section 8.2.39). This can be done by suggesting similar products that are better than the reviewed product, “Be honest: if a specific product does not meet the blogger’s expectations, maybe recommend a similar product by the same brand” (section 8.2.39). Bloggers should only endorse products which they find valuable, “The only bloggers who maintain an ethical relationship with the readers are those who only endorse products which they find valuable” (section 8.2.39). They should not sell out, “Only take on project for products that you genuinely use. Don’t sell out” (section 8.2.39). The blogger should stay true to its own beliefs and values, “Bloggers can endorse any product that they want as long as they stay true to their beliefs and values instead of prying followers to purchase items for the purpose of profitability” (section 8.2.39). The blogger should in general not get paid to write a positive review, “Just as long as they take free products and give them honest reviews and don’t take money in exchange for writing a positive and not honest review” (section 8.2.39). Some respondents point out the importance of maintaining the relationship with the readers, “If most of their posts were not sponsored by brands and they regularly interacted with their readers, bloggers would have a more ethical relationship with its readers. Endorsing a product would seem more trustworthy” (section 8.2.39). This is supported by another respondent, “If the blogger is receiving products for free and making honest reviews on said product I think the ethical relationship is upheld. Also, taking suggestions from readers and reviewing those products makes the blog seem more authentic rather than compensated by a brand” (section 8.2.39). However, as one respondent points out, it can be nearly impossible for a blogger to endorse a product while still maintaining an ethical relationship with its readers, “From a psychology perspective, it’s near impossible. A blogger, regardless of opinion will feel some sort of obligation to the brand because the product was free” (section 8.2.39). Because of this, one respondent points out that the blogger should point out that there might be bias, “Just be completely honest with the readers about the nature of the endorsement and their opinions of it. Warn that there might be bias but try to avoid it” (section 8.2.39).

5. Analysis

Prior to this study, I have outlined two hypotheses concerning blogger endorsements and credibility. The two hypotheses are as following:

Hypotheses 1: Blogger endorsement is more effective than celebrity endorsement

Hypotheses 2: Bloggers who are paid to endorse brands or products are considered less credible by the readers

In the following analysis, I will consider the validity of these assumptions. In order to do so, the analysis will be divided into two parts. The first part will mainly have a focus on general blogger endorsements and effectiveness versus celebrity endorsement. The point of departure in the second part of the analysis will more specifically be on how brand or product endorsements can affect the perceived credibility of the blogger.

5.1 Part 1: The effectiveness of blogger endorsement

The first part of the analysis will be divided into four parts in order to analyse all aspects of the subject thoroughly. The first part will analyse the young American consumers' perception of celebrity endorsements and their purchase behaviour in relation to this. The second part will look into why the consumers read blogs, mostly from a Uses and Gratifications perspective. The third part will compare the use of bloggers versus celebrities as brand endorsers. Finally, the fourth part will analyse the effectiveness of blogger endorsements.

5.1.1 Celebrity endorsements and purchase behaviour

This section will examine how celebrity endorsers' credibility is perceived by young Americans, and further how they can aid in changing the consumers' perceptions of a brand.

As clarified in section 3.1, McCracken's meaning transfer model reveals that "the secret of celebrity endorsement is largely cultural in nature, and that the study of the celebrity and endorsement is improved by a cultural perspective" (McCracken 1989, 320). According to him, the choice of celebrity endorser has a massive impact on the consumers' perception of the brand and product.

In the questionnaire, the respondents were asked whether the presence of a celebrity helps them recognise the brand. More than half of the respondents (54,8%) believes that having celebrities in advertisements means that they are more likely to recognise the brand (section 4.2.2). However, 69,4% of the respondents do not believe that the presence of a celebrity has an influence on their purchase behaviour and decisions (section 4.2.2). The reason for this can be explained with McCracken's Meaning Transfer Model. According to this model, the celebrity endorser has generated meanings through their public careers in movies, tv, or the like, which is transferred onto a product through the endorsement in stage 2. In this step it is of high importance to have a visible similarity between the product and the endorser in order to successfully move onto the third stage, which is the consumption. According to the answers from the questionnaire, the respondents may not believe that the product correlates with the persona of the celebrity endorser, which is why it does not influence their purchase decisions. Also, if we analyse this from a Uses and Gratifications perspective, Blumler and Katz explains that the audience is considered as active and goal oriented and that the audience is more powerful than the media, and only uses and absorbs what they can take advantage of, rather than letting the media manipulate them. This is also shown throughout the questionnaire, in which the respondents seem rather informative and not easily manipulated, "I strive to make purchases that are best for me personally and my wallet. I may be intrigued by funny or emotional commercials but not convinced to make a purchase solely on those characteristics" (section 4.2.2). However, one respondent points out that the likeability of the celebrity does make them more likely to be influenced towards purchasing the endorsed product, "Because my attention is always drawn to a familiar face or voice, especially if I like the celebrity" (section 4.2.2). If we analyse this response from a Source Credibility perspective, we might further understand the reasons for why celebrity endorsements do not influence the purchase behaviour of the majority of the respondents. This model encompassed the relationship between the level of expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of the source and how these are important to the credibility of the source. Source attractiveness refers to the familiarity and likeability of the source, which can have a positive impact on the brand and products associated with the source, in this case the celebrity endorser. However, it seems as if the majority of the rest of the respondents believe that although a celebrity has a high level of source attractiveness, they lack both expertise and trustworthiness, which are equally important factors in the perceived credibility of the endorser.

In question 18 the respondents were asked how trustworthy they find an advertisement that is endorsed by a celebrity. 50.3% of the respondents answered that they do not know, while 40.8% of

the respondents answered that they find it either little trustworthy or not trustworthy (section 4.2.2). This means that although the celebrities might bring attractiveness in the form of likeability and familiarity to the endorsement, they still lack expertise and trustworthiness in order to be perceived credible (section 3.3). This assumption is further supported by the written answers from the respondents, “There is no guarantee that paid endorsements relay true information” (section 4.2.2). In the Source Credibility model, trustworthiness is defined as “the degree of confidence in the communicator’s intent to communicate the assertions he considers most valid” (section 3.3.1). Although Friedman et al. states that celebrities are more likely to be considered trustworthy because of their high level of likeability, it does not seem to be the case for our respondents.

It seems as if the biggest issue for the perceived credibility of the celebrity endorser and the endorsed product and brand is the fact that the endorsement is paid, “The more technical, the more reliable. Celebrity endorsed content is generally paid for and is unreliable” (section 4.2.2). The issue with paid endorsements is addressed by Tripp et al. (section 3.5.1). In their research they examined the relationship between multiple product endorsements and the consumers’ perception of the endorsement. Although the likeability of the endorser may not be affected by multiple endorsements, the trustworthiness and expertise is indirectly. This is also what the Source Credibility model told us. According to Tripp et al., multiple endorsements are linked with monetary reasons, which results in the consumers questioning the motives behind the endorsement, and whether the celebrity does like and use the product endorsed. A few respondents also points this out as being the reason for them not finding celebrity endorsements trustworthy, “because it is doubtful the celeb actually uses the product” (section 4.2.2). Another respondent supports this perspective, and states that paid endorsements are not trustworthy, “I trust more in people who have actually used a product instead of a paid endorsement” (section 4.2.2). The respondents prefer hearing the opinions of real people, or blogger, rather than celebrities, as they find this more credible, “Comes from a “normal person” blogger, who I know is picky about what s/he endorses” (section 4.2.2).

5.1.2 Why do the consumers read blogs?

Whereas other approaches to media consumption seek to understand what media does to people, the Uses and Gratifications theory takes on another perspective and asks “What do people do with the media?” (Katz, 1959, 2). This is exactly what this chapter will examine, *why do people read blogs?*

According to Blumler and Katz, the audience is considered as active and goal directed (section

3.2.2), in other words, they are aware of using the media for gratifications. The respondents of the questionnaire is generally perceived as a very critical and informed audience. As just mentioned, Blumler and Katz states that the audience is considered active and goal oriented and seeks gratification from the media (section 3.2.2). But not only do they use the media, they also do not let the media influence or manipulate them. This is highly shown in the responses, which gives the respondents an image of being very informed and goal oriented in their media consumption, "I like to make my own decisions after gathering lots of information" (section 4.2.2). The consumers only absorb what they can take advantage of, in this case information, and does not let the media influence them otherwise (section 3.2.2).

The majority of the respondents (47.1%) of the respondents read blogs to find specific information, which correlates with McQuail's adaptation of the Uses and Gratifications theory and the first dimension of classification of why people consumer media in order to find gratification, *information* (section 3.2.3). The respondents turn to blog for information on happenings in their surroundings, but especially for product reviews or advice, as 10.5% of the respondents answered. This is further supported 8 in which the majority (26.3%) of the respondents answered that they agree with the statement that they actively search blogs for reviews on brands or services they are interested in. 23.1% of the respondents strongly agree with the statement. This further supports the assumption that the audience is conceived of as active (section 3.2.2) and use blogs with the purpose of finding information (section 3.2.3). Another dimension of McQuail's is the use of media for *entertainment*. 10.5% of the respondents answered that they read blogs as a pastime or a hobby, which correlates with this dimension, which explains that media either can be used as a time filler or a way to escape reality and give the audience, or in this case, the reader the possibility to relax (section 3.2.3).

As we can conclude from the responses combined with McQuail's adaptation of Uses and Gratifications theory, the blog readers use blogs for especially two things; for searching for information and for entertainment. But what makes blogs attractive or appealing to blog readers, other than being a source of information or entertainment? In McQuail's adaptation of the Uses and Gratifications theory, there are introduced two more dimensions that we have not touched upon yet. These are *Personal identity* and *Integration and social interaction* (section 3.2.3). Now, the immediate impression of the responses from the questionnaire may not suggest that these two dimensions are relevant in the case of blogs. Only 2% of the respondents answered in question 7 that they read blogs to socialise (section 4.2.1). Further, in question 9 67.5% of the respondents

answered that they strongly disagree with the statement that they often comment on blogs (section 4.2.1). In other words, it does not seem as if the respondents read blogs for social reasons. However, if we continue onto the third part of the questionnaire, we get a slightly different impression of the respondents' relationships with blogs than the ones they gave in the second part of the questionnaire. In question 20 the majority of the respondents answered that they agree with the statement that they find it easier to relate to blogger endorsement than celebrity endorsements (section 4.2.3). Further, in question 21 the majority of the respondents also agreed with the statement that they feel a stronger connection with bloggers than celebrities (section 4.2.3). Even though the respondents do not believe that socialising is the main reason for them to read blogs, there definitely seems to be a social element in blog reading. According to McQuail's dimension *personal identity*, the audience can use the media for reinforcement of personal values and to gain an insight into one's own personality, and further in the search for other individuals with values which the audience can identify with. In the case of bloggers, the audience read blogs because the bloggers have similar needs and lifestyles to the reader. In question 24 the majority of the respondents agree with the statement that they are more likely to trust a review from a blogger with similar interests to them (section 4.2.3). Along with fitting into the Personal identity dimension from McQuail's Uses and Gratifications (section 3.2.3), this answer can also be explained from the perspective of the Source Credibility Model (section 3.3). Not only do bloggers have a high level of attractiveness because of the consumer finding a resemblance between the blogger and him or herself, but they also have a high level of trustworthiness as the consumers have confidence in the blogger's "intent to communicate the assertions he considers most valid" (section 3.3.1). This will further be examined in the following section.

5.1.3 Bloggers versus celebrities as endorsers

As it was clarified in the previous section, the respondents read blogs not only in the search for information or entertainment, but also for identification reasons. But how do bloggers compare to celebrities when talking endorsements?

As we concluded in section 5.1.1 celebrity endorsements may help consumers to recognise the endorsed brand, but it does not have an influence on the consumers' purchase behaviour. Both the Source Credibility Model and the theories by Mowen and Brown, Kelly, and Tripp et al. agree on both trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness being equally important to the perceived credibility. Celebrities especially have a high level of attractiveness because of the familiarity to the

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consumer (section 3.3.3). However, it seems as if they lack in both trustworthiness and expertise compared to bloggers, as the respondents in question 22 were given the statement “Bloggers are more credible brand endorsers than celebrities” (section 4.2.3), which 38.7% of the respondents agreed with. As it was clarified in the previous section, bloggers have a high level of credibility partly because of a high level of trustworthiness, which in the source credibility model is defined by the source being perceived as dependable, honest, reliable, sincere, and trustworthy (section 3.3.1).

In question 19 the respondents were asked if the celebrity’s behaviour have any influence on their perception of the brand that they endorse, which the majority (49%) of the respondents answered yes to (section 4.2.1). Now, in question 26 the respondents were asked the same question but for the case of bloggers. More respondents believe that a blogger’s behaviour influences their perception of an endorsed brand compared to celebrity endorsers, as 68.6% of the respondents answered yes to this question (section 4.2.3). If we examine the difference in these answers from the perspective McCracken’s Meaning Transfer Model, this might be highly caused by the meanings, or culture, of the celebrity and blogger endorser. According to this model, it is of high importance that the desired image of the product correlates with the meanings of the endorser, along with focusing on these values in the endorsement in order to have a clear similarity between the endorser and the product. The reasons for why the respondents are more likely to let the behaviour of a blogger influence their perception of a brand, rather than the behaviour of a celebrity can be explained with this model. There might be a chance that the respondents believe that there is a higher correlation between the product that a blogger endorses, than the products endorsed by a celebrity. The reason why the respondents do not find a similarity between the celebrity and the endorsed product and brand can be explained with the attribution theory, which is introduced by Mowen and Brown, Kelley, and Tripp et al. (section 3.5). According to the attribution theory, the relationship between the celebrity and the endorsed brand and product loses its distinctiveness, or uniqueness, if the celebrity endorses multiple brands or products (section 3.5.1). So in the case of the respondents’ perception of celebrity endorsements, the respondents may not think that their perception of the brand that the celebrity endorses is influenced by the celebrity’s behaviour, because the respondents simply do not believe that the relationship between the celebrity and brand has a high level of distinction, and because of this they may not associate the given celebrity with the brand that he or she endorses.

Along with that, multiple brand endorsements also have a negative impact on the trustworthiness of the celebrity, as this causes the consumers to question the motives behind the endorsement (section

3.5.1). One respondent believes that celebrities only do endorsements for personal gain, “Celebrities utilise their advertisements to help their personal gain at times. Bloggers tend to be more straight to the point and usually tend to truly express their beliefs without trying to win popularity counts” (section 4.2.3). This is supported by Tripp et al.’s studies which showed that multiple brand endorsements are usually associated with the word “more”, referring to the endorser receiving more money, fame, or exposure (section 3.5.1). However, another respondent disagree with this, as he believes that the celebrity is more responsible for the quality of the products than bloggers are, “A celebrity is less likely to endorse something only for the money, they’re more responsible if the products is bad because they’re well known” (section 4.2.3). In this case, the respondent believes that the celebrity has a higher level of trustworthiness than bloggers as this is considered more reliable (section 3.3.1). However, this level of trustworthiness can also be influenced by the high level of attractiveness which celebrities possess, “If the type of person I look up to says they use, they aren't lying” (section 4.2.2). For some people, a high level of attractiveness seems to equal a high level of credibility, as they have to protect their reputation, “Since a celebrity is ready to put his name and reputation on the line to promote this product I assume that it must be quite good” (section 4.2.2). This attitude towards celebrity credibility is supported in section 3.3.1 by Friedman et al. who concludes that celebrities are more likely to be considered trustworthy as a result of them being likeable. Turning back to Mowen and Brown, Kelley, and Tripp et al., a majority of the respondents do question the motives of celebrities, along with whether they use the endorsed products, “Although celebrities can be strong advocates for a brand, I sometimes feel that they are paid without actually using the product and actually believing in the products. I make the assumption bloggers have tested or used the product before writing or endorsing it” (section 4.2.3). From the perspective of the attributions theory (section 3.5.1), the fact that the respondents question the motives of the celebrity refers to external attributions, while the fact that they as a result of this question the trustworthiness and expertise of the celebrity refers to internal attribution. This further correlates with three questions from the questionnaire in which the respondents are asked about their purchase behaviour in the case of endorsements. In question 15 the majority of the respondents (41%) answered that they had purchased a product that was endorsed by a celebrity (section 4.2.2), yet in question 17 a majority of the respondents (69.4%) of the respondents do not believe that the presence of a celebrity influences their purchase intentions (section 4.2.2). Comparing this to a similar question about bloggers, a majority of the respondents (41.7%) of the respondents answered in question 25 that they agree with the statement that they had purchased a product after reading a positive review on a blog, and 32.1% answered that they strongly agree (section 4.2.3). Apart from

being caused by the high trustworthiness that we have concluded that bloggers have compared to celebrities, the reason for this attitude might also be because of the perception of bloggers as experts in their field. According to Tripp et al. (section 3.51) multiple brand endorsements do not influence the source attractiveness (section 3.3.3), but it does affect the trustworthiness and expertise of the endorser, which ultimately results in less intentions to purchase the endorsed product. Expertise is in the source credibility model defined as the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertion (section 3.3.2). Finally, a comment which will be further examined in the next section is “Bloggers are “real” peoples; celebrities are like unicorns” (section 4.2.3).

5.1.4 People buy from people

In the previous section it was clarified that the majority of the respondents are more likely to trust the words and opinions of a blogger rather than a celebrity endorser. They believe that bloggers are considered more trustworthy endorsers. But what is it exactly that makes bloggers more effective endorsers, other than being considered more trustworthy? This question will be examined in this section.

This section will take its departure from a respondent who justified why bloggers are more credible brand endorsers than celebrities, “Bloggers are “real” peoples; celebrities are like unicorns” (section 4.2.3). What this respondent means by comparing celebrities to unicorns is that they are unrelatable and unachievable, just like the legendary fairytale creature. McCracken explains with the Meaning Transfer Model that the celebrity endorser plays an important role in all stages, but especially in the third stage *consumption* (section 3.1.1). The reason for this is not only because of the meanings of the celebrity being transferred onto the product through the endorsement, but especially because they have constructed an attractive and accomplished self, which the consumers seek to incorporate into their own selves through consumption. “Consumers are themselves constantly moving symbolic properties out of consumer goods into their lives to construct aspects of self and world. Not surprisingly, they admire individuals who have accomplished this task and accomplished it well. Celebrities are proof that the process works” (section 3.1.1). McCracken further explains that “They are exemplary figures because they are seen to have created the clear, coherent, and powerful selves that everyone seeks” (section 3.1.1). However it seems as if celebrities to the respondents are not considered the ideal role models as they simply have created selves that are impossible for the respondents to obtain, “Bloggers are “real” people like you and me. I can relate much better to them than to someone who makes millions of dollars acting or singing” (section 4.2.3) From a

Source Credibility perspective, one might also suggest that celebrities do not have a high level of attractiveness, despite the level of familiarity. An equally important aspect of source attractiveness is *similarity* which “is the degree to which the receiver of the message sees a resemblance between the source and the receiver” (section 3.3.3). According to the responses, bloggers are more similar to the readers than celebrities are, “These people are more like me and live my lifestyle. You would always trust your neighbor or friends over someone who is complete stranger and so I feel that celebrities can’t speak for how well a product fits me” (section 4.2.3). From a Uses and Gratifications perspective, it is of high importance that the consumers can find a resemblance in the people they follow, whether it being celebrities or bloggers, as the audience also consumes media for personal identification reasons (section 3.2.3). Media can be consumed in order for the audience to find individuals who can serve as behavioural role models, or whose values the audience can identify with, “Bloggers are easier to identify as they are ‘real’ people” (section 4.2.3). Further, the trustworthiness of bloggers are also stronger, as they are more sincere than celebrities, “Bloggers are real-life people, they could be a neighbour or a friend. Also I feel that a blogger’s purpose is to give me tips & advice whereas celebrities just want me to buy things, almost like a salesperson” (section 3.2.3). According to McGinnies et al., an endorser who may not be considered an expert is still considered credible and persuasive only from being trustworthy (section 3.3.1).

In question 25 revealed that 41.7% of the respondents answered that they agree with the statement that they had purchased a product after reading a positive review on a blog, and 32.1% answered that they strongly agree (section 4.2.3). Furthermore, in question 26, 37.8% of the respondents answered that they agree with the statement that they have decided not to purchase a product or service after reading a negative review on a blog, and 35.9% of them answered that they strongly agree (section 4.2.3). In other words, bloggers seem to have quite a major influence on the consumers’ purchase intentions. Apart from being influenced by the factors explained above, this might also be highly influenced by the perceived expertise of bloggers, “Bloggers generally have more expertise than celebrities who merely act, sing, dance, etc. Of course, this depends on the celebrity as well” (section 4.2.3). According to the Source Credibility Model, the perceived expertise of the source is the element that is considered to be the most critical factor in the perceived credibility. The expertise of the source depends on its perceived knowledge skills, or experience on the material it is covering, along with and whether it is making valid assertions (section 3.3.2). According to the respondents, they especially go to blogs when looking for information, “I’m going to look for information in the first place if I am going to read a

blog” (section 4.2.2). This also corresponds with the previous answers stating that the respondents use blogs for information search and product reviews, which also is the first dimension in McQuail’s Uses and Gratifications. The reason why they use blogs for information search may simply be because of the perceived expertise of bloggers, and that they by the consumers are considered experts in their field and therefor can make valid assertions of the products. “They’ve actually tested the products and aren’t getting paid like celebrities” (section 4.2.3).

From this it can be concluded that people buy from people. The consumers are more likely to believe the words of bloggers rather than celebrities. This, both because bloggers have more similar needs and lifestyles to the consumers, and because they are considered experts in their fields, which is why their opinions about a certain product are more valid. This was the first part of the analysis. In the next part I will analyse how brand endorsements can affect the credibility of the blogger.

5.2 Part 2: Blog credibility

In this second part of the analysis, the credibility of the blogger is to be analysed more in depth. In the first part of the analysis, we realised that blogger endorsers can result in a more positive attitude and perceived credibility of the endorsed brand, compared to celebrity endorsers. But how does brand endorsements in return affect the credibility of the blogger? Is the endorsement less trustworthy if the blogger is paid to do it? This will be examined in this section. Again, this part will be divided into three sections in order to analyse this subject more thoroughly. The first part will analyse how multiple brand endorsements can affect the credibility of a blogger. The second part will examine blog ethics when doing sponsorships. The final part of the analysis will analyse the importance of dialogue on blogs.

5.2.1 Multiple brand endorsements’ effect on credibility

Since we clarified in the secondary empirical data in section 4.1 that some bloggers are starting to be considered as celebrities, it is relevant to make use of the attribution theory which was presented by Mowen and Brown, Kelley, and Tripp et al. in section 3.5. As we realised in the first part of the analysis, multiple brand endorsements results in the endorsement losing its distinctiveness. This is however not the only thing that is affected by multiple brand endorsements, according to these theories. Although the likeability, or the attractiveness, as it’s called in the Source Credibility Model, is not directly affected negatively in the case of multiple endorsements for monetary

reasons, the trustworthiness and expertise might be affected indirectly. This is shown several times throughout the questionnaire. In question 31 the respondents were given the statement “A blog with a high number of sponsored posts seems less trustworthy” (section 4.2.4). The majority of the respondents either agree or strongly agree with this statement, as 35.7% of them ticked one of these boxes. As it was the case with celebrities, the audience questions the motives for the endorsement if there are money involved. This is also shown in the questionnaire, “Blogs that consist mostly of sponsored posts are annoying as simple advertising” (section 4.2.4). According to this respondent, sponsored posts are not subjective and written with the blogger’s own words, but rather with the ones of the brand that they endorse. This means that it becomes more of an advertisement, which according to Kent and Taylor’s five principles of dialogic relations theory and the principle of *conservation of visitors* distracts the readers from the general content on the blog (section 3.4.2). Further, according to Tripp et al., the audience doubts whether the endorser actually likes, uses, or purchases the products endorsed.

In question 32 I tried to make the respondents take another perspective on sponsored content, as they were given the statement “I think that working with brands makes a blogger more reliable” (section 4.2.4). Interestingly enough, the result did not reflect the same attitude towards sponsored content as in question 31. 35% of the respondents ticked box 3, stating that they are indifferent to the statement, 29.9% stated that they disagree, and 16.6% answered that they agree. This is by one respondent justified with “Even though some readers care about paid vs. unpaid, most people don’t and brands help bloggers make money. I understand the need to make money, so I think brands are incredibly important to bloggers” (section 4.2.4). From a theoretical perspective, there can be several reasons for this attitude. Tripp et al. concluded that multiple endorsements for monetary purposes can negatively affect the trustworthiness and expertise of the blogger, yet some of the respondents still believe that bloggers have a high level of trustworthiness because of them being dependable and reliable, (section 3.3.1) “they have a strong audience whom they know. they would not recommend something they do not like or think won’t work with their audience” (section 4.2.4). Furthermore, the respondents may acknowledge the bloggers benefitting from a high following, which refers to Kent and Taylor’s feature of *propinquity* and *engagements*. This feature refers to the organisation, or in this case the blogger, engaging in one’s community, which ultimately means that all parties involved will benefit from this.

Further, in question 36, the respondents were given the statement “I think blogs should remain free of brand influence”. The majority of the respondents (33.8%) ticked box 3 on a scale from 1 to 5, stating that they are indifferent to this statement (section 4.2.4). In other words, this question shows that sponsorships or receiving products for free is not necessarily a bad thing in the eyes of the respondents. It is up to the individual reader to determine if a blogger can be perceived as being trustworthy, “I think it comes down to an individual judgement call, if the blogger has established a certain level of trust with their regular audience, then it doesn't matter how much sponsorships they have” (section 4.2.4). In the case of sponsorships, it is important that the blogger has an ethical relationship with its readers. It must not only engage with its readers and acknowledge all parties benefitting from a sponsorship, but it must to begin with have established a relationship of trust with its readers.

5.2.2 Blog ethics and sponsorships

In the previous paragraph we realised that just like in the case of celebrity endorsements, multiple endorsements for monetary reasons can have a negative effect on the credibility of the blogger. But why does it have this negative effect on the perceived credibility? How does money play a part in a blogger's trustworthiness and expertise?

In question 30 the respondents were given the statement “A blogger that has been sent a product or paid for review is more likely to be biased and review positively” (section 4.2.4). The majority of the respondents (36.3%) of the respondents agree with this statement, and 30.6% strongly agree. This is further supported in the comments, “They are likely to be more knowledgeable, but could also be biased” (section 4.2.4). According to this respondent, being paid for endorsements might mean that the blogger has a higher level of expertise from making more reviews (source credibility model), yet the trustworthiness is affected because the honesty and sincerity of the blogger might be affected by money. This exact dilemma is touched upon by another respondent, “Difficult question: bloggers which receive products for free do more reviews and have more experience to provide better reviews. On the other hand bloggers who buy products (with limited means sometimes) have less incentive to be biased...” (section 4.2.4). Further, in question 35 the respondents were asked to rate how influenced they believe bloggers' opinions are by money received from brands on a scale from 1, not influenced, to 5, very influenced. The majority of the respondents (42.7%) ticked the box four, stating that they believe bloggers are influenced by money received from brand (section 4.2.4). The issue with bloggers being influenced by money is that the

audience questions whether they actually do like, use, and purchase the endorsed product, or whether they only do the endorsement for the money (section 3.5.1). The respondents believe that “they are being paid by the company to write positive reviews, the company wouldn't pay them for negative publicity” (section 4.2.4).

The issue here is the conflict of interests that occurs when bloggers start working with brands, “I don't think it makes them more reliable, probably the opposite actually. They have a conflict of interests. It's the same situation than with our politicians, they work with corporations and take their donations but that doesn't make them more reliable and it makes me question whether they are honest or not” (section 4.2.4). This issue can be explained with one of Taylor and Kent's five tenets of dialogue as an orientation, *mutuality*. According to Taylor and Kent, this feature refers to the acknowledgment that the organisation and public are tied together, and is characterised by a “collaborative orientation” and a “spirit of mutual equality”. Especially the spirit of mutual equality is relevant in the case of blogger collaborations, as this tenet evolves around the acknowledgement of all participants in the dialogue (section 3.4.1). In the case of blogger endorsements, the blogger must both acknowledge the brand that is endorsed, but also its publics, or in other words its readers. In question 37 the respondents were asked whether they believe readers or brands are most important for bloggers. A vast majority of the respondents (93.5%) answered that they believe readers are most important to bloggers (section 4.2.4), or from the standpoint of Taylor and Kent's *mutuality* tenets the public of the blog is of highest importance. This is justified in the answers to question 38, “Brand support is meaningless without readers. Readers are NOT meaningless in the absence of brand support” (section 4.2.4). This relates to the tenet *empathy* and *communal orientation* from Kent and Taylor, which encompasses the recognition of organisations needing to engage with local and internal relationships (section 3.4.1). The blogger must acknowledge the importance of its readers, which in return will allow them to work with brands. “Increasing readership allows bloggers to build a fanbase - giving more of a platform and more credibility. With that established, brands will be more likely to pay bloggers for their reviews of products. This is more profitable for the bloggers” (section 4.2.4). This is further supported by the feature of *Engagement* which refers to organisations engaging in one's community, which ultimately means that all parties involved will benefit “because decisions serve multiple publics” (section 3.4.1). This means that both brands, bloggers, and their audience will benefit from the engagement, rather than only two parties. “If you don't have readers you don't have a blog. If you don't have brands you might have a poor blog. I suspect most established bloggers have some sort of code of ethics which

informs how and when they review products, but for that vote to be of any use they need someone to read what they write. I do think some may lose sight of this, but I am fairly convinced that readership numbers are king with regard to informing bloggers approaches” (section 4.2.4). This respondent agrees that all parties should benefit from the dialogue, but points out that some bloggers may lose sight of this, and as a result of this only focus on making themselves and the endorsed brand feel the benefits.

“Most of the bloggers I know are very concerned about their online reputation and they know how quickly a blog can die if people don’t trust them. They are far more concerned about their own image than they are about favorably reviewing a product they don’t love. working with brands shows me that they build relationships with people/companies they respect and admire. Building relationships is a big part of running a good business or blog” (section 4.2.4). As introduced in section 3.4.1, Cenite et al.’s studies looked at bloggers’ ethics, and came up with four attributes of blogging ethics; truth telling, accountability, attribution, and minimising harm. The attribute of accountability can cover the comment above, as accountability refers to the blogger bearing the consequences of one’s actions through writing. In other words, according to Cenite et al. and the comment above, a blogger is responsible for the things he or she shares on the blog, and should be aware that he or she is accountable for the product of brand that he endorses. The blogger should be aware that their reputation is at risk if they endorse a product which does not align with their image, or if it does not live up to what they write about it.

Another ethical principle in Cenite et al.’s studies is truth-telling, which involves honesty and completeness in reporting and the importance of gathering and reporting correct information. Although this specific study was not connected to payment within blogging, it can still be argued that the question of paid endorsements could be covered under truth-telling. One way to include truth-telling into sponsored content is by including both negative and positive aspects of a reviewed product. In question 34 the respondents were given the statement “Bloggers who write both negative and positive reviews are more trustworthy” (section 4.2.4). The majority of the respondents (44.6%) strongly agree with this statement, and 39.5% of them agree with it. Furthermore, in question 39 the respondents were asked their opinion on how a blogger could endorse a product or a brand while still maintaining an ethical relationship with its readers (section 4.2.4). “Just like most journalism: a blogger should make his or her biases open, transparent, and known. If that happens, then the reader can try to sort through whatever biases may be present and

make an informed decision” (section 4.2.4). This comment supports the before mentioned principle of truth-telling by Cenite et al., but also *empathy* and *supportiveness* which is one of the five dialogic tenets by Kent and Taylor (section 3.4.1). Empathy, or sympathy refers to the support and trust that must be present in order for dialogue to succeed. Further, supportiveness involves all information being available and open to all, and for all participants being able to engage. In the case of blogging, this refers to transparency and the blogger telling the truth lying behind an endorsement. Further, supportiveness is described as “more akin to a conversation between lovers where each has his or her own desires but seeks the other’s good” (section 3.4.1). This perspective is shared by one of the respondents, “I think being very transparent about the fact that they are being paid to rate this product, is that they are doing it in a completely honest way and have the readers best interest at heart in giving an honest review” (section 4.2.4). This also emphasises the idea that the blogger needs readers in order to have a successful blog. Brands only are not important, “Bloggers that focus on the readers and provide reliable information are definitely more important. Bloggers may make money off the brands however it is the reader who makes or breaks a blogger. Without the reader the blogger would loose the brand” (section 4.2.4). This further enhances the importance of *mutuality* and the importance of the bloggers’ publics in a successful dialogue. “I think that some bloggers “sell out”. I realize that sponsored posts are an important source of income, but if these posts are not clearly marked and if they don’t seem like something the blogger would truly appreciate (based on their reviews of unsponsored goods and services), I become skeptical” (section 4.2.4). From the perspective of *mutuality*, this respondents acknowledges the blogger’s need for income in order to maintain the blog, however this acknowledgement is not mutual. The case is that some bloggers do not maintain an ethical relationship with their readers, but only focus on the brand, and further do not focus on the importance of truth-telling. The importance of this will be further examined in the following section.

5.2.3 The importance of dialogue on blogs

In the previous two sections we realised that sponsored content on blogs in general are not perceived very credible because the readers believe that there is a conflict of interests. Brands can be an important way of income for bloggers, yet it can seem difficult for the blogger not to be biased. However, an ethical relationship with a blogger’s readers can be maintained trough two things; truth-telling and dialogue. The previous section addressed the importance of truth-telling in order to incorporate ethics into a sponsorships. The last comment in the previous section addressed

the importance of dialogue and clearly marking sponsored content on blogs, in order to maintain an authentic relationship with the readers. This section will examine this subject and the importance of disclosure.

In question 28 the majority (74.8%) of the respondents answered that they had noticed bloggers doing sponsored posts prior to the survey, 14.8% of them answered no, and 10.3% of them did not know (section 4.2.4). In question 29 they were further asked whether the blogs they read review products purchased by the bloggers themselves, or if they have received the product for free. As mentioned in section 4.2.4, the result from the answers to this question is very unclear. 37% of the respondents answered that they do not know, 36.4% of them answered that the blogs they read review products purchased by themselves, and 26.6% of them answered that the blogs they read review products that they have received for free. The issue with the high rate of respondents who do not know if the blogs they read do sponsored posts, or reviewing products that they have received for free, could be caused by two things. The reader not paying attention to these details, or that the blogger simply does not disclose this information. "I am a blogger, however a lot of them don't disclose" (section 4.2.3). According to Kent and Taylor's fifth tenet *commitment* and *genuineness*, dialogue must be honest and forthright. An organisation, or in this case a blogger, must disclose the good of a relationship with a brand, as "organizations and publics that deal truthfully with one another are much more able to come to mutually beneficial solutions"(section 3.4.1). The respondents agree on this, "They must present a disclaimer saying that they have been paid or received free goods or services. They must also be as objective as possible, indicating the negatives of the goods and services where appropriate" (section 4.2.4). In the last question of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked about their opinion on how a blogger could endorse a product or a brand while still maintaining an ethical relationship with its readers. Apart from truth-telling which was addressed in the previous section, several respondents also pointed out the need of a disclosure. "by disclosing first, then having an unbiased review, that may or may not have some negative comments" (section 4.2.4).

According to Kent and Taylor, the dialogic loop is the ideal starting point for a successful dialogic communication between an organisation and its publics, as it allows the public to engage with organisations, which can respond to these questions, concerns and problems (section 3.4.2). This is exactly what makes blogs a very strong marketing tool, as bloggers have such a strong connection with its audience. According to the secondary empirical data (section 4.1.1) the top six Australian

bloggers “have a larger combined audience than the highest-selling magazine, newspaper and TV program collectively” (section 4.1.1). Further, they have a higher interaction rate than celebrities. Especially female bloggers have a big following of female “fans” whom they can engage with. However the majority (67.5%) of the respondents in question 9 answered that they do not comment on blogs often (section 4.2.1), and further in question 10 the majority of the respondents (56.1%) answered that bloggers do not often respond to their comments (section 4.2.1), which is quite the obvious answer, since the respondents do not comment on blogs. However, there still is the option of commenting, for the audience to not only be able to find information on blogs, but also to express their opinions or wishes for further information from the blogger. Dialogue is in general an extremely important tool for blogs, and interaction can highly influence the perception of a blogger towards a more trustworthy image, “If the blogger is receiving products for free and making ones reviews on said product I think the ethical relationship is upheld. Also, taking suggestions from readers and reviewing those products makes the blog seem more authentic rather than compensated by a brand” (section 4.2.4).

Not only should bloggers use a disclosure in the case of brand collaborations in order to maintain an ethical relationship with its readers, but also for legal reasons. As Cenite et al. points out, *accountability* involves bearing the consequences of one’s actions through writing, whether it being through comments or for legal reasons (section 3.4.1). So while in the previous sections, this ethical principle was used to explain that bloggers need to do honest reviews in order to maintain a positive and trustworthy image, they can also be held accountable in the case of the lack of a disclosure when doing sponsored content. As the secondary data in section 4.1.3 clarifies, the FTC Federal Trade Commission released in 2009 their Testimonials & Endorsement Report, in which the requirements for online endorsers were explained. In the case of sponsorships, these must be disclosed in the post, and the same is the case for reviewing products that are sent for free or affiliate links. The purpose of this is to assist the readers or viewers in “determining whether a blogger or endorser has a material connection to the brand about which they’ve produced content” (section 4.1.3).

6. Conclusion

Throughout the analysis I have worked from a critical rationalism approach, meaning that I looked at the phenomenon of blogger endorsements and sought to formulate assumptions about this subject, which I ultimately sought to examine, and hereby falsify or corroborate by using the hypothetic-deductive method. What I intended to examine in this study was the young American consumers' perception of blogger endorsements versus celebrity endorsements, and how brand or product endorsements in return can affect the perceived credibility of the blogger. As the questionnaire is comprised of a limited number of respondents (157), which is a rather small group compared to the American population, it is essential to clarify that I cannot conclude anything general on this basis alone. However, I have concluded that even though the questionnaire cannot be regarded as representative, it is still applicable as an indication of the general young American consumer's perception of blogger endorsements. Hence, I have come to the conclusion that it is possible to generalise the results from the questionnaire, as bloggers and blogger endorsements more or less holds the same position in the minds of the young American consumers.

Previously celebrities have been widely used for endorsements for anything from hair care, to weight loss pills, or watches. However, it seems that there is starting to be a slight shift in the traditional brand endorsers. In the first part of the analysis I discovered several things. First of all, it was concluded that celebrities simply lack trustworthiness and credibility. This is for several reasons. According to the Source Credibility Model, celebrities do have a high level of trustworthiness, which may have a positive affect on the level of perceived trustworthiness. However, according to the respondents of the questionnaire, which is the main empirical data of this thesis, the lack of sincerity and reliability of the celebrity has a negative effect on the perceived trustworthiness, and ultimately perceived credibility of the celebrity. The reason for this can be explained by Mowen and Brown, Kelley, and Tripp et al.'s theory regarding multiple product endorsements and the attribution theory, as celebrities doing multiple product endorsements results in the consumers questioning the motives of the endorsement, believing that the endorsement is only for monetary reasons, rather than being a sincere recommendation. This ultimately has a negative effect on the credibility of the celebrity and endorsed brand. According to McCracken's Meaning Transfer Model, celebrities are loaded with meanings in the form of culture and values, which are transferred onto a product through endorsements. If the case is that the consumer does not see a correlation between the product and the image of the celebrity, the meaning transfer fails and

never reaches the third stage, *consumption*. These things combined means that although a celebrity may result in the consumers recognising the endorsed brand, it does not have a positive effect on their perception of the brand and product, nor their purchase intentions. Furthermore, according to the Meaning Transfer Model and the empirical data, celebrities simply may not possess the self which the consumers are striving to achieve, which is why they instead search for other role models whose recommendations to follow. These new influencers are the bloggers.

In the second section of part 1 of the analysis, it was concluded that people read blogs for several reasons, or gratifications. The first being in the search for information, especially product or service reviews. The second and maybe most important reason for this thesis is for personal identification. Although barely any of the respondents on the questionnaire stated that they read blog for socialising, they did still read blogs, as bloggers have similar lifestyles and needs as them, and therefore they are more likely to trust and follow their advice and listen to their opinions. Hypothesis 1 was *Blogger endorsements are more effective than celebrity endorsements*. This can partly be corroborated. People buy from people. Blogger endorsements are more effective than celebrity endorsements, as it allows a brand to target a very specific audience, which has a very high connection and perceived trustworthiness and expertise of the blogger endorser. However, compared to celebrity endorsements, the brands only reaches a rather limited amount of recipients through blogs.

As much as it seems as if bloggers have pushed the celebrity endorser aside, the success of the blogger endorser might also be coming to an end soon with the rise of a more critical audience. In the second part of the analysis the credibility of bloggers was examined, with a focus on how paid endorsements affect the credibility of bloggers, which in the previous section was concluded to be higher than that of celebrities. In order to examine the perceived credibility of bloggers, the Source Credibility Model, Dialogic Public Relations Theory, and Mowen and Brown, Kelley, and Tripp et al.'s theory regarding multiple brand endorsements and attribution theory was used. My second hypothesis was *Bloggers who are paid to endorse brands or products are considered less credible by the readers*. This has in this thesis partly been corroborated. Generally speaking, paid endorsements does result in a lower level of perceived credibility of the blogger. However, with different tools it is possible to maintain an ethical relationship with the blog readers, and ultimately not affect the credibility of the blogger.

This bring us back to the problem statement; *With the increasing use of blogger endorsers rather than celebrities, how can this affect the young American consumers' perceptions of the endorsed product and brand? How can paid brand endorsements in return affect the credibility of the blogger?* Based on this thesis, we are now able to answer this. Compared to celebrities, bloggers can be an incredibly powerful tool for brands. They have a higher level of perceived credibility and expertise, and along with that, the brands are able to reach a very targeted group of consumers through the blogger. A blogger has a very loyal audience, which makes them not only trust the words of a blogger more than the ones of a celebrity, but they are also more likely to purchase a product endorsed by a blogger. However, paid endorsements does affect the credibility of a blogger negatively.

However, it is possible for bloggers and brands to work together in a way which allows not only the blogger and brand to benefit from the collaboration, but also the readers. This all depends on the use of dialogue on the blog. First of all, transparency and truth-telling are two very important features. The blogger must disclose the relationship with the brand and product in the case of a paid endorsement, and hereafter give an objective and unbiased review with both positive as well as negative opinions on the product or brand. In this way, the blogger maintains an ethical relationship with its readers, which results not only in a higher level perceived credibility of the blogger, but its readers will also benefit from a reliable review, which ultimately benefits the brand endorsed in the form of a positive image and the audience of the blogs purchasing the endorsed product.

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7.4 Illustrations

Figure 1: McCracken 1989, 315

Figure 2: Ohanian, 1990, 46

Figure 4: Results, section 8.2.2

Figure 5: Results, section 8.2.3

Figure 6: Results, section 8.2.4

Figure 7: Results, section 8.2.5

Figure 8: Results, section 8.2.6

Figure 9: Results, section 8.2.7

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Figure 11: Results, section 8.2.13

Figure 12: Results, section 8.2.15

Figure 13: Results, section 8.2.16

Figure 14: Results, section 8.2.27

Figure 15: Results, section 8.2.28

Figure 16: Results, section 8.2.29

Figure 17: Results, section 8.2.37

8. Appendix

8.1 Appendix 1 - The Questionnaire

Blogger endorsement

Hi! I'm a Danish student, currently working on my master's thesis on blogger endorsement. In order to better understand this subject, I need your help.

The purpose of this study is to understand whether blogger endorsement can affect the perception of a brand, along with whether this endorsement can affect the credibility of the blogger.

I would greatly appreciate if you could take just 5 minutes out of your day to answer these few questions.

Your answers will of course remain anonymous.

Thank you for your help!

NEXT

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Blogger endorsement

Part 1

In this first part of the survey I will ask you some general questions about yourself.

What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

You are aged between?

- ☐ Younger than 18
- ☐ 18-22
- ☐ 23-26
- ☐ 27-32
- ☐ Older than 32

What fits your current situation?

- ☐ Student
- ☐ Employee
- ☐ Entrepreneur
- ☐ Unemployed
- ☐ Other : _____

How much time on average per day do you spend online?

- ☐ Less than 1 hour
- ☐ 1-2 hours
- ☐ 3-4 hours
- ☐ 4-5 hours
- ☐ 5+ hours

How many blogs do you read on average per day?

- ☐ None
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2-4
- ☐ 4-6
- ☐ 6-8
- ☐ More than 8

Which type of blog do you mostly read?

- ☐ Fashion
- ☐ Beauty
- ☐ Tech
- ☐ Cooking
- ☐ Travel
- ☐ Political
- ☐ Personal life
- ☐ Art
- ☐ Health & wellness
- ☐ Home decor
- ☐ Other : _____

My main reason to read blogs is

- ☐ To socialize
- ☐ To find specific information
- ☐ As a pastime/hobby
- ☐ For product/brand reviews
- ☐ Other : _____

Please tick one box for each of the statements below, depending on how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement.

I actively search blogs for reviews on brands or services I am interested in

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

I often comment on blogs

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

Bloggers often respond to my comments

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

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Blogger endorsement

Part 2

Which kind of advertising influences your purchase intentions the most?

- ☐ Funny
- ☐ Informative
- ☐ Emotional
- ☐ Celebrity endorsed
- ☐ Other : _____

Why?

Your answer _____

Which kind of advertising do you find most trustworthy?

- ☐ Funny
- ☐ Informative
- ☐ Emotional
- ☐ Celebrity Endorsed
- ☐ Other : _____

Why?

Your answer _____

Did you ever purchase a product that had been endorsed by a celebrity?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

Does the presence of celebrities help you recognise the brand?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

Does a celebrity endorsed ad have more influence on your purchase behavior and decisions than a non-endorsed ad?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

How trustworthy do you find an ad that has been endorsed by a celebrity?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not trustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very trustworthy

Does the celebrity's behaviour have any influence on your perception of the brand that they endorse?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

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Blogger endorsement

Part 3

Please tick one box for each of the statements below, depending on how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement.

I find it easier to relate to blogger endorsement than celebrity endorsement

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

I feel a stronger connection with bloggers than celebrities

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

Bloggers are more credible brand endorsers than celebrities

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

Please state the reasoning behind your answers to the 3 questions above

Your answer

If a blogger has interests similar to mine, I am more likely to trust their review

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

I have purchased a product after reading a positive review on a blog

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

I have decided not to purchase a product or service after reading a negative review on a blog

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

Does the blogger's behaviour have any influence on your perception of the brand that they endorse?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

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Blogger endorsement

* Required

Part 4

In this section, you will be asked about your opinion on sponsored posts or bloggers receiving free products. A post is sponsored if the blogger is paid by a company to talk about their brand or product.

Have you noticed bloggers doing sponsored posts prior to this survey?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

The blogs that I read review

- ☐ Products purchased by the blogger themselves
- ☐ Products received for free
- ☐ I don't know

Please tick one box for each of the statements below, depending on how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement.

A blogger that has been sent a product or paid for review is more likely to be biased and review positively *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

A blog with a high number of sponsored posts seems less trustworthy *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

I think that working with brands makes a blogger more reliable *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

Why?

Your answer

Bloggers who write both negative and positive reviews are more trustworthy *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

From 1-5, how are bloggers' opinions influenced by money received from brands? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not Influenced	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly influenced

I think blogs should remain free of brand influence *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

In your opinion, what is more important for bloggers?

- ☐ Readers
- ☐ Brands

Why?

Your answer

In your opinion, how could a blogger endorse a product or a brand while still maintaining an ethical relationship with its readers?

Your answer

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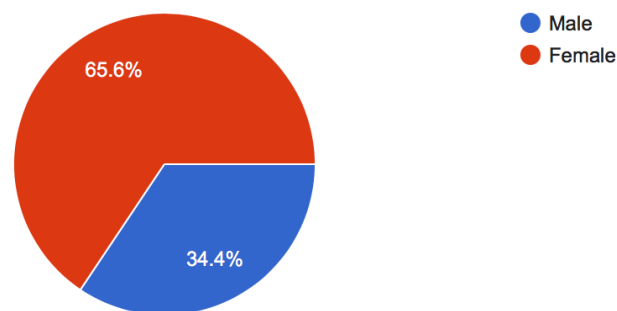
SUBMIT

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8.2 Appendix 2 - Results of Questionnaire

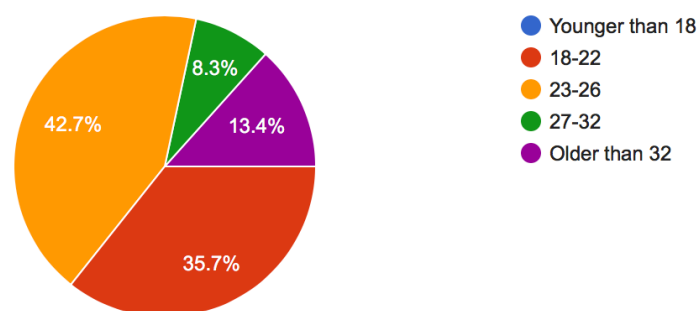
8.2.1 Question 1

What is your gender? (157 responses)



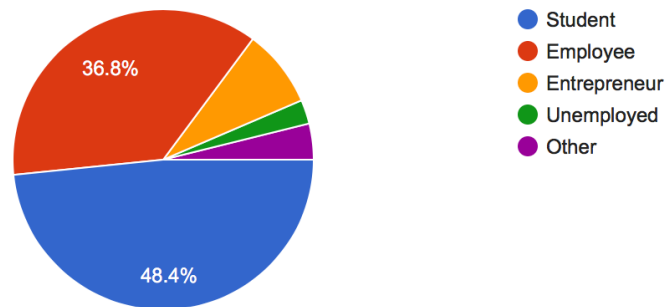
8.2.2 Question 2

You are aged between? (157 responses)



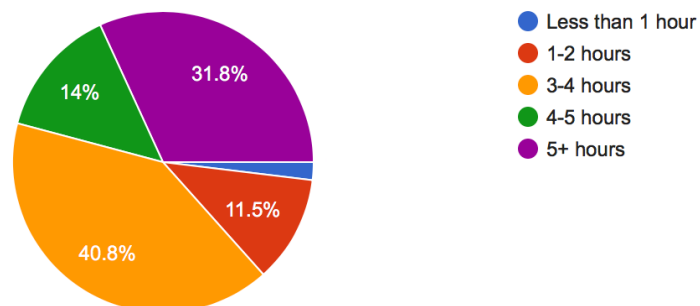
8.2.3 Question 3

What fits your current situation? (155 responses)



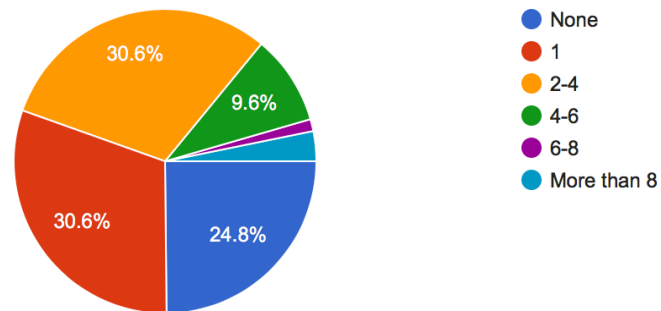
8.2.3 Question 4

How much time on average per day do you spend online? (157 responses)



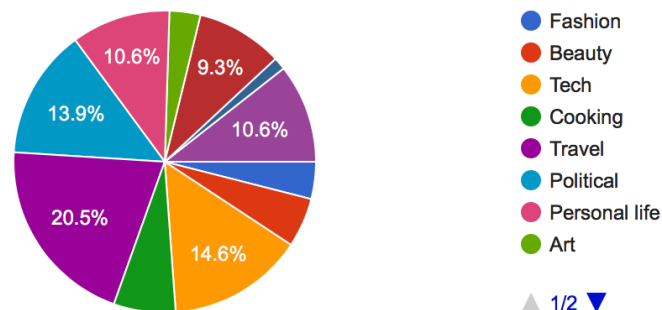
8.2.5 Question 5

How many blogs do you read on average per day? (157 responses)



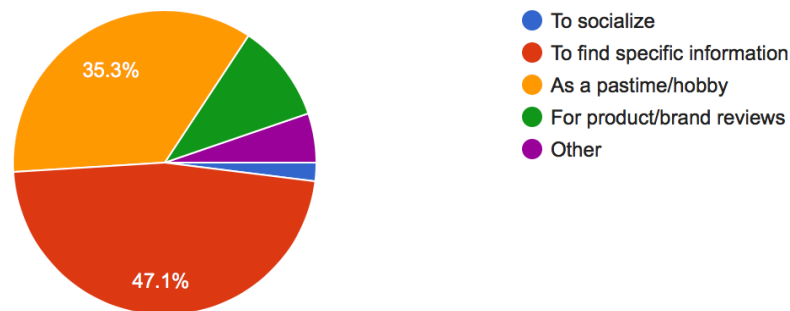
8.2.6 Question 6

Which type of blog do you mostly read? (151 responses)



8.2.7 Question 7

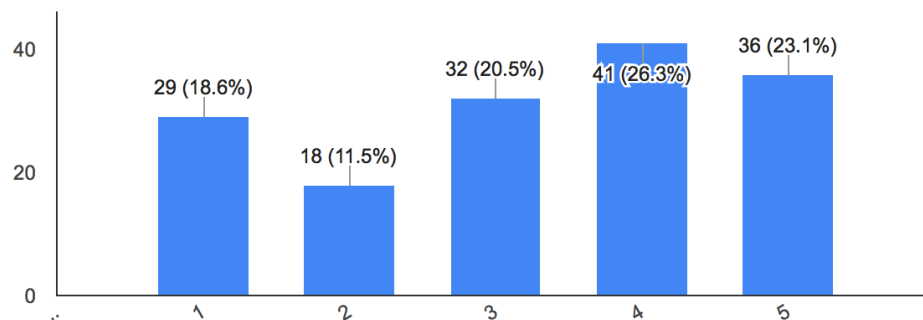
My main reason to read blogs is (153 responses)



8.2.8 Question 8

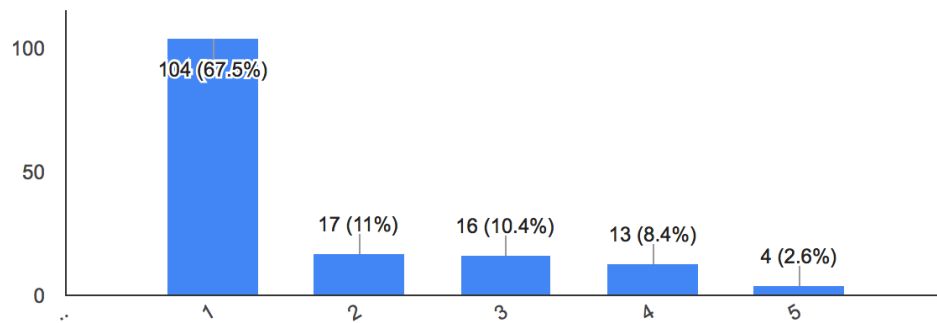
Please tick one box for each of the statements below, depending on how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement.

I actively search blogs for reviews on brands or services I am interested in
(156 responses)



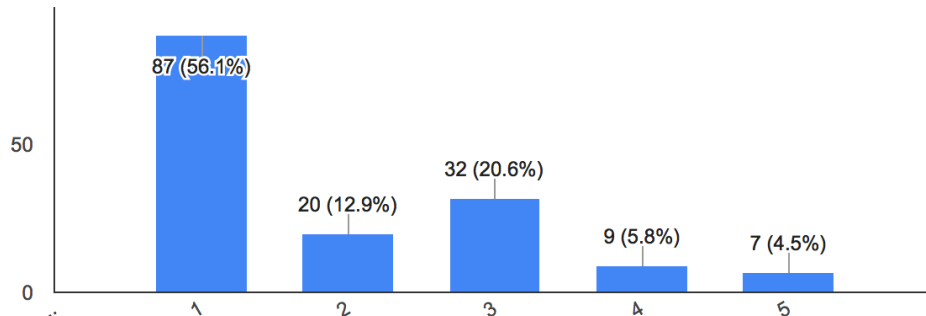
8.2.9 Question 9

I often comment on blogs (154 responses)



8.2.10 Question 10

Bloggers often respond to my comments (155 responses)

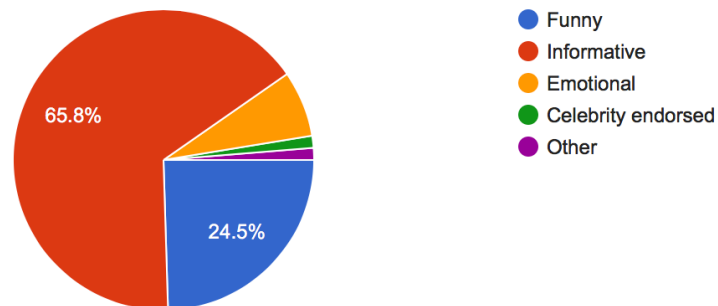


8.2.11 Question 11

Part 2

Which kind of advertising influences your purchase intentions the most?

(155 responses)



8.2.12 Question 12

Why? (109 responses)

I can base my decision to buy on real information

I can base my decision to buy on real information

Because my attention is always drawn to a familiar face or voice, especially if I like the celebrity.

I try to live a minimalist lifestyle so I concentrate on products that are effective and useful.

I'm less annoyed at the advertisement when it's funny.

Know about the product.

I am usually looking for something specific.

i trust my friends opinions and not a commercial

I am usually looking for specific information, so advertising that answers my questions is the most effective.

i like to make informed decisions

Although the others may catch my attention, Informative is what I ultimately trust.

I would only buy something if I am well informed about it.

I usually become interested in a product that is innovative in some way.

Memorable

While I appreciate the funny, if a product makes a good case for itself I respect that. I find myself more drawn to something that shows me clearly how and why I would use it.

I am more likely to want to watch something that is funny. Most of the ads that I watch are on YouTube before a video will play or on Facebook as I'm scrolling through. If it is funny I might be engaged and keep watching, but even if it's a wonderful emotional ad I'm probably not going to watch because I don't typically seek out ads that are trying to make me sad or give me the feels.

I seek out information to make reasoned decisions.

I like making well researched decisions.

I buy things based on facts

I tend to make rational decisions, therefore need information to make them.

Because I trust facts

I need to be motivated to keep reading

I always am drawn to ethos. Regardless of how it is presented. Human stories draw me in the most.

I like practical information

I like specific details more than opinions

it tells me everything. I don't have to do anymore research

need facts, don't care about emotions when buying stuff

They seem to be the most honest

Photographs make me feel a certain way, and I think the product will make me feel that way too.

I want to hear what people who have been there or are holding the item in their hand say- but only if it is detailed and informative.

Need to know what I'm buying, or why I should take a look.

because it is more serious, not a joke, and not a paid celebrity endorsement

Draws my attention

I strive to make purchases that are best for me personally and my wallet. I may be intrigued by funny or emotional commercials but not convinced to make a purchase solely on those characteristics.

Things like peterman that make me imagine myself using it.

I feel connected to the product or service

My background is clinical research so I go mostly on data.

I am usually looking for something specific and I want to know if it fills a need

I like to know the facts before considering it

I trust more in people who have actually used a product instead of a paid endorsement.

I like to feel a connection.

I want to know the facts so I can make an informed decision

Something that touched my heart will be remembered for long

It breaks barriers and creates comfort

I like honest, straight-forward reviews

Because I want to know about the product.

I like to know honest opinions/reviews of products. Someone being funny is entertaining, but it doesn't necessarily give me the information I need to know about the product.

They grab my attention

It keeps me interested.

It's just more likely to stick in my head.

Seems more trust worthy than the other types.

I like personal opinions and perceptions of products, but from an efficiency point of view

They appear to be more honest.

I go my what seems true and reasonable

I want to know if it's useful

Simple, to the point

Because I typically buy things only if I know exactly what I'm getting.

Generally if I'm looking for a specific product or technique I want to know what they have found works the best. I want to be informed before I make my own purchases. This way I don't waste money.

It's actually informative and emotional. I like it when I see real people using a specific brand.

If an ad can make me laugh I'm more likely to remember it.

I'm a funny guy so I enjoy humor.

Life is too serious

I don't see the point in buying something you don't need

Because I want the brand to connect with me, and I'm into humor.

Brand doesn't sway me as much as knowing how I will be able to use the product, or if it's high quality.

I like to know what I am buying

I feel like I can make an informed decision

Because I want to know about brands to inform my purchasing.

If you make me laugh, I feel obligated to return the favor, somehow. Probably some psychological element going on. Reciprocity or something.

I'm going to look for information in the first place if I am going to read a blog

Product Advertisement is key to making investments.

I would rather the advertiser be straightforward and let the product sell itself

The more information I get the more interested I am in buying products.

I want to know what someone who has purchased the product and is only affected by its performance thinks of it.

Understanding why advertisements affect our decisions is very important. Informative advertisements show me that they can substantiate the brand or organization behind the ad with real application.

I'm drawn to pay more attention to anything that makes me laugh.

I like the facts.. Don't like to be surprised..

I try to find the most suitable products for my needs

I only want to buy the best products.

The more I know about a product, the more likely I will be inclined or disinclined to make a purchase.

Ads do not influence my purchases-I rarely make them

Humor sells

I like to make my own decisions after gathering lots of information.

A good sense of humour is key to life

If I'm looking for a review of a product I'm going to buy, I want the most information on that product I can find in the easiest way. Humor definitely doesn't hurt.

I prefer looking at studies and statistics to evaluate a product. If good, real data is presented i feel more comfortable buying a product

I have limited disposable income, so I do research before most purchases. Even if an ad is entertaining I tend to research the product if it piques my interest.

Positive emotions

they are more entertaining

I like learning about things through people

I want to know everything about the product I'm purchasing

I like to know the products I am purchasing.

Makes me remember the product as opposed to other brands when purchasing them

I'm more likely to pay attention to a funnier ad

I like things that are funny.

Just because some one endorses a product, doesn't mean it's the best. I prefer to have information about a product and make my decision based on that.

It is easier to identify with emotions and provides a more tangible incentive to buy what they might be advertising.

I remember them the best

I value whit over popular/celebrity endorsed items

I respond and engage positively with humor.

It gets my attention and puts me in a good mood

I want to see how much a product will benefit me before I spend money on it.

I am more driven by reviews and facts about the product to ensure I am getting a good investment/product.

It's creative

It catches my attention better. Something that makes me laugh sticks with me longer than something that is merely informative or celebrity endorsed.

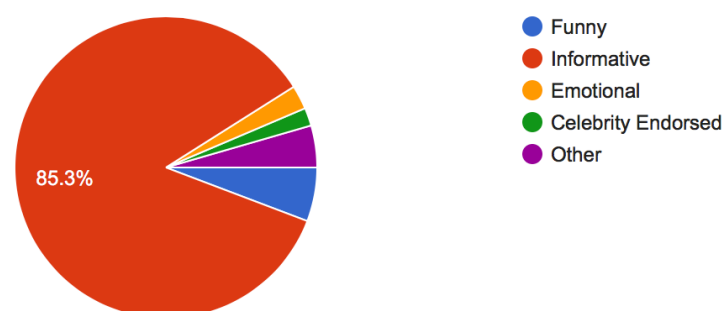
I want to know what the product is and how it could help me in my life.

Pragmatism

It seems more good-natured.

8.2.13 Question 13

Which kind of advertising do you find most trustworthy? (156 responses)



8.2.14 Question 14

Why? (94 responses)

Real data

Real data

Since a celebrity is ready to put his name and reputation on the line to promote this product I assume that it must be quite good.

I want to know if the product will fit into my lifestyle of minimalism by being effective and green.

Credibility comes from true, factual information.

it lays out the facts

Same as above.

Because i notice it more

Easier to trust something that has been tested with a detailed procedure

Being informative demonstrates openness and respect for truth in advertising.

Comes from a "normal person" blogger, who I know is picky about what s/he endorses

Same reason as above. Informative seems more well-reasoned and by extension it seems more accurate (at least potentially so).

An ad might catch my eye, but at the end of the day it's an advertisement with an end goal. If the ad makes me interested I will invest time in learning more about the product, but I rarely if ever take an ad for face value. Definitely not if it's for something important.

It seems more fair and balanced.

Usually includes facts/tests.

If it's informative, the seller is making an effort to explain why this product will be useful

Don't care about the other attributes

Because I trust facts

Too informative often means it's sponsored, as are celeb endorsements.

Backing up claims with evidence best supports a product.

Funny and emotional endorsements are fine but they don't push me to the "buy" point.

same as above

Authentic

Facts before fluff

You will at least know what the product does and can make up your mind by yourself.

Good to hear what similar users have experienced.

because it is doubtful the celeb actually uses the product

It provides info

All of the other types of advertising can easily hide important information. Therefore, the more informative an advertisement is, the more honest and trustworthy it appears.

If the type of person I look up to says they use, they aren't lying

These types usually are fact based

Same as a above

Same as above

I like to buy something because I know it's worth buying

See previous answer

It's the most genuine. It's a lot harder to fake emotion.

No gimmicks

It has numbers

It seems more genuine and from the heart

Because it's probably more honest.

If I'm to trust a product I want the facts.

Appears to be backed by facts

I think that when there is humor in an advertisement it is fairly likely to show the character of the advertisers. So if they're funny I'm subconsciously more likely to think "hey, these are good guys!"

The other ones could be covering up or distracting you from things through humor, psychological tactics, or famous people.

They appear to be more honest.

Facts

Because you can follow up on their information elsewhere, so they can't lie.

Facts are important to me.

It tells me more about the product/service.

If it's straight to the point, it's usually more trustworthy.

I'm a scientist, skeptical of claims that aren't backed up by data.

You can be informed about what you're going to buy

Because it shows a willingness of the company to use facts in their persuasion.

I want to know what I'll be purchasing.

I like to know what I am getting and if you can't tell me straight up, then I don't want it.

I'd like to think I'd find informative stuff the most trustworthy. Not sure if I do though – I can't really gauge my subconscious reaction to things

If it is true, and is backed up, I trust it.

Product Advertisement is key to making investments.

It gives good information on the product

The more technical, the more reliable. Celebrity endorsed content is generally paid for and is unreliable.

Same as above.

It lays out the facts.

Facts don't lie

Informative advertising gives more information than appealing to a person's humorous or emotional side. Yes, it may be cold, but ultimately that kind of advertising gives more of the truth than other types.

I usually rely on customer reviews

Makes me think the company has done their research

There is no guarantee that paid endorsements relay true information

There's truth in jokes

If there is specified reason to back up a product, then the product will speak for itself.

Same answer as before

It's a sales pitch that appeals to a consumer's intelligence, so even if it is stilted it is based on product information.

Memorable

Honesty is abandoned

The more information the better

Because everything else seems fake.

Seems less biased

Factual evidence is usually involved comparing competitors to their products.

I trust facts

People don't normally lie about their emotions when they take the time to write them out.

see previous answer. I like making my own decisions rather than listening to what someone else says.

If you have facts to back it up, i'm usually cynical but am more likely to believe or buy into it.

As long as the information is credible, I feel that this is the best way to establish trust.

I like information, and find it more trustworthy over everything

Best to know the facts and have them evaluated by a respectable, credible source.

Trusting something and responding to it are different things-- I trust something I can understand.

I like to hear about facts that I can research about later

I like having the facts, and I can generally evaluate if the information is true before purchasing a product.

Informative feels more serious and less like an avoidance of possible flaws in something.

Appeals to my logic

They're relying on simply facts to get you to buy their brand. Even if they skew them a bit to make you like them, they have to have some factual basis to advertise.

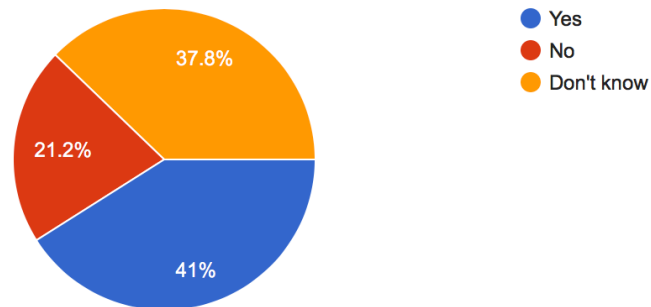
They are trying to give details about their product so any claims can easily be checked so I find these the most trustworthy.

Information is king.

It is the most objectively reliable.

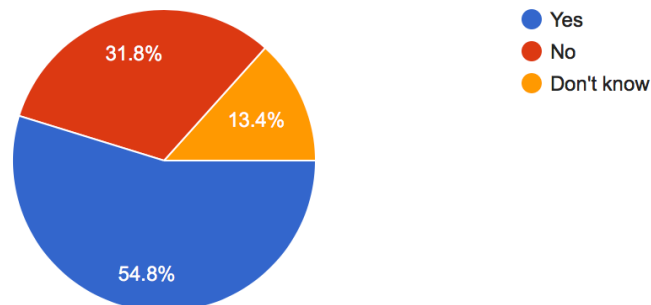
8.2.15 Question 15

Did you ever purchase a product that had been endorsed by a celebrity?
(156 responses)



8.2.16 Question 16

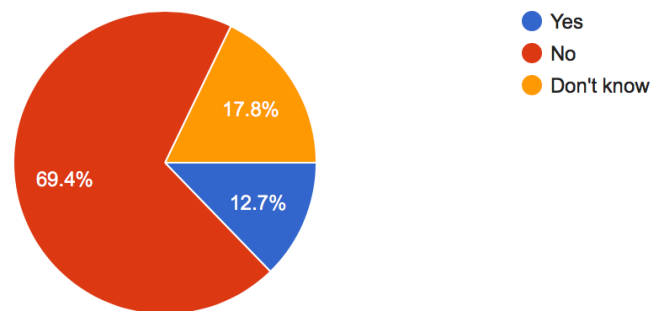
Does the presence of celebrities help you recognise the brand? (157 responses)



8.2.17 Question 17

Does a celebrity endorsed ad have more influence on your purchase behavior and decisions than a non-endorsed ad?

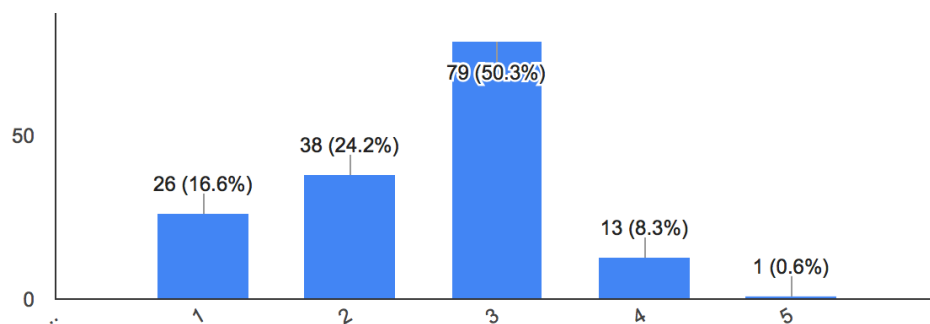
(157 responses)



8.2.18 Question 18

How trustworthy do you find an ad that has been endorsed by a celebrity?

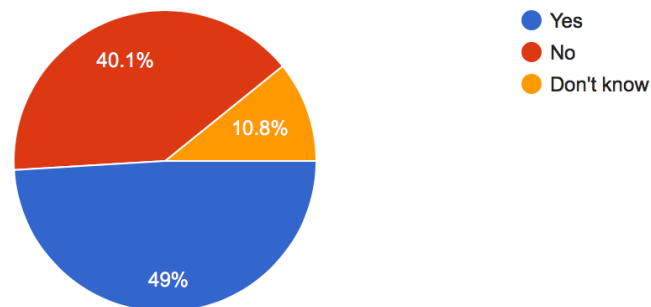
(157 responses)



8.2.19 Question 19

Does the celebrity's behaviour have any influence on your perception of the brand that they endorse?

(157 responses)



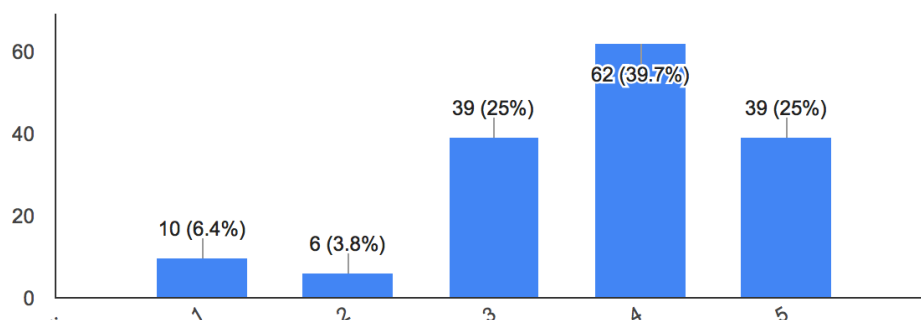
8.2.20 Question 20

Part 3

Please tick one box for each of the statements below, depending on how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement.

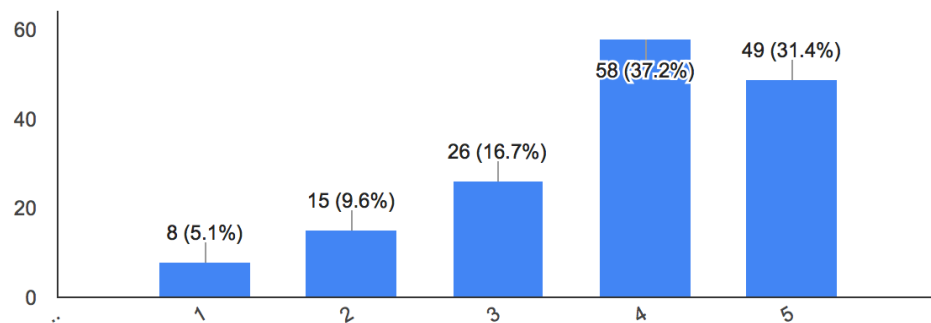
I find it easier to relate to blogger endorsement than celebrity endorsement

(156 responses)



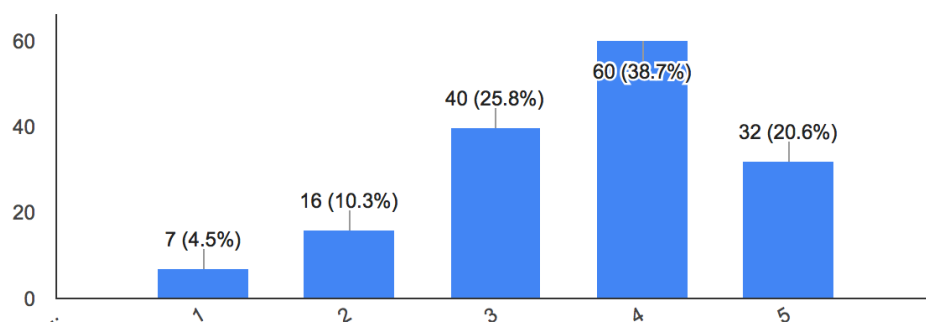
8.2.21 Question 21

I feel a stronger connection with bloggers than celebrities (156 responses)



8.2.22 Question 22

Bloggers are more credible brand endorsers than celebrities (155 responses)



8.2.23 Question 23

Please state the reasoning behind your answers to the 3 questions above

(122 responses)

I feel like I can relate to them more

I feel like I can relate to them more

Bloggers are real-life people, they could be a neighbor or a friend. Also I feel that a blogger's purpose is to give me tips & advices whereas celebrities just want me to buy things, almost like a salesperson.

As with celebrities, bloggers are often paid to endorse certain products. However, I think that sometimes they talk about a product simply because they like it and it works well for them. With celebrities it is ALL ABOUT MONEY, and you can tell they probably wouldn't even use the product if they weren't getting paid to endorse it.

I generally perceive celebrity endorsements to be for a monetary reason (for the celebrity). While this is probably the same for bloggers, I've noticed bloggers will give both the positive and the negative side to the product (which I trust more).

Bloggers are more similar to me in their needs than celebrities who are only pretending to use a product to get paid.

Honestly, the only reason I buy a product is if I need it. Endorsement is only relevant by marketing a products existence.

bloggers are real people who actually use the product and are typically honest about their opinion they MAY get small royalties from the company but celebs are payed thousands of dollars to endorse something they probably don't even use. i HIGHLY doubt blake lively uses pantene shampoo!!

A celebrity is less likely to endorse something only for the money, they're more responsible if the product is bad because they're well known.

Because most bloggers have in-depth knowledge about the products

The blogger may not be compensated for their endorsement.

I dislike celebrities and they are more often sponsored by brands to endorse them.

I don't really know. A lot of bloggers are full of crap, so their endorsement might harm my perception of the product.

A blogger has more of a choice over what s/he endorses, whereas celebrities are more subject to coercion by the powers that be.

Celebrities are paid to endorse the products they endorse. I have little faith that they've ever actually used them, they're just there because they're famous. Often bloggers are paid to endorse something or at least given that product free to test, but they also tend to be more specialized. For example, a food blogger is not usually going to endorse a new phone nor will they be paid to, but a tech blogger might and even if there is an incentive for him or her to say that product is superior, I will trust their statement more because they have expertise in the area.

If a blogger is doing well then often times they are paid to blast a product. Sometimes you can find an early blog that is really true to the blogger, but once they've got a ton of followers it gets more tricky.

Bloggers seem more trustworthy than celebrities.

They seem less beholden to brands.

Bloggers are real people who are going to test out products and give honest reviews. A celebrity is most likely just trying to get more money

They aren't (usually) paid for their "endorsement"

Bloggers are real people who share deep insights into their private life. I get to know them and their style and if it fits my style, I trust their recommendations more than a celebrity

Celebs have to be paid a lot to do something, bloggers often do it for low cost or free.

Although celebrity endorsement might not always be credible (they do it for money), I have to truly be connected to a blogger to take their suggestions.

I don't believe someone who is paid to endorse a product can be objective. Celebrities will pitch anything that pays them and the content is scripted. Bloggers at least have to come up with their own opinions about a product.

The blogs I follow are usually information based and supported by a number of authors, so I wouldn't say I have direct ties/affiliations or appreciations for specific bloggers and more for a blog at large. You could argue that a blog wouldn't publish an author or their work if they didn't agree with it to some degree, but regardless, I'm rarely influenced by an individual in my purchasing habits.

they stick to their niche and only endorse things they believe in

i still hope they preserve their sincerity

They are real people living real lives with an income similar to mine.

I assume bloggers will endorse quality products, whereas celebrities endorse solely for money. I don't know that for sure, that's just my perception.

They are equally not credible. If they have some experience in the related field then I would trust them more.

Celebs rarely have to think about their audience. Bloggers do..

because they are an 'average' person, who doesn't get (or expect) special treatment

Bloggers are real people vs a celebrity who is only endorsing for money

I do not have a strong attachment toward any bloggers or celebrities

I'm indifferent but expect bloggers to be more honest than celebrities.

If I was influenced by a celebrity, it would be a smaller celebrity or one I knew I could trust, like if Nanci Griffith did collab with MAC, if Kim Kardashian endorses something, she's probably lying and doesn't even use it. If grav3yardgirl or one of my favourite travel bloggers reviews something, I know they're telling the truth and I prefer written blog posts to youtube

Bloggers are real everyday people and usually reach out to the brands they want to work with. I feel celebrities agents choose the brands they endorse and although have some say may be influenced by an attractive contract rather than the product.

Since I am in the blogger community and follow bloggers are trust and consider credible I trust the blogger community in general more than celebrity

I see bloggers as more relatable and honest.

There are as many terrible blogger as decent ones. And there is just tons of them

I am a blogger, however a lot of them don't disclose.

Celebrities are paid a lot of money and their opinions / words are written for them. A lot of bloggers are paid as well but they have to write their own opinions / words about the product and it's easier to tell if they are being dishonest. A lot of people aren't very good liars.

Bloggers are real people and don't just sell out for a commercial. They share their true thoughts an opinions instead of reading from a script.

They are normal people unlike celebrities who advertise for some products but we are not sure whether they really use it or not

Bloggers are "real" people; celebrities are like unicorns

Celebrities are just getting paid to say good things

As a blogger myself I don't believe celebrities even care about products. Bloggers will usually tell you if something has something wrong with it.

I know that bloggers often get paid to endorse or review brands/products, but I feel like they'll be more honest with their reviews than celebrities. Some celebrities review products on tv for a company and get paid tons of money.

Celebrities are often in it for the money and they are highly scripted. Bloggers let you into their lives everyday so it's easier to trust them and their endorsements.

Endorsement from any source seems untrustworthy

Bloggers are more likely to have just received a free whatever to review, rather than a celebrity which may have been paid a great deal.

Ultimately, I don't know any of them, so I don't think any of them are super trust worthy or credible, but it seems like most bloggers are independent so I do trust them a bit more than celebrities.

Bloggers are regular people not receiving thousands/millions of dollars to pretend to like something

Bloggers are not paid nearly as much as celebrities.

Bloggers may not be paid to endorse the product, but celebrities most often times are

Bloggers generally have more expertise than celebrities who merely act, sing, dance, etc. Of course, this depends on the celebrity as well.

Don't really know a whole lot of bloggers

Celebrities have credibility

Bloggers are usually just like me, so I can relate to their opinions.

Bloggers are more relatable because they are just people using social media, like I do. But I don't necessarily feel connected to them, because they're still strangers. Technically, they could be getting paid to endorse a product just like celebrities, so that lowers their credibility. But usually they're actually using it and reviewing it in their blog, so their credibility would depend on if the review they gave seemed to completely look at the product.

More personal connection

I don't judge people's opinions based on how they publicize them or who they are.

I hope bloggers are being truthful in critiquing different products. I have an easier time viewing a blogger as a third party when endorsing a product than I do a celebrity.

Bloggers are "real" people like you and me. I can relate much better to them than to someone who makes millions of dollars acting or singing.

I know no bloggers.

I don't read many blogs, but real people are more trustworthy than celebrities who are paid to endorse something.

Bloggers could be equally untrustworthy, celebrities aren't necessarily trying to lie to you.

I don't feel like I have a strong answer to number 1 or 3. Bloggers seem more like "real people" than celebrities

Both are probably getting paid for their endorsement but at least with bloggers there is a chance that they are not.

Celebrity endorsed products don't do anything for me because I know that the company is probably just after a profit.

Bloggers are typically less motivated by money or deals. Bloggers typically tell the truth unless they have a personal vendetta against the brand.

Celebrities are more clearly getting paid. Bloggers seem more authentic.

I relate more to regular people who are probably not paid to endorse something.

I don't know if bloggers are more credible than celebrities. If I were to read a blog, especially if they blog about stuff I like, I'd likely be more inclined to agree with their endorsements, as well. Since I don't know a celebrities inner workings, their thoughts and feelings, I can't say one way or the other whether or not they're more or less credible. I have less information about them than I would a blogger.

Celebrity = corporate shill. I avoid celebrity endorsed items

Celebrities utilize their advertisements to help their own personal gain at times. Bloggers tend to be more straight to the point and usually tend to truly express their beliefs without trying to win popularity counts.

Bloggers are not paid to sell products typically

Unless they're getting paid, they're less biased. I want someone who is clearly not getting paid to promote a product.

It depends on their messaging. Bloggers are paid by brands just like celebrities. Sometimes celebrities endorse products because they are passionate about the story behind it or its purpose. The more credible endorser is the more informed endorser, celebrity or blogger.

I don't frequent blogs, and I have no reason to trust a stranger on the Internet.

I think most bloggers only promote products they actually use and are happy with, celebrities can be "bought" easier

Celebrities are usually being paid and don't actually use the product.

Anyone can be credible - just depends on where they get their information and why they endorse something. Their status as a celebrity or a blogger means nothing to an intelligent human being.

Bloggers seem to be more relatable to the common man, as there is a better chance that they actually have used whatever they are selling or reviewing.

Pretty ambivalent in this sense. I don't have a personal relationship with either the celebrity or the blogger, so I really can't form any conclusions on their credibility.

Bloggers are regular people, mostly. Celebrities are paid to say that something is good, whether they have used/bought it or not

Its easier to connect with average people

I feel neutral about this, many bloggers I follow also receive endorsements which can effect their "trustworthiness" but many bloggers I follow will tell you if they paid for something or were given it for free which helps.

They seem like normal people

Bloggers may have a genuine interest in the brand/service. Celebrities seen to be most interested in the money and selling their own "brand".

More likely to have actually used the product

Bloggers can be paid without advertising that they're being paid, same with instagrammers etc., you really don't know if you can trust their suggestions.

As a person who does not look at blogs often, whenever I do, to usually evaluate computer parts or games, the bloggers talk about the good and bad aspects of a products, while celebrities are paid to only talk about the good.

I think bloggers and journalists are less likely to be "sponsored" and may be more likely to do product research and come to some form of conclusion. Additionally, most bloggers are closer to my income and social level than celebrities, so I find them more relatable.

Bloggers are more easily bought

They are not sponsored

It seems more likely that the blogger isn't being paid to endorse a product.

Because bloggers are usually more genuine about why they're endorsing it

Most Celebrities will lie for money/fame

Because just because a celebrity endorses something, it doesn't mean they believe in it. For celebrities, it is all about the money.

Celebrities are based on their looks and beauty, while bloggers are everyday people trying to give others their thoughts and feelings.

Bloggers are paid to endorse products just like celebrities are paid to endorse products. Don't see much of a difference besides the fact celebrities have more money.

Bloggers are less often paid to endorse products, though that does happen

A bloggers job is to give an honest review and demonstration. Celebs just have to show up.

They probably don't get paid as much so they are probably endorsing the product because they like it.

Bloggers can be paid for their endorsements depending on how popular their blog is.

Bloggers are easier to identify as they are 'real' people

Depending on how much the blogger invests in the items they blog about, this platform is a much more thorough way to find out about a product (usually by someone who has specific interest in the topic at hand) than having a celebrity endorse something.

Bloggers are real people, so they should be more trustworthy, but then again, they each have strong opinions of their own. And they can endorse certain brands for profit on the side.

Bloggers are less likely to be in it for the money alone, and likely have a genuine interest in the product or service.

Bloggers seem more relatable because they are, supposedly, normal everyday people like me. They don't necessarily get sought out for endorsements by brands. I trust that more than a celebrity who is getting paid millions to endorse a brand.

I find bloggers to be more truthful. Celebrities are looking for media attention, might not be sincere about what they are advertising

Although celebrities can be strong advocates for a brand, I sometimes feel that they are paid without actually using the product and actually believing in the product. I make the assumption bloggers have tested or used the product before writing or endorsing it.

While I feel there is a stronger possibility that a blogger shares more life experiences with myself, making it easier to connect, I still try to acknowledge that bloggers can be compensated for testimony just like celebrities.

Since I do not read many blogs I feel no connection to bloggers therefore do not find them more credible or relatable than celebrities.

They're average normal people

They've actually tested the products and aren't getting paid like celebrities

I guess the perception is that this is just another source of revenue for a celebrity. Bloggers may get sponsored to advertise, but for the most part, they're just communicating about products that actually work for them.

These people are more like me and live my lifestyle. You would always trust your neighbor or friends over someone who is a complete stranger and so I feel that celebrities can't speak for how well a product fits me.

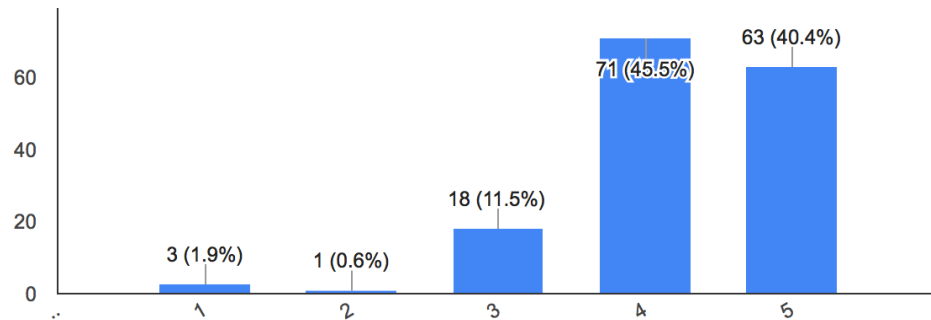
They aren't.

Celebrities suck

I feel like both bloggers and celebrities have the capacity to lie or otherwise not be objective in reviews/endorsements.

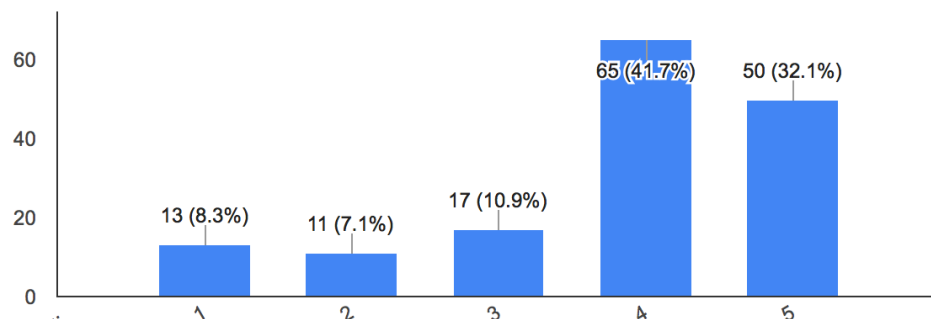
8.2.24 Question 24

If a blogger has interests similar to mine, I am more likely to trust their review
(156 responses)



8.2.25 Question 25

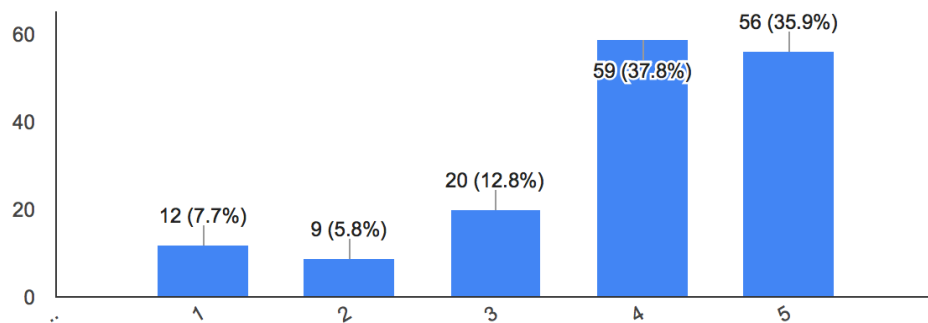
I have purchased a product after reading a positive review on a blog
(156 responses)



8.2.26 Question 26

I have decided not to purchase a product or service after reading a negative review on a blog

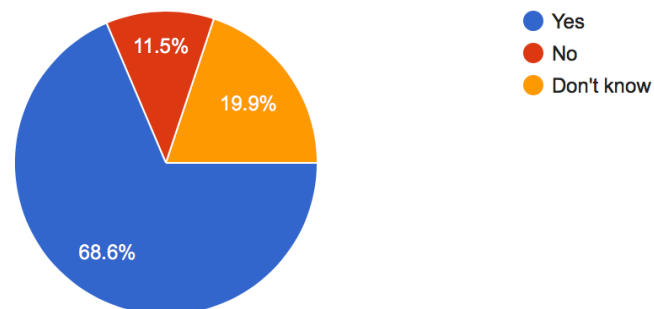
(156 responses)



8.2.27 Question 27

Does the blogger's behaviour have any influence on your perception of the brand that they endorse?

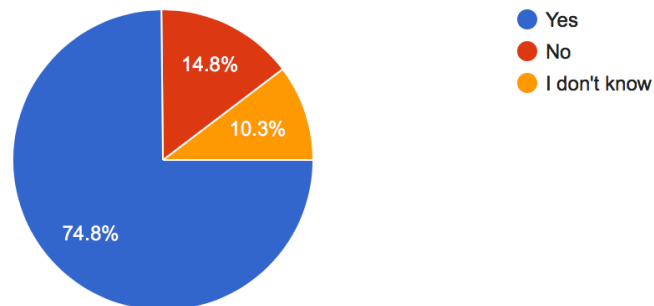
(156 responses)



8.2.28 Question 28

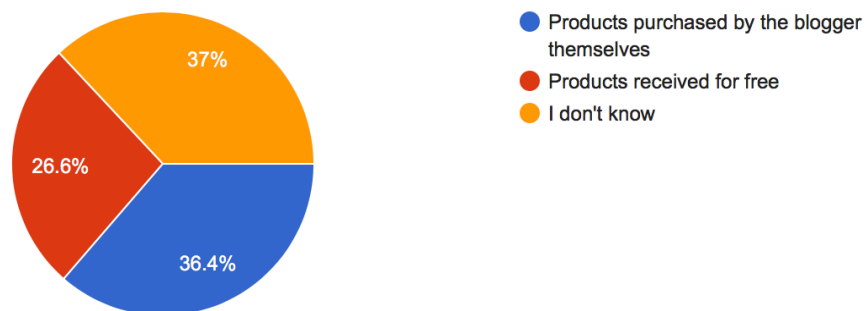
Part 4

Have you noticed bloggers doing sponsored posts prior to this survey?
(155 responses)



8.2.29 Question 29

The blogs that I read review (154 responses)

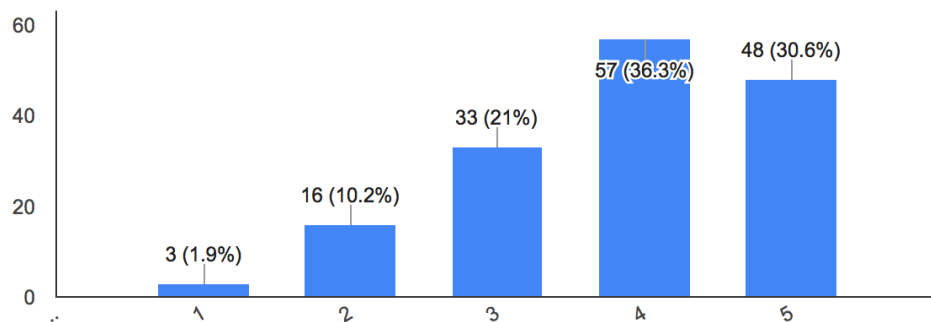


8.2.30 Question 30

Please tick one box for each of the statements below, depending on how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement.

A blogger that has been sent a product or paid for review is more likely to be biased and review positively

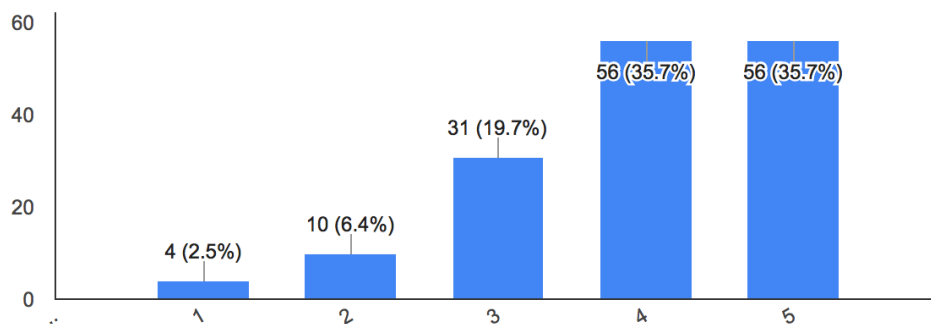
(157 responses)



8.2.31 Question 31

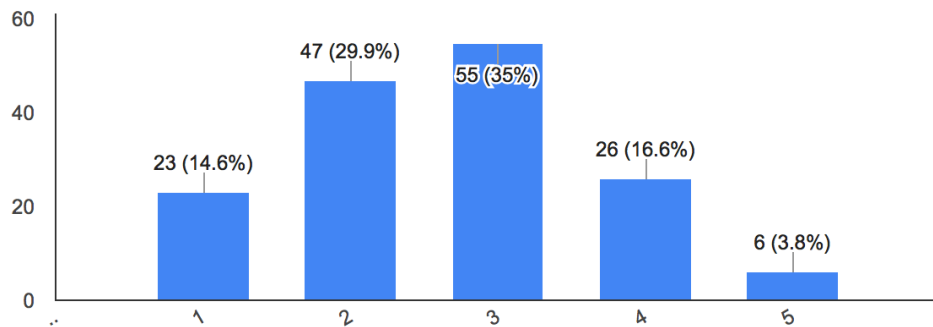
A blog with a high number of sponsored posts seems less trustworthy

(157 responses)



8.2.32 Question 32

I think that working with brands makes a blogger more reliable (157 responses)



8.2.33 Question 33

Why? (73 responses)

Bias
Bias
Brands may sponsor bloggers to make better opinions of the products with bribes
Brands may sponsor bloggers to make better opinions of the products with bribes
I don't think it makes them more reliable, probably the opposite actually. They have a conflict of interests. It's the same situation than with our politicians, they work with corporations and take their donations but that doesn't make them more reliable and it makes me question whether they are honest or not.
I don't agree with the last one because this means they are biased.
I don't think I have enough experience with bloggers to answer this question.
they are being paid by the company to write positive reviews, the company wouldn't pay them for negative publicity

If a blogger just has a bunch of sponsored post, they seem like a shill.

there is an element of bias in review

Gut intuition

Difficult question: bloggers which receive products for free do more reviews and have more experience to provide better reviews. On the other hand bloggers who buy products (with limited means sometimes) have less incentive to be biased...

It makes them less impartial. They have an incentive to give positive reviews in order to continue a beneficial relationship.

I think that some bloggers "sell out." I realize that sponsored posts are an important source of income, but if these posts are not clearly marked and if they don't seem like something the blogger would truly appreciate (based on their reviews of unsponsored goods and services), I become skeptical.

Incentives and relationships will always shape bloggers relationships to the product whether they acknowledge it or not. It may be helpful to have an insider view of the product, but it also may be detrimental in terms of the accuracy and veracity of the review. Unfortunately, which of these is the case is often very difficult for the casual reader to determine.

Because if I were being paid to review a product I would be more inclined to review a product positively.

It will corrupt their perspective.

Bloggers put a lot of effort into their blog and I understand that they need to make it worthwhile.

A blogger cannot be completely objective if it will damage their relationship with a sponsor.

they have a strong audience whom they know. they would not recommend something they do not like or think won't work with their audience

does not have anything in common

Not necessarily because they often review products that they don't use everyday

It really is dependent on the individual and how they are running their blog/themselves.

A blog that's only sponsored posts is not a blog.

Because the brand wouldn't have picked the blogger unless he had some credentials

Seems that the blogger may be influenced by the sponsors and perhaps less likely to be critical of those sponsors

I don't think bloggers who receive products for free are less trustworthy at all, but I think that being paid for a good review certainly makes them less trustworthy.
So, collabs with honest opinions are fine, but being paid for a review isn't.

Doesn't make them more reliable just shows they have a bigger following

The bloggers I follow I know only provide unbiased reviews. I have found them trustworthy

It doesn't bother me when bloggers work with brands as long as the review seems honest and they are not always completely favorable.

A little bit of sponsored content feels like hey have worked hard to get where they are, but too much feels like I am being sold too and loses its credibility as relevant content

Most of the bloggers I know are very concerned about their online reputation and they know how quickly a blog can die if people don't trust them. They are far more concerned about their own image than they are about favorably reviewing a product they don't love. Working with brands shows me that they build relationships with people/companies they respect and admire. Building relationships is a big part of running a good business or blog.

As a blogger who works with brands, I understand the relationship. I also realize that there are a lot of requirements to work with a brand, and one needs to be responsible, reliable, and reputable to make that kind of working relationship.

Bloggers don't need to work with brands to be reliable. They can share their reviews just because they want to.

Bloggers take on assignments for products that they already believe in and that they think their target market will enjoy. If it isn't a good fit, they won't take the project. Working with brands shows that the blogger is a master in their field and makes them more credible because brands see their potential and want to work with them.

I'm just not sure why it would.

\$\$\$ = corruption

I feel that if the blogger is paid then he or she is more likely to be influenced negatively.

Because they may be receiving incentives to say positive things

Brands have credibility

A blogger that reviews a product positively without any incentive is more likely to be telling the truth because they have nothing to gain. But a blogger working with brands probably means that they are qualified in some way, at the very least as a consumer, to give the product a review.

Don't know.

A blogger can choose which brands they are going to endorse. Hopefully they like the products that the company is offering. Through working with the company the blogger can continue to get the products with less expense to themselves.

They are likely to be more knowledgeable, but could also be biased.

I don't know, I don't follow bloggers

Because they have a competing interest not to skewer products or their flow of free products may cease to exist. Companies only send them products if the risk of them criticizing the product is less than the benefit, so bloggers have to watch how negative they are or risk losing their free products.

The blogger may just have a lot of subscribers so they get brands that they are paid to use and it makes them seem self purchased when they aren't.

It is in the bloggers' best interests to engage in activities that make them more likely to get more sponsorship opportunities in the future

If someone sends you free stuff, I think you're more obligated to be nice to them. At least, that makes would make sense to me

No brands on my blogs!!!!

Working with brands means a blogger is probably getting paid to promote.

If you're working with a brand I would assume you have a greater obligation to give their product a good review.

Blogs that consist mostly of sponsored posts are as annoying as simple advertising

If they want to continue to get free stuff then they would be expected to write more positively biased reviews

The blogger could be bought.

No opinion

Some bloggers are able to offer discounts, which is great, but it only makes a specific few more reliable.

When a popular blog constantly reviews free products, they become Internet celebrities and are more likely to give positive reviews to continue being sponsored by companies

I think it comes down to a individual judgement call, if the blogger has established a certain level of trust with their regular audience, then it doesn't matter how much sponsorship they have.

money influences content

I feel like it's a little less trustworthy when the blogger is working with a company

It's 50/50 for me. By working they have biases. But on the other hand, they know the product better.

Too many endorsements make the blogger seem like he/she "sold out"

I don't really know

they are being paid to make that product look better. I would rather have a more honest review.

Hadn't thought about it. Could mean they're a very trusted opinion.

I think that using a blogger to endorse a brand is a cheap way to get advertising to a specific and potentially loyal fan base. I honestly do see this as cheating in regards to advertising.

The fact that they are getting paid, may make you think that they are just told what to say about the product

I tend to trust brands, so I would just generally trust brands if blogger about over an alternative.

Bloggers that receive compensation for the things they review are not trustworthy whatsoever because receiving these items either free or at reduced cost simply to review them allows the companies to influence the bloggers whether subtly out through a contractual agreement.

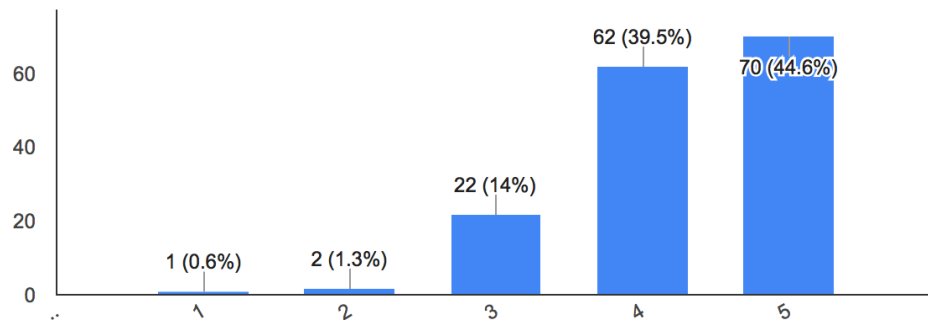
Bloggers who are making significant money off of brand endorsements have an incentive to rate them highly and continue that business relationship.

It depends on the blogger. Some of them purchase their own products, and some just get sent by the companies because they see that this blog has such an authoritative say on products in the category. I just can't say carte blanc that a blog is biased because they receive products for free. More sponsored posts make the value of what the reviewer says go down, much like a celebrity that endorses a lot of products.

Because that person is being paid.

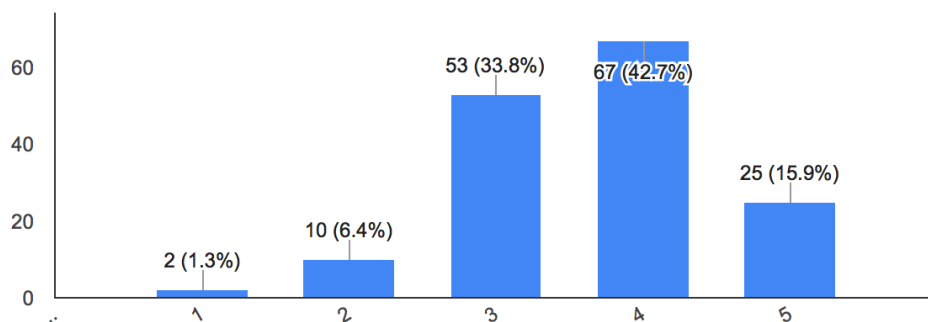
8.2.34 Question 34

Bloggers who write both negative and positive reviews are more trustworthy
(157 responses)



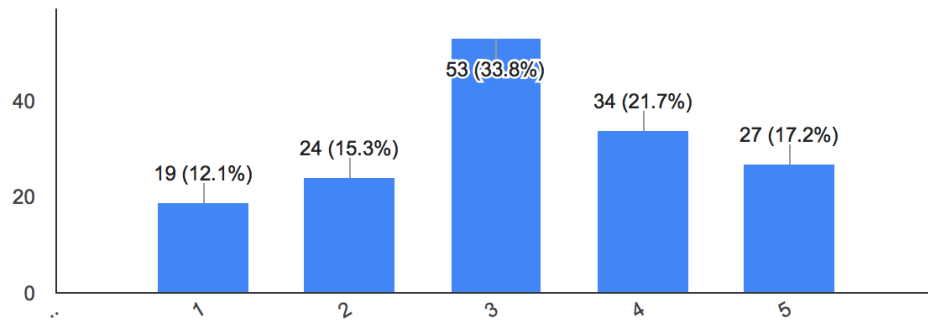
8.2.35 Question 35

From 1-5, how are bloggers' opinions influenced by money received from brands?
(157 responses)



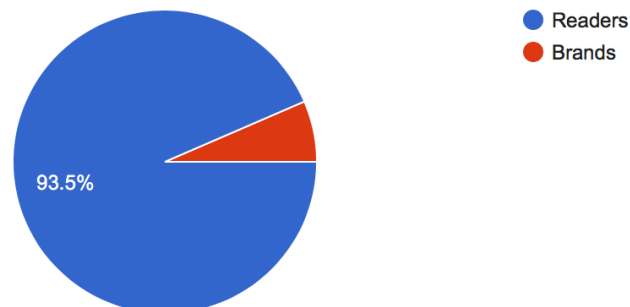
8.2.36 Question 36

I think blogs should remain free of brand influence (157 responses)



8.2.37 Question 37

In your opinion, what is more important for bloggers? (154 responses)



8.2.38 Question 38

Why? (83 responses)

Readers should get true opinions from bloggers

Readers should get true opinions from bloggers

In my opinion, a blog's purpose shouldn't be the same than an advertising. It should be all about helping each other out. But if the main source of a blogger's income come from sponsored posts, I don't see how he/she can remain neutral, I feel like they will naturally give more importance to corporations since they rely on them...

Because without readers their blogs would gain no traction

Without readers, their blog isn't worth anything.

Gut intuition

Bloggers aren't really anything without readers. I'd also like to mention that I listen to a lot of podcasters and I really trust sponsoring brands. If I ever buy razors, I'm going to buy them from Harry's razors. This is partly because they are supporting my favorite podcasts, but the podcasters give warm reviews and I trust them.

Brand support is meaningless without readers. Readers are NOT meaningless in the absence of brand support.

If you don't have readers you don't have a blog. If you don't have brands you might have a poor blog (both content wise and monetarily) but you can still have a blog. I suspect most established bloggers have some sort of code of ethics which informs how and when they review products, but for that code to be of any use they need someone to read what they write. I do think some may lose sight of this, but I am fairly convinced that readership numbers are king with regard to informing bloggers' approaches.

It really depends on your end goal. If you are blogging specifically to make money than I would say brands. If you are blogging to build a long term brand that could include pod casts, books, etc. I would think readers would be more important.

Increasing readership allows bloggers to build a fanbase - giving them more of a platform and more credibility. With that established, brands will be more likely to pay bloggers for their reviews of products. This is more profitable for the bloggers.

They market themselves to the public as being an "every person".

If you don't have an audience, what do brands matter?

Building up a loyal readership takes years and most bloggers are not willing to sacrifice their reader's loyalty for a few hundred dollars

brands won't be interested unless there are readers

Because a reader means someone is following and liking your craft.

readers first, brands second. if they don't have readers, they won't get brands. brands won't come to them without the readers.

make them attractive for brands

Without readers they would lose the interest of the brands.

They won't get any brand sponsorship if they have no readers.

Without readers, a blogger has nothing to offer brands.

Brands will only come if you have readers... so if no readers, there will never be a relationship with a brand. You can't say the opposite.

I do not know enough about bloggers to answer this.

In my opinion, a blogger is there for her fans, that's why they became a blogger. Brands and monetary endorsements should take a back seat, their first responsibility should be to their fans/readers.

Brands come and go. Followers stay with you

Bloggers that focus on the readers and provide reliable information are definitely more important. Bloggers may make money off the brands however it is the reader who makes or breaks a blogger. Without the reader the blogger would lose the brand

Brands won't sponsor blogs without strong readership.

I have been traveling blogging for about a year and I feel like fellow bloggers are my viewership

A lot of bloggers are in it for \$\$\$

Naturally, without readers there would be no point in a blog. It is just like with a business; without consumers or clients there is no point in a business. That is not to say that brand or business partnerships aren't necessary though. They are both important but the edge goes to readers.

Why have a blog if all you do is pander to brand requests?

Without readers, how will their blog grow

If there are no readers, there's no point in writing

But blogging is hard work and brands provide income so they are needed too

Readers come first. You need readers to get a brand's attention

Both - they want to work with brands as this is their income, and they want readers. Without readers, there are no brands.

Bloggers don't need to work with brands to be successful, though it helps. But you can't work with brands if you don't have readers.

At the end of the day, the blogger is there for the readers. They work with brands to supplement their income to create content for the readers.

The audience are the people. Advertising is a byproduct of the intention to spread information.

Although I look up product reviews, I prefer to read blogs on my areas of interest.

Readers are the only reason the blog exists. Without them, brands couldn't have any influence.

Brands give them money

Advertising

Bloggers are writing for people, not for companies. At least, that's how I perceive it.

Brands are only going to support blogs that have a good following, so readers are more important.

Shows appreciation from real people.

It depends on how they are being paid. Are they being paid by the number of views that their blog receives? Or are they being paid by the number of times a link to the company homepage is being made? Either way, it's all about profitability.

I assume bloggers blog to get their thoughts out, not to endorse the newest skin cream or something

Readers can bring both fame and money from page views. Without readers Brands won't pay to have a feature product anyway.

Otherwise, you are in advertisement and not a blogger.

Without readers there is no blog

I'd rather bloggers not to be bought by a corporation.

A blogger's purpose is to post articles that relates to their readers and followers. If bloggers stray away from this and focus more on brand advertisements, then they are becoming spokespersons for these products; not bloggers.

Even though some readers care about paid vs. unpaid, most people don't and brands help bloggers make money. I understand the need to make money, so I think brands are incredibly important to bloggers.

I would assume most people who write blogs want to increase their audience whenever possible.

Without the readers, you have nothing.. You lose the brands.

That's how the blogosphere started

Money.

Readers are the ones who read all the blogger's posts, not just the reviews of specific products.

In a vacuum, bloggers are suppose to represent a third party source that will review a product in a non-partisan way. This helps to ensure the that consumer knows what they are getting into

Popularity

It's a personal creation. Not a job

Without the readers, no one will read their reviews and they won't get sponsored.

Having a large amount of readers shows that more people find the blogger trustworthy

A blog can't be successful without the audience, so I would assume a blogger would be cautious of losing that audience.

Money

content is the most important thing

The point is to influence the people

That's who allows them to keep their jobs.

The readers are there customers

There are advertisements everywhere on the web and blogging was meant for articles and writing, not solely advertisements.

A blogger who loses their audience has no reason to be paid to review things

You have to have people who read your stuff before you can try and endorse brands.

I think it makes the blogger more trustworthy that they make honest product reviews rather than being influenced by brands' compensations.

It's my assumption

Unless they're in it for the money alone; but even then, the money depends on readership, so bloggers likely value readers more.

The trust of a reader is more important because the blogger has set themselves up to be a relatively objective critic of a product, not a walking/typing billboard.

Loyalty to their readers

Without readership, a blog is irrelevant. I would rather read and come back to a blog that truly evaluates products than just endorses brands.

Okay, I'll tackle these questions individually. Bloggers writing positive and negative reviews demonstrate autonomy from the brands themselves making them seem more trustworthy. Yes, Bloggers are strongly influenced by the money they receive from companies trying to promote their brands. I think there are ways for brands to influence bloggers without biasing their reviews. For example, bloggers who review competing brands or by reviewing only one brand, but maintaining more autonomy by reviewing a wide variety of products. The last question is clearly a spurious correlation between readers/brands because the more readers you have the more bigger brands will want you to review their products, however without name brands you'll likely not get the attention of many readers.

Not sure

That's the basis of blogging. That's the whole reason they started blogging. If they didn't have any readers, the brands wouldn't even approach them.

The brands should not be their focus. If they want to focus on the brands they should open a marketing specific business and not just causal reviews on a blog.

8.2.39 Question 39

In your opinion, how could a blogger endorse a product or a brand while still maintaining an ethical relationship with its readers?

(91 responses)

Just write the truth and not take bribes

Just write the truth and not take bribes

By providing objective opinions.

Only promote brands that the blogger and his/her audience loves and provide honest reviews, even if it is negative limit endorsements and mix in non-sponsored posts.

A blogger needs to have real reviews. Not just for money.

They must present a disclaimer saying that they have been paid or received free goods or services. They must also be as objective as possible, indicating the negatives of the goods and services where appropriate.

only endorse products they believe in

speak his or her mind no matter what

Tell them it is sponsored, their relationship to the brand, and their experience with the product.

Honestly – every product has good points and bad points. A simple, straightforward disclosure of what was received.

by disclosing first, then having an unbiased review, that may or may not have some negative comments

By being completely honest in their reviews

I do not know enough about bloggers to answer this.

Just as long as they take free products and give them honest reviews and don't take money in exchange for writing a positive and not honest review

Many bloggers already do this by mentioning it's a paid post but reiterate that the opinions are all theirs

The only bloggers who maintain an ethical relationship with the readers are those who only endorse products which they find valuable.

Be honest that the review was sponsored and how he/she obtained the product, provide an honest review that includes positive and negative features of the product, and include other content on the blog besides solely product reviews.

Tell how the brand engagement came about and not do top many. I want passion in the blogs I read and not feel like I am looking at a business

Being honest about their relationship, disclosing, trying to balance their sponsored posts with non-sponsored posts.

Yes.

Just tell the truth

By being honest in their review

Disclosing the relationship at the beginning of the post.

By providing honest reviews even if it means turning down sponsorships from brands they don't agree with or don't like

They disclose up front that they received payment or a product.

Incorporating it into a post or giving a very honest review of what they are reviewing.

Only take on projects for products that you genuinely use. Don't sell out.

By explaining who the product is for and recommending an alternative when it might not suit a demographic of their readers.

Endorsing products that are ethically sound, which means the blogger being selective and doing their research and then informing the readers of the reasons they accepted the endorsement

If they use the brand/review it prior to endorsement

I'm not sure. The hard part would be CONVINCING readers that they are honest. The best way to maintain this would be being as honest and frank as possible.

Disclose the relationship between the brand and blogger, and be honest and thorough when reviewing the product.

If most of their posts were not sponsored by brands and they regularly interacted with their readers, bloggers would have a more ethical relationship with its readers. Endorsing a product would seem more trustworthy.

Be open about it

Transparently

Honestly explain why you support a brand, how it aligns with your code of conduct, etc.

Just to be honest. If they get a product that isn't that great, they shouldn't be afraid to say how it wasn't the best.

Explain thoroughly how they use the product. Maybe post pictures with them using it.

The blogger should chose a company where they like their base product line. This way any new releases can be critiqued with less risk of offending the company you are being sponsored by. There should be a section on the blog that tells any endorsements that they have. Or just don't be endorsed and make any opinion be known.

Choose products that align with the blog.

Give positives and negatives of the brand.

By casually mentioning it with the pros and cons, not trying to sell anything to their audience

Yes

Stating what they use, but try to stay neutral.

I hope so...

Give a nuanced review. Address my concerns as a reader about the possibility of the review being biased toward the brand. That would make me trust them more than if they ignored it, for sure.

Bloggers can endorse any product that they want as long as they stay true to their beliefs and values instead of prying followers to purchase items for the purpose of profitability.

I think they would have to have demonstrated that they've tried out competitors as well and that they are unbiased and if they are getting paid, say it outright.

By receiving no benefits from the company who's product they are reviewing.

Not receive products or "bribes"

Not take payment. Or show that they received payment but reviewed it negatively.

Disclosing every single paid post, being honest (describing positive and negative aspects of a product)

Receive money through viewer ad traffic instead of from the sponsors of the products.

Be honest: if a specific product does not meet the blogger's expectations, maybe recommend a similar product by the same brand.

I don't think it is possible.

Being truthful-there are usually good and bad things one can say about a product

They could, but how would the reader know?

Forthrightly disclose whether or not they have been paid or gifted the items or have bought the items themselves. Then, if they have been gifted the items, disclose whether or not they would purchase themselves.

If they believe in a product, it's not a crime to promote it often

Publish their distribution table of rankings/ratings.

If they previously enjoyed the brand

Only endorse products you actually already use or have recently used, and would actually recommend the product to someone close to them.

N/a

Explain that it is a sponsorship, and make non branded content to keep an independent spirit.

Can't

being honest about it

multiple reviews of similar products

Being honest

Honesty and an unbiased opinion

It has to be a 3rd party who has no corporate interests Doing the review. They truly believe in the product.

By reviewing different brands or products that have no nothing to do with their endorser.

If the blogger states he/she bought the product himself/herself, it would be a more credible review. Or if the blogger is semi-consistent with other reviews of the same product or brand, I would trust that review more.

Jeez that's a tough and large question. I uave to pack for a trip now. Hope i helped a little anyway!

By shaping their post around their own opinions and not the money they get from a company

Relate it back to their own life, or do up dates of how it is going with that product so people know that they are actually using it in real life.

If the blogger is receiving products for free and making honest reviews on said product I think the ethical relationship is upheld. Also, taking suggestions from readers and reviewing those products makes the blog seem more authentic rather than compensated by a brand.

From a psychology perspective, it's near impossible. A blogger, regardless of opinion will feel some sort of obligation to the brand because the product was free.

By being as objective about that product as possible and still being able to review other related/competitive products

Perhaps give positives and negatives of a product.

Disclosing whether the product was gifted by the brand, and perhaps more if the brand relationship is deeper.

Receiving the brand's product for free and stating in no uncertain terms that he or she has absolutely no obligation to endorse said product, as well as listing some negative things about said product in order to make his or her review seem more fair.

Create a group with other known bloggers to discuss, and see the different opinions each individual blogger has. To show maybe a certain blogger likes a product, but maybe a different blogger disagrees and why.

Just like most journalism: a blogger should make his or her biases open, transparent, and known. If that happens, then the reader can try to sort through whatever biases may be present and make an informed decision.

Discuss the pros and cons of a product/brand.

Not accept bribes

I think being very transparent about the fact that they are being paid to rate this product, but that they are doing it in a completely honest way and have the readers' best interest at heart in giving an honest review.

Always relaying the positives and negatives of each product

By disclosing payments or arrangements about that product or any other conflict of interest that may arise (like a family member working for a company that made the product). Also they should be very willing to show the negative qualities of every product.

By not being paid and having used it of their own accord.

Just be completely honest with the readers about the nature of the endorsement and their opinions of it. Warn that there might be bias but try to avoid it.