



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

Why blogs?

An exploratory study on blog reading among young women in Sweden

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Thesis work in Master in Communication

Report No. 2012:040

ISSN: 1651-4769

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to all the respondents who devoted their time to take part in this study. I would also like to thank my supervisor Ellinor Torsein at the School of Business, Economics and Law at the University of Gothenburg for her guidance and valuable comments.

Gothenburg, May 24, 2012

Abstract

Purpose: To explore why and how young women in Sweden are reading blogs.

Background: Consumers are turning away from the traditional elements of the promotion mix; in particular, they are reducing their reliance on advertising. User-generated social media is on the rise, and interactivity inherent in blogs allows a high level of connectedness with the customer. Moreover, blogs are extending the word-of-mouth, and consumers in Sweden are increasingly turning to blogs before making a purchase. Reading blogs has become a popular activity among young women in Sweden. Nevertheless, no study has been carried out so far to explore why and how young women in Sweden are reading blogs.

Methodology: A qualitative research design was chosen to reach the purpose of the study. To collect primary data semi-structured interviews were undertaken. Secondary data was collected from academic literature studies and online reports.

Main findings: It was discovered that young women in Sweden are reading blogs because of following reasons: personal interest in the topic; seeking inspiration and knowledge; personality of the blogger; seeking information; seeking opinions and recommendations; affiliation; personal fulfillment; complement to traditional media and books; presentation of the blog; and specific features of the blog. The respondents reported reading blogs on many topics, but the two most popular categories were fashion blogs and friends' blogs. Mostly, they were reading several blogs every day or several times a week.

Keywords: Social media, blog readers, marketing communications, word-of-mouth (WOM), blogs, uses and gratifications, new media

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INTRODUCTION

1.2. Background

Internet offered new ways for people to communicate with a wide spectrum of possibilities. It also brought changes in how companies deliver their marketing messages to their customers, and how they build relationships with them. Internet facilitated direct marketing by offering new opportunities to reach customers, whereas social media was delivering a "paradigm shift from organisations and brands controlling the flow of information to people being in control" (Qualman, 2009). Consumers are now interacting with the company, the media, and each other through social networking and other new media (Winer, 2009). Moreover, consumers are turning away from the traditional elements of the promotion mix; in particular, they are reducing their reliance on advertising as a source of information to guide their purchase decision-making (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Meanwhile social media brings people together around shared interests and values creating new virtual communities (Rheingold, 1993), and facilitates "interactive, low-cost communications" (Palmer and Koenig-Lewis, 2009:165).

Social computing, interactivity, and customer participation are central to Web 2.0, and, according to Singh et al (2008), blogs are one of the leading tools in the next generation of the Internet tools in Web 2.0. Although blogs represent the earliest form of social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), and have been around since the late 1990s (Kent, 2008) the Oxford dictionaries added the words *web log*, *web logging*, and *web logger* to the dictionary only in 2003 (Singh et al, 2008). Today *blog* is a legitimate word defined as a web site, on which an individual or group of users produce an ongoing narrative (Singh et al, 2008). Walker (2005) states that among bloggers and new media scholars, blog is typically defined by its format: a website displaying dated entries in reverse chronological order, most often containing links and other kinds of interactivity between websites and frequently featuring conversational features on the individual blog, for instance, a comment section.

Nowadays there is a great variety of blogs available. Rettberg (2008:20) suggests that the difference between a medium and a genre has become blurred with Internet. However, blogs can be considered mediums with different genres and sub-genres, such as the diary-style blog, the filter blog and the political blog. The author also argues that many blogs do cross genres, and as with every genre there are exceptions and crossovers. Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) note that although text-based blogs are still by far the most common, blogs have also began to take different media formats. Those are mainly video blogs in *YouTube* and photo blogs. Moreover, videos, photos and recordings can be added to text-based blogs.

As discovered by Findahl (2007) most of the blog users in Sweden are in the age from 18 to 29. Seven percent of young adults in this age group have their own blog and 43 percent report reading blogs. Although blogging has never become a wide-spread activity, it has become part of the Internet culture among young women in Sweden (Findahl, 2010). Two women out of three are writing a blog at least 1-3 times a week, and 78 percent in the age group from 16 to 25 are reading a blog. Meanwhile, Internet use by young men is developing in another direction - gaming and file sharing are the most important parts of their Internet culture (ibid.). This is opposite to what was discovered by Kaye (2005) in U.S. where blog users tend to be young, highly educated men with high incomes. Also Solin (2010) maintains that young women are dominating the blogosphere in Sweden.

Most of the larger companies now have a CEO blog on the company's website in Sweden (Solin, 2010). These blogs have partly replaced the newsletter, which is a one-way communication. In addition, Ström (2010:31) notes that blogosphere has become an important channel for the fashion industry in Sweden. Blogs as *Kissies* (kissies.se), *Kenza* (kenzas.se) and *Blondinbella* (blondinbella.se) have about half a million visitors per week each, and these blogs can do wonders for clothing sales (Ström, 2010:31). These bloggers are the trendsetters (ibid). Also data from survey *BlogSweden 5* (kullin.net, accessed 2012-02-01) compiled by *Media Culpa* in 2010 show that female blog readers mostly choose to read blogs about fashion and design (62.9%), followed by everyday life experiences (50.5%), and photo and art (40%).

Blogs have become a prominent source of reference for consumers prior to making a purchase decision. In marketing communications it is referred as "electronic word-of-mouth communication" - "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" (Hennig-Thurau et al, 2004). According to the survey *BlogSweden 5* (kullin.net, accessed 2012-02-01), 53.5% of blog readers in 2010 bought a product or a service after reading recommendations posted in a blog. This is a larger number compared to the data of the same survey in 2009, when only 37.9% of respondents agreed with the statement. Accordingly, 44.4% of the respondents said that they have refrained from buying a product or a service because of information read in blog (up from 34.6% in 2008). Nevertheless, the companies are not active in engaging with bloggers who share negative opinion about them - only 4.8% of the respondents who shared negative opinion online were contacted by the companies.

This shows that blogs are an increasingly significant source of electronic word-of-mouth in Sweden, as well as their use in marketing communications are rising in scope and importance with fashion blogs and corporate blogs. Moreover, there has been a dramatic proliferation in the number of blogs (Hsu et al, 2007). Nonetheless, studies on reasons for accessing blogs from a blog user perspective are scarce (Kaye, 2005; Kaye, 2007; Li et al., 2010; Karlsson, 2007; Hsu et al., 2007; Huang et al, 2008; Kaye, 2010), and research in this realm in Sweden has not been carried out yet. Moreover, none of the studies have focused on young women, and they are the most active blog users in Sweden.

Based on the discussion of the problem and its scope the thesis focuses on blogs as one of the marketing communications tools, and explores reading blogs among young women in Sweden. A multidisciplinary communication perspective is employed, and literature from marketing communications, mass communication, corporate communication, consumer behavior, communication technologies and other relevant fields are used.

1.3. Purpose

Since there is a large interest in reading blogs among young women in Sweden, and blogs are a significant source of reference prior to making a purchase of a product or service, the study, based on the problem proposed and discussed, aims:

To explore why and how young women in Sweden are reading blogs

Due to great variety of blogs and obscurity of their definitions this research does not focus on a specific type or types of blogs but allows participants of the study to define for themselves what type of blogs they are reading.

1.4. Research question

The main research question, based on the purpose of the thesis, is:

Why and how young women in Sweden are reading blogs?

To answer the research question semi-structured interviews were carried out. During the research, questions relevant to marketing communications were kept in mind to derive a more complete and useful set of reasons for blog reading as well as the blog reading patterns. The reasons for blog reading were not predefined in order to allow the interviewees to come up with their own reasons for engaging in this activity. However, based on literature studies, some probe questions were asked, if necessary, so that the respondent is involved in a more throughout discussion of the possible reasons for blog reading.

The blog reading patterns were predefined. The author of this study considered that it would be valuable for the companies to know the following:

How often blogs are being read?

How much time is spent on blog reading?

How often/what the blog readers are commenting?

How do blog readers find blogs?

How many blogs blog readers are reading regularly?

How do blog readers receive information about updates?

What types of blogs blog readers are reading?

1.5. Expected Research Contribution

Since research on reading blogs is scarce, and no similar research has been carried out in Sweden, the results of the study will contribute to research corpora on the blogging phenomenon and utilization of blogs in marketing communications. It will also provide basis for further research within these areas. Moreover, by offering some insight into the minds of the young Swedish consumers, the results of the study will be of significance to the companies that use or intend to use blogs as part of their marketing communications' efforts, e.g. word of mouth, corporate blogs, market segmentation.

1.6. Delimitations

The study's main focus is on marketing communications and utilization of blogs within this area. Due to multiple blog "types" and obscurity of their definitions as well as the constantly changing nature of blogs, the study is not limited to any particular blog "type". Moreover, the study focuses on young women, since they are the main blog readers in Sweden. Due to the intention to perform face-to-face interviews and convenience, respondents were chosen from Gothenburg.

1.7. Definitions

Blog is a website displaying dated entries in a reverse chronological order, most often containing links and other kinds of interactivity between websites and frequently featuring conversational features on the individual blog, for instance, a comment section (Walker, 2005).

Reading a blog - the author of this research defines "reading a blog" as an activity, which includes both accessing a blog and following its updates regularly for an undefined period of time.

Blogosphere is a real network of more or less loosely interconnected Weblogs, where the author of one blog can easily comment on the articles of other blogs (Cantoni & Tardini, 2008:31).

Social media refer to the online activities and behaviours among a group of people who gather in order to create and exchange user generated content (information, knowledge, opinions) using web-based media or applications (Safko & Brake, 2009:6).

Web 2.0 is often used instead of social media, but it actually implies the new inventive technologies that are arising in new media, whose key aim is to enable online interaction and conversation among communities of people by using the interactive dialogic features (Safko & Brake, 2009:7).

New media - the essential features of the 'new media' are their interconnectedness, their accessibility to individual users as senders and/or receivers, their interactivity, their multiplicity of use and open-ended character, and their ubiquity and 'delocatedness' (McQuail, 2010:39).

Integrated marketing communications - a term used to explain the processes concerned with the consistent development and coordinated delivery of company's messages with its target audiences (Fill, 2009:928).

Marketing communications - the means by which firms attempt to inform, persuade, and remind consumers - directly or indirectly - about the products and brands they sell. In a sense, marketing communications represent the "voice" of the company and its brands and are means by which it can establish a dialogue and build relationships with consumers (Kotler et al., 2009:510).

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) - any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet (Hennig-Thurau et al, 2004).

Viral marketing - an electronic version of the spoken endorsement of a product or service where messages, screen savers and other information are targeted at key individuals who then voluntarily pass the message to friends and colleagues and in doing so bestow, endorse and provide the message with much valued credibility (Fill, 2009:52).

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Changes in marketing communications

..Customers are armed with iPods, TiVo machines, Blackberries, search engines, broadband connections, spam filters and variety of digital technologies, they have gained unprecedented control over the media and content to which they are exposed. (Singh et al, 2009)

According to Kotler et al (2009:510), modern marketing calls for more than developing a good product, pricing it attractively, and making it accessible. Companies must also communicate with present and potential stakeholders and the general public (ibid.) Today, marketing communications increasingly occur as a personal dialogue between the company and its customers. Companies must ask not only "How should we reach our customers?" but also "How should our customers reach us?" and even "How can our customers reach each other?" (Kotler et al, 2009:571). Singh et al (2008) suggest that recent advances in technology have moved the relationship between the businesses and the customer to an interactive level where technology contributes to brand building by creating and sustaining a long-term relationship with the customer.

Nevertheless, communication is becoming more and more difficult, and more companies fail to grab an increasingly empowered consumer's divided attention. Consumers themselves are taking a more active role in the communication process and deciding what communications they want to receive and how they want to communicate to others about the products and services they use (Kotler, 2009:510). Winer (2009) points out that the increase in the number of "alternative" media has shifted power in the transaction to buyers. According to Kotler et al (2009:510) technology have profoundly changed the way consumers process communications, and whether they choose to process them at all. In a study of Yankelovich Partners in 2005 it was discovered that customers respond more favorably to marketing when they have control over what they see, when they see it, whether it can be personalized to fit their needs, and when they can be active participants in the marketing process (Singh et al, 2008). An essential ingredient to this changing

landscape has been that communications in the past have been perceived as fixed and definable, whereas the post-modern marketplace emphasizes the need to consider communications as dynamic, fragmented and constructed within a social context (Dahlen, 2010:444). Moreover, Dahlen (2010:444) suggests that consumers have a declining relationship with the “interruption” advertising and interactive, user-generated social media is on the rise. Dahlen (2010) states that we are now witnessing a third incarnation for marketing: social web. In addition, Singh et al (2008) argues that the continuing fragmentation of media and information overload has led customers to become less and less interested in companies' brand messages, delivered through traditional media.

The main challenges marketers are facing now are media fragmentation, excessive commercial clutter and a growing resistance among customers towards marketing messages (Ramsey, 2006)

2.2. Interactivity

Interactivity - a responsive form of communication, characterised as either mediated (through technology) or non-mediated (human) interaction (Fill, 2009:928).

Interactivity is central to Web 2.0 and blogs are one of the leading tools in the next generation of the internet tools in Web 2.0 (Singh et al, 2008). According to Singh et al (2008), blogs are conceptually similar to other channels, e.g. print, video and audio, but the interactivity inherent in blogs allows for a higher level of connectedness with the customer. Therefore, blogs have a better ability to manage customer relations, facilitate internal collaboration, aid knowledge management, improve media relations, and test new ideas for products and services (ibid.). Mangold & Faulds (2009) state that consumers feel more engaged with products and organisations when they are able to submit feedback, which contributes to a sense of community in which honest, open communications are encouraged and customer engagement is enhanced.

The format of blogs is designed to enable and facilitate communication (Singh et al, 2008). Ninety percent of blogs are interactive (Lenhart, 2006:20, in Kent, 2008). Despite the wide variety of blogs they have some common elements: comments (comments that a reader

adds), categories (subjects that the entry discusses), trackbacks (links to other sites that also discuss the entry), and permalinks (permanent URLs to individual posts). These elements provide continuity and facilitate the on-going collective conversation (Singh et al, 2008:284). Stauffer (2002) argues that blogs invite active participation opposed to passive consumption of content. According to Singh et al (2008), blogging activities for the younger group involve discussing pop culture and personal information, whereas the older bloggers use the blogosphere to discuss, share, and analyze everything from the political climate to product information.

Kent (2008) points out that messages posted to blogs are usually accompanied by threaded dialogue that many readers find more compelling than the blog postings themselves. Complaints about the values of posts are common on blogs, as are corrections, elaborations, clarifications, and contradictions.

2.3. New Marketing Mix

Singh et al (2009) claim that blogs have quickly become the major force in the new generation of marketing. Moreover, most researchers and industry experts believe that blogs are now an important part of a sound marketing strategy. Companies such as General Motors, IBM, Sun Microsystems, Microsoft, GE, Home Depot, Guinness, Honda, and Southwest Airlines are embracing this medium as a communication platform with individual customers and other stakeholders (Singh et al, 2009).

Mangold & Faulds (2009) point out that tools and strategies for communicating with customers have changed significantly with emergence of social media. Consumers are interacting with the company, the media, and each other through social networking and other media (Winer, 2009), and they are turning away from the traditional elements of the promotion mix; in particular, they are reducing their reliance on advertising as a source of information to guide their purchase decision-making (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Until the mid-1990's the traditional concept of the communications "mix" included (Winer, 2009):

Advertising (TV, print, radio, outdoor)

Sales promotion

Direct marketing

Publicity/public relations

Personal selling

According to Safko & Brake (2009:65), both traditional marketing activities and social media are contributing to the corporate image. Mangold & Faulds (2009) claim that social media is a hybrid element of the promotion mix (see Appendix 1). They suggest a new communications paradigm, which enables companies to talk to their customers and to talk directly to one another. Moreover, "the content, timing, and frequency of the social media-based conversations occurring between consumers are outside managers' direct control". It is opposite to traditional integrated marketing communications paradigm, where a high degree of control is present (ibid.). Social media is also a hybrid in that it springs from mixed technology and media origins that enable instantaneous, real-time communication, and utilizes multi-media formats (audio and visual presentations) and numerous delivery platforms (*Facebook*, *YouTube*, and blogs to name a few), with global reach capabilities (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

According to Mangold & Faulds (2009), social media include a wide range of online, word-of-mouth forums including blogs, company sponsored discussion boards and chat rooms, consumer product or service ratings websites and forums, moblogs (sites containing digital audio, images, movies, or photographs), etc. They stress that "social media outlets are numerous and varied" and that 21st century is "witnessing an explosion of Internet-based messages transmitted through these media". Moreover, these messages have become the main factor in influencing various aspects of consumer behaviour including awareness, information acquisition, opinions, attitudes, purchase behaviour, and post-purchase communication and evaluation (ibid.). Two promotional roles that social media have are: 1) they enable companies to talk to their customers; 2) they enable customers to talk to one another (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Companies can talk to their customers by using such platforms as blogs, *Facebook* and *MySpace* groups. The second role of social media is an extension of traditional word-of-mouth communication. The uniqueness of it lies in its

magnitude: "instead of telling a few friends, consumers now have the ability to tell hundreds or thousands of other people with a few keystrokes!" (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

2.4. Electronic Word-of-Mouth Communication

Electronic Word-of-Mouth - is any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet (Hennig-Thurau et al, 2004). A recent study found that 50 percent of internet users said they had sought out advice from a blog before making a purchase (Qualman, 2009:17). This implies that the consumer decision making process is being altered by social media, and blogs have become a significant source of word-of-mouth communication. Singh et al (2008) points out that individuals are much more comfortable using blogs as a place to express their opinions and read about the opinions of others, including those held by businesses. Dicken-Garcia (1998) argues that Internet places stronger emphasis on informal, interpersonal conversation than it has been true of earlier media. Moreover, she claims that "users unquestionably accept information via the Internet that they would not accept so readily from another medium".

People can share their feelings, photos, ideas, issues, opinions, and information on personal or company blogs, which in turn play influential roles in electronic word-of-mouth (WOM) networks (Huang et al, 2008). Moreover, blogs bring homogenous groups of individuals and publics together, allowing the power of the enthymeme and self-persuasion to be used (Kent, 2008).

2.4.1. Viral marketing

Changes in the marketplace have forced firms to seek new opportunities to differentiate their products and services. Often this means involving the customer in the creation, delivery, and dissemination of the brand message (Singh et al, 2008). Viral marketing is an electronic version of the spoken endorsement of a product or service where messages, screen savers and other information are targeted at key individuals who then voluntarily pass the message to friends and colleagues and in doing so provide the message with much valued credibility (Fill, 2009:52).

Today an integrated marketing communication campaign often involves creating a buzz around the product or service using new media. Research suggests this buzz is uniquely effective for customer persuasion, even when initial news of an innovation may have been acquired via mass media such as TV, print, or audio (Phelps et al., 2004). From a social networking perspective, viral marketing works because the originator of the virus is able to convince and recruit others to the network due to the personal nature of the communication.

Besides using blogs to disseminate marketing messages as a viral marketing activity, blogging itself can be viewed as a form of viral marketing because it also uses social networks, user-generated content, and interactivity to spread the message (Singh et al, 2008). It shares several advantages with viral marketing, such as low cost and voluntary customer participation. However, blogging is more enduring and possibly more effective because, unlike viral marketing, which is generally unidirectional with a limited life span, blogging is interactive, dynamic, and has a longer life span.

2.4.2. Opinion leaders

Katz and Lazerfeld identified individuals who were predisposed to receiving information and then reprocessing it to influence others (Fill, 2009:54). They concluded that those individuals who could exert such influence were more persuasive than information received directly from mass media. According to Chan and Misra (1990), they have greater exposure to relevant mass media (print) and as a result have more knowledge/familiarity and involvement with the product class, are more innovative and more confident of their role as influencer (leader) and appear to be less dogmatic than non-leaders. In addition, they tend to be of the same social class (Fill, 2009:54).

Further Fill (2009:55) argues that in today's digital environment opinion leaders are often revealed due to their propensity to blog. They have strong opinions, and they are able to lead and shape the opinion of mainstream audiences (ibid.). Moreover, bloggers who have gained opinion leader status are used by organizations to feed information about the launch of new brands, to educate opinion followers or to reposition brands (Fill, 2009:513).

Also Singh et al (2008) state that blogs are used by thought leaders to share their expertise and experiences with interested people. Many leading consultants, writers, and academics share their expertise via blogs, providing readers with the most current information in their respective fields (ibid.).

2.5. The benefits of corporate blogs

According to Singh et al (2008) blogging about a firm and its products and services can be an integral part of the long-term integrated marketing communications strategy for a company. Singh et al (2008) offers four major ways how companies can benefit from blogs while using them for their marketing communications' efforts.

2.5.1. Public segmentation

When a company has its own blog, the so-called *corporate blog*, it is an ideal platform for targeting, since the customer has already been segmented and, in some cases, has already expressed an interest in the product. Many marketers target customers and users via blogs to fine tune their product or communication message (DeFelice, 2006a). GM's Michael Wiley states, 'When we feel we need to get a direct response out there, we've certainly got this bully pulpit to some extent...it's a place where we can talk directly to people unfiltered' (Dizon, 2005). Moreover, technology-driven media, such as iPods and cell phones, can be used in conjunction with blogs (Singh et al, 2008).

Consumers like to network with people who have interests and desires that are similar to their own. According to Mangold & Faulds (2009), blogs represent the ultimate in public segmentation: coherent groups of individuals/professionals who share a common interest. Kent (2008) agrees that they give access to very homogenous publics since very little "accidental" blog readership takes place.

2.5.2. Brand loyalty

Singh et al (2008) state that blogs can play a significant role in engaging the customer through on-going communications, which in turn can help support brand loyalty. This is due to the fact that blogs tend to be time-sensitive and driven by customer defined

interactions. Thus, the message involves the customer, and is relevant to the customer. Singh et al (2008) argue that customers use blogs to reflect their brand experience, and that the companies can empower customers by enabling them to have a role in the product or brand. This in turn can help build loyalty by providing them with a feeling of ownership in the brand (Woffington, 2006). Blogging, when done right, can show a customer that the company cares about its products and its customers. This strengthens the company's image and helps build loyalty and trust. Singh et al (2008) state that companies can achieve different goals with blogging: for small companies blogging helps strengthen their core competency, while for larger companies, such as Honda and Microsoft, blogging humanizes the corporation. They maintain that blogs build awareness and loyalty by engaging the customer in co-creation of expectations and experience. Purchasers of a product can read a blog about a product before buying it, and post comments and engage in discussion about the product; this personal communication helps create an open and trust-based conversation. Through this open dialogue, a customer becomes an active participant, and can feel good about a product or a brand, which will likely lead to increased loyalty (Nardini, 2005).

2.5.3. Market research

"A well-designed blog gives the company insight into the customer and his or her thinking" (Singh et al, 2008). According to Singh et al (2008) information most people provide in blogs is candid and uncensored since many blogs are anonymous and the postings are almost always unsolicited. The researchers maintain that this unfiltered look at the customer is perhaps the biggest advantage for the marketer. Moreover, the interactive nature of blogs allows a company to participate in its own market research, and to respond to feedback provided by the customers. Singh et al (2008) stress the importance of managing negative feedback from costumers. If the negative comments can be solicited and responded to in a company-sponsored blog, the company can better control or manage the information. This way it can also respond to appropriate criticism or accolades in a fast and effective manner. Singh et al (2008) also suggest measuring consumer-generated online word of mouth more accurately in order to understand opinions, attitudes, and motivations of the customers.

2.5.4. Relative ease and efficiency

One more reason for the companies to use blogs in their marketing communications' efforts according to Singh et al (2008) is the ease they provide for sharing knowledge and experience among employees, customers, and markets. Blogs provide a relatively easy portal, whether for the dissemination of information or receiving feedback. Likewise, establishing and managing a blog is relatively easy (ibid.). Many software and related product companies now facilitate the process for the startup, and provide extensive monitoring of blogs and blog content. As companies become more sophisticated in the use of blogs, and better understand what is required for the on-going management of the blog sites, the cost of participation, data filtering, and analysis of content will become more reasonable. Many companies that currently utilize blogs believe the customer insight gained is invaluable compared to the relatively low investment (Singh et al, 2008).

2.6. Blog: new media

Since the 1980s, the news market has been challenged by the diffusion of digital technologies: the computer first, the Internet and the latest tools, such as blogs (Cantoni & Tardini, 2008:35). The information sources of journalists are changing, thus re-raising the issue of their trust and credibility; the process of delivering news is changing, since the Internet is gaining more and more space in comparison to newspapers; the role itself of journalists is challenged, since bloggers are entering the market (Cantoni & Tardini, 2008:42).

Pew Research report (Scheffler, 2006, in Singh, 2009) found that the number of adult blog readers is 40%, which compares well with the size of the U.S. talk radio audience, and is about 20% the size of the newspaper-reading population (Singh et al, 2008). A recent study conducted by the American Association of Advertising Agencies reported that blogs were identified by 20% of the respondents as the form of new media that will show the greatest growth in the coming years (Singh et al, 2008). According to Media Survey 2009 conducted by Nordicom, more and more people in Sweden are using Internet to take part in various media - 85 percent of adolescents and 34 percent of adults in 2009 (Internetstatistik.se, accessed 2012-02-01). The survey reports that almost 65 percent of 15-24 year olds are engaged in social networking on Internet every day on average, and 37

percent have read a blog. In the whole population, aged 9-79, social media is as popular as traditional media on the internet. 26 percent of all Swedes are using social media every day on average; the same number is using traditional media online.

2.6.1. Citizen journalism

Cantonini & Tardini (2008) refer to *citizen journalism* (or *grassroots journalism*) - a kind of journalism where citizens have an active role in gathering, analyzing, and spreading news and information. They point out that the power of this kind of journalism consists in the quickness and easiness with which a citizen can tell the world what s/he has seen and experienced. In the case of a sudden and disastrous event, citizen journalists and bloggers are quicker than any other journalist, because they happen to be on the scene (Fare, 2006, in Cantoni & Tardini, 2008:37-38).

Kent (2008) suggests that another type in contrast to the traditional or historic blogs that are written like a diary entry has emerged. They are news blogs that "often focus on specialized areas, which make them excellent places for professionals and experts to keep abreast of trends, relevant legislation, and general issues of importance". Nevertheless, Kent (2008) claims there is no official distinction between a traditional blog and news blog.

Among the online sources which journalists rely upon, blogs are gaining more and more consideration (Cantoni & Tardini, 2008:36). Moreover, many bloggers consider themselves as journalists, while others prefer to stress their outsider status, thus eschewing the name of journalist and making blogging a real profession (*professional blogger*). In this context, of course, the issue of trust and credibility is pivotal, as some scandals concerning unfounded and unverified information published and spread by bloggers confirm. Blogs, however, have proved also to be useful in unmasking unfair journalistic practices, thus playing a role of control towards the media system, as well as the political and economic ones.

2.6.2. Traditional media and new media symbiosis

The situation digital technologies are configuring in the news market is a convergence of new technologies with existing ones (Cantoni & Tardini, 2008:36). Meaning that Internet is being incorporated into other mass-media, in particular acting as a new and very important

information source for them; on the other side, the Internet tends to include the existing media as an extra channel for the information they broadcast (Cantoni & Tardini, 2008:152).

According to Cantoni & Tardini (2008) the advent of Web 2.0 brought new challenges for newspapers in the U.S.: "newspapers are taking advantages of online capabilities, and have expanded upon their traditional strategies to launch aggressive online programs that include many sophisticated elements" (The Bivings Group, 2006:2, in Cantoni & Tardini, 2008). In 2006, from 100 most circulating newspapers in USA, 76 of them offered RSS feeds on their Web sites, 31 offered podcasts, 80 offered at least one reporter blog, 33 offered a sort of "most popular" function, and seven - a bookmarking function (ibid.).

2.6.3. Uses & gratifications of blogs

McQuail (2010:423) argues that audiences are often formed on the basis of similarities of individual need, interest and taste. Typical "needs" are those for information, relaxation, companionship, diversion or "escape".

Within Uses and gratifications (U&G) theory scholars explore why do people use media and what do they use them for (McQuail, 2010:423). This approach regards audiences as active media users as opposed to passive receivers of information, thus it is very relevant for this study since blog users have to be active in selecting the blogs of preference. In U&G theory it is assumed that individuals are aware of their own needs and expect that those needs will be satisfied by particular types of media and content (Katz et al, 1974). Moreover, as stressed by Ruggiero (2000), traditional models of U&G provide a useful framework from which to begin to study new media communication. He also argues that U&G theory has been used for all new media to assess the motivations for their use.

Internet as a new media is different from traditional media because it offers interactivity, demassification, and asynchronicity (Ruggiero, 2000). However, the historically developed motivations for media use such as diversion (i.e., as an escape from routines or for emotional release), social utility (i.e., to acquire information for conversations), personal identity (i.e., to reinforce attitudes, beliefs, and values), and surveillance (i.e., to learn about one's community,

events, and political affairs) can still be used in assessing motivations for new media use. Moreover, the main focus of the U&G is on the individual, and its activity is being analyzed in a plethora of psychological and social contexts.

One of the studies exploring the motives for using blogs is a descriptive, exploratory study conducted by Kaye (2005). According to Kaye (2005), blogs offer their users information and opinion that satisfies many needs and uses and gratification approach is ideal to uncover what needs are being satisfied. The purpose of the study was to draw a profile of blog users and examine reasons for accessing blogs. This study also examined whether political attitudes, political involvement, political and general news interest, Internet and blog experience, blog participation, and demographic characteristics predict motivations for accessing blogs. The method used was an online questionnaire that was distributed to blog users and a convenience sample was employed. Motivations were comprised of 28 statements derived from previous uses and gratification studies, with some questions adapted especially for blogs. Majority of respondents were white male with a college degree or higher with a high or very high interest in general news and current events. The average age was 38.9 years.

It was discovered that the respondents of the survey were motivated to use blogs primary for:

1. Information seeking and media checking - actively seeking information about current issues. Blog readers in this category were young, highly educated individuals with high incomes.
2. Political surveillance - following politics and politicians actions. Older individuals who are new to Internet and spend many hours per week on blogs are using them for political surveillance.
3. Convenience - because using blogs is more convenient than using traditional media or other online sources, e.g., bulletin boards or chat rooms. Blog readers in this category were older women who have not been using Internet for very long.
4. Social surveillance - learning about others' points of view and opinions on different issues and current events. It was discovered that the longer users have been connecting online the more likely they are using blogs for social reasons. Such demographics as young, less educated women were significant but weak predictors for using blogs to monitor others' opinions.

5. Personal fulfillment - collecting information to use in conversations with others, and fulfilling emotional needs - entertainment, excitement, relaxation, involvement. Young women who are spending many hours using blogs were seeking excitement and entertainment.
6. Expression and affiliation - expressing viewpoints and interacting with like-minded individuals. Participation on blogs for expression and affiliation were the strongest predictor of any blog use motivations. Also all demographic characteristics predicted using blogs for these reasons. However, younger women with lower levels of education and lower incomes are more likely to connect to blogs for expression and affiliation.

Political involvement predicted all six blog motivations. Each of the independent variables predicted at least one of the blog motivations. However, although significant, they were fairly weak predictors of blog use motivations. Because the study was based on uses and gratifications theory, respondents were offered certain categories to choose. Other limitation was that overall the respondents were also bloggers who were blogging more than 9 hours per week. Blog readers can also be the ones who do not blog. Kaye (2005) argues that blog users are similar to early internet users, and that mainstream audiences eventually follow.

In a further study Kaye (2007) attempted to explore the reasons for accessing blogs without preexisting scales. Instead, open questions were asked and respondents could provide their own answers. Each respondent could give up to three different reasons for blog use. Afterwards, the answers, e.g. motivations for using blogs, were coded and categorized according to words and phrases used by the respondents when describing their reasons for accessing blogs. A list of motivations was developed by grouping alike responses together and labeling each grouping as a motivational item. 3,747 respondents filled out an online questionnaire and 2,397 responded to the open-ended questions that asked them their reasons for accessing blogs. Many of them provided multiple reasons, thus 4880 responses were gathered yielding 62 motivational items.

Ten motivations were developed based on the answers. Those were:

blog presentation/characteristics

This motivation was about specific characteristics of blogs that no other media can fulfill. Examples include that readers chose blogs for their depth of information, for up-to-the-minute

news, for commentary and analysis, for unfiltered information and to track a story over time, as well as ability to link to other sources. This motivation was not found in previous study by Kaye (2005).

personal fulfillment

The researcher suggests that blog users find blogs entertaining, fun, relaxing and interesting. Blogs offer escape from work and boredom, and they are humorous.

expression/affiliation with bloggers and blog users

Blog users enjoy affiliating with other blog readers and with bloggers. Users express their opinions, read opinions of others, keep up with social trends, make friends, develop a sense of community, mobilize behind a cause, network, keep in touch with friends and family members who blog.

information seeking

Blog users search for a wide variety of information for work or school, for personal reasons, etc. This is considered a purposive activity.

intellectual/aesthetic fulfillment

This motivation means that blog readers want to learn something new, debate, sharpen their critical thinking skills, want to learn from experts or are drawn to good writing. Blogs gratify the need for intellectual stimulation and aesthetic needs.

anti-traditional-media sentiment

Respondents were drawn to blogs because they considered traditional media biased, didn't trust it or didn't like it. Many blog users consider blogs an alternative or a supplement to traditional media. They offer broader spectrum of news or news that are not available in traditional media.

guidance/opinion seeking

Respondents choose blogs to receive support and validation of their opinions and for help to make up their minds about important issues.

convenience

Blog users turn to blogs because they can quickly access information, blogs are easy to use, and they are less expensive than buying a newspaper and that information can be easily copied and stored. They save time by having all the important news of the day gathered in one place.

political surveillance

Blogs give users opportunity to track politicians and keep up with elections and political issues, and to connect to specific political perspectives. Blog users also trust blogs to reveal what the government is actually doing.

fact checking

Blog users tend to fulfill the need to verify and compare accounts of news and information and check the accuracy of traditional media. Users also enjoy "fisking", which is "point-by-point sarcastic and cutting refutation of a blog entry or newsarticle" (Kaye, 2007).

In the previous study by Kaye (2005) six motivational items were discovered, this study (Kaye, 2007) added four more: blog presentation/characteristics, intellectual/aesthetic fulfillment, anti-traditional-media sentiment and fact checking. It also revealed some characteristics in previously found motivations that were not found before. Those were: need for unbiased information under the blog presentation motivational block; affinity with a particular blogger and following and participating in blogger/user dialogue (in expression/affiliation with bloggers and blog users); negative attitude towards traditional media (in anti-traditional-media sentiment); fisking (in fact checking).

In a further research an attempt was made to create a uses and gratification scale for blogs (Kaye, 2010). The study was based on a follow-up survey conducted in 2007 to quantitatively investigate blog use. Nine motivational factors resulted from a factor analysis. Ranked according to their significance, those were:

1. Convenient information seeking

Blogs offer a convenient source for information seeking on up-to-date and in-depth information about current issues.

2. Anti-traditional media sentiment

Respondents find traditional media distasteful and do not trust it, thus they turn to blogs. They believe mainstream media omit information and they can find it in blogs. Users also rely on blogs to check the accuracy of traditional media as well as to expose their mistakes.

3. Expression/affiliation

Respondents access blogs to interact with like-minded individuals, express personal opinions, make social connections. However, this factor doesn't seem an important one. Out of six items forming this factor, five are among the least likely to access blogs in general.

4. Guidance/opinion seeking

Blogs help users to make up their minds on important issues, to validate their own opinion. They also keep up with social trends, judge politicians' personal qualities and develop critical thinking skills.

5. Blog ambiance

Blog users enjoy the overall atmosphere of the blogs; they enjoy the good writing and that blogs are humorous and interesting. They enjoy affiliating with bloggers, reading personal events. The users enjoy specific benefits and properties of blogs.

6. Personal fulfillment

Respondents find blogs as a way to escape boredom and relax. They fulfill various emotional needs.

7. Political debate

Blog readers want to have information from a specific political perspective and for the ongoing debates. They are keeping an eye on the political scene and especially on partisan politics.

8. Variety of opinion

The strength of blogs is the analysis of events and issues from a personal perspective and that is what the blog users seek. They don't want only facts, they want opinions.

9. Specific inquiry

This factor includes seeking specific information and looking for a support for one's point of view. This is an activity with a purpose.

Demographics were correlated with three top motivation factors. With Pearson correlations several weak but significant relationships were found. Those who read blogs for convenient information seeking tend to be highly educated and females. Those who chose them because of anti-traditional media sentiment are older and male. For expression and affiliation are going women who have low incomes, are younger and less educated.

2.7. Other studies on blog readers

The study of Li et al (2010) investigated the extent to which compatibility of personalities influences online interaction. Participants of the study were from the University of Toronto community. The main findings were that readers of the blog corpus were able to consistently judge the personality of the writers based solely on the text that they wrote, and that they followed a well-established social rule regarding interpersonal attraction in real-life interaction. It was also discovered that blog readers were significantly more attracted to blog writers with more similar personalities - offering support in a blog environment, “birds of a feather flock together.” Moreover, emotion word use in the blog corpus correlated with writer’s personality, suggesting that online personality maybe signaled by linguistic cues. Li et al (2010) suggested that personality is an important determinant and that further research on how people communicate with blogs will be relevant to social network analysis and to marketing.

Other research in which it was concluded that blog readers are searching for "sameness" in blogs, is the research of Karlsson (2007), which was conducted as an exploratory web survey on “how/when/why we read weblogs” on four independent diary blog sites kept by women in their 30s. The sample of the study consisted of readers of four specific independent diary blogs, three of which belong to larger cluster of Chinese American diary blog sites. The fourth site was an Australian site. The main conclusions of the study were that the consumption of these blogs seemed to be based on gender, age, place of living, race/ethnicity, and educational level. Moreover, readers reported being drawn to the diary blog for the rhythm of serial autobiographical consumption and the possibilities of identification (Karlsson, 2007).

In the study, which was based on theory of reason action (Hsu et al, 2007) a model involving technology acceptance, knowledge sharing and social influences was developed to investigate what motivates people to participate in blog activities. The study, which was conducted in Taiwan, found a strong support for the model. It was discovered that ease of use and enjoyment, and knowledge sharing (altruism and reputation) were positively related to attitude towards blogging, and accounted for 78 percent of the variance. Social

factors (community identification) and attitude towards blogging significantly influenced a blog participant's intention to continue to use blogs. The quantitative study didn't distinguish between bloggers, blog readers and comment providers.

Several studies have been conducted to explore how blog readers perceive the credibility of blogs. In a study by Johnson et al (2004) it was discovered that blog users judged blogs as highly credible - more credible than traditional sources, which were rated as moderately credible. In a later study by Johnson et al (2008) where U.S. politically-interested Internet users' perceptions of the credibility of blogs were examined it was discovered that blogs were judged as moderately credible, but as more credible than any mainstream media or online source. Moreover, information-seeking motives predicted credibility better than entertainment ones. Further, in a study performed in UK and replicated in Malaysia the impact on bloggers' anonymity was examined (Chesney et al, 2010). The results showed that there was no difference in the credibility of the blog itself. However, the well-presented blog's writer was perceived as being more credible than the writer of the badly presented blog.

Huang et al (2008) explored motives for reading blogs and discussed their effects on the responses after reading blogs. Based on data analysis from 204 respondents in Taiwan, motives for reading blogs were assessed. They were: affective exchange, information search, entertainment and getting on the bandwagon. A regression analysis suggested the effects of these motives on three major responses - opinion acceptance, interaction intentions, and word-of-mouth (WOM) intentions. Moreover, readers who focus on affective exchanges believe blog messages, interact with bloggers, and spread messages to others. Information search and entertainment motives positively affect opinion acceptance. Blog readers who focus on information and those who read for fun both view blogs as trustworthy sources. Getting on the bandwagon positively affects interaction and WOM intentions. These readers interact with bloggers and spread messages to others. The study examined literature pertaining to motives for reading or browsing messages on traditional community Web sites and extended it to blogs.

2.8. Summary of the theoretical background

Advances in technologies as well as new media have changed the relationships companies are having with their customers. Customer is more empowered to choose marketing messages, as well as the channels and timing for receiving them. Moreover, they are interested to communicate with each other. They also respond more favorably to marketing when they have control over what they see, when they see it, whether it can be personalized to fit their needs and if they can be active participants in the marketing process. In general, consumers have a declining relationship with the "interruption" advertising and interactive, user-generated social media is on the rise.

Blogs are one of the leading tools in Web 2.0. Although they are similar to other marketing communication channels, interactivity they offer allows a high level of connectedness with the customer, and their format is designed to enable and facilitate communication. By acknowledging this advantage companies are embracing blogs as a communication platform with customers and stakeholders. Moreover, most researchers and marketing experts believe that social media, including blogs, are an important part of a marketing strategy nowadays. Social media is extending the word-of-mouth, and blogs have become an important source of electronic word-of-mouth with about 50% of consumers turning to blogs for an advice on different products or services. This is due to the facts that popular bloggers are opinion leaders and also because people are more ready to accept information from Internet than from any other medium because of the informal, interpersonal conversations.

Changes in the marketplace have forced companies to think of new ways how to differentiate their products. It has become common to create a buzz around a product or service using new media. Viral marketing works because the originator of the virus is able to convince and recruit others to the network due to the personal nature of communication. In addition, corporate blogs offer several advantages for marketing: public segmentation, brand loyalty, market research and ease of use. Blogs are perfect for public segmentation because blogs bring people with common interests together creating very homogenous target audiences. They also help to build loyalty and trust by empowering the customer. Speaking of market research, information people provide in blogs is candid and uncensored since many blogs are

anonymous, and this provides an unfiltered look at the customer. In addition, blogs are easy to use, manage and establish, and they need little investment.

News market has been challenged by the new technologies: first the computer and then the Internet and the blogs. Information sources for the journalists are changing and so as the role of the journalist with blogs entering the market. Citizens are spreading news with the help of blogs and a new profession - professional blogger - has emerged. As a result traditional media is merging with the new technologies. Internet is being incorporated in other mass media, and newspapers are found online offering RSS feeds, podcasts, blogs and other online features.

Uses and gratifications (U&G) theory explores why people use media and what do they use it for. This theory regards audience as active media users, thus it is relevant for this study because blog readers have to be active to choose their blogs of preference. Moreover, U&G theory assumes that individuals are aware of their own needs and expect that those needs will be satisfied by particular type of media and content. U&G theory also provides a useful framework to study new media.

Kaye has carried out several studies on blog users (Kaye, 2005; Kaye, 2007; Kaye, 2010). The first study was quantitative and was based on U&G theory. It was discovered that blog users were motivated to access blogs because of several reasons: information seeking and media checking; political surveillance; convenience; social surveillance; personal fulfillment; expression and affiliation. In the next study Kaye (2007) asked open questions and respondents could provide up to three reasons for accessing blogs. Based on respondent answers 10 motivations were discovered. Six of them were present in the previous study but four were new. Those were: blog presentation/characteristics; intellectual/aesthetic fulfillment; anti-traditional media sentiment, and fact checking. The study revealed also some previously undiscovered characteristics in the previous motivations. Those included need for unbiased information; negative attitude towards traditional media; faking; affinity with particular blogger and following and participating in blogger/user dialogue. Furthermore, Kaye (2010) attempted to create a U&G scale for blogs. From factor analysis nine motivational factors emerged: convenient information seeking; anti-traditional media sentiment; expression/affiliation; guidance/opinion seeking; blog ambiance; personal fulfillment; political debate, variety of opinion; specific inquiry. The study of Kaye (2007) is

most relevant to this thesis because respondents were not asked specific questions on their motivations for accessing blogs. However, the study's limitation is that the respondents could only provide three options. Other limitation compared to conducting in-depth interviews is that the respondents are not asked to elaborate on their thoughts and thus to reveal more motivations for blog reading.

Other studies on blog readers used different approaches and studied different areas. In the study of Li et al (2010), the extent to which compatibility of personalities influence online interaction was examined. The main findings were that the readers were able to consistently judge the personality of the writer based solely on the text they wrote, and that blog readers are significantly more attracted to blog writers with similar personalities to their own. Karlsson (2007) also concluded that blog readers are searching for sameness. The consumption of blogs seemed to be based on gender, age, place of living, race/ethnicity, and educational level. In comparison to Kaye's study (2007), these two studies discovered another factor to be taken into account - personality, which, in author's opinion, is worth to consider. The difference between the purpose of these studies and the purpose of the thesis is that they didn't focus on variety of reasons for reading blogs. Moreover, Karlsson (2007) was exploring only the diary type of blogs.

Hsu et al (2007) based their study on theory of reason action and developed a model involving technology acceptance, knowledge sharing, and social influences. The main findings were that ease of use, enjoyment and knowledge sharing (altruism and reputation) was positively related to blogging. Moreover, social factors and attitude towards blogging affected the intention to continue using blogs. The results of this study cannot be directly applicable to a study exploring blog reading because it didn't distinguish between blog readers, blog writers and comment providers. In a study of Huang et al (2008) motives for reading blogs and their effects on responses after reading blogs were discovered. Motives for reading blogs were affective exchange, information search, entertainment and getting on the bandwagon. Readers who focus on affective exchange believe blog messages, interact with bloggers, and spread messages to others. Information search and entertainment positively correlated with opinion acceptance. These readers also see blogs as trustworthy sources. Getting on the bandwagon positively affected interaction and WOM. This study was quantitative with predefined reasons

for reading blogs. It extended motives for reading or browsing messages on traditional community websites on blogs.

To develop the interview guide and analyze the results the author of the study mainly focused on the studies of Kaye (2007; 2010), Li et al (2010) and Karlsson (2007) as well as on the literature from marketing communications and new media. Kaye (2007) allowed the respondents of the study to reply about motivations for accessing blogs using their own words and providing three possible reasons for their activity. The purpose and method of Kaye's study is the closest to this study. To assess factors related to marketing communications and new media, literature from these studies was used as well. Other previous studies were also taken into consideration in the development of the interview guide, analyzing the results and drawing conclusions, however, to a lesser extent.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research philosophy

According to Bryman (2008) interpretivist approach aims to understand human behaviour and social world through an examination of the interpretations of that world by its participants. Since the aim of the research is to explore how and why young women in Sweden are reading blogs and thus to understand the reasons behind their behaviour which is blog reading, the research was conducted within interpretivism.

3.2. Research design

There are three types of research: exploratory, descriptive and explanatory. Since exploratory research is most commonly undertaken to gain background information about the general information of the research problem (Burns & Bush, 2010:144), and due to the lack of information on possible reasons or patterns for blog reading among young Swedish women, the research was exploratory. Moreover, according to Hair et al (2006:170) descriptive designs often are not as useful in collecting primary data to explain why the marketing phenomena is happening. An explanatory study was not chosen because during an explanatory study a situation or a problem is researched to explain relationships between variables (Saunders et al, 2007:134). Defining possible variables before conducting this research would limit the possibility to examine the reality and how the individuals are constructing it.

3.3. Research strategy

One of the main objectives of qualitative research is to gain preliminary insights into research problems. Moreover, qualitative research methods are appropriate when researchers are obtaining insights into the motivation and personality factors (Hair et al, 2006:174). Due to the nonexistence of previous data about reasons and habits of blog reading in Sweden, and the research question proposed, it was decided to undertake a qualitative research to answer the research question: how and why young women in Sweden are reading blogs.

3.4. Data collection

3.4.1. Primary data and secondary data

According to May (2001:120), interviews offer rich insights into people's experiences, opinions, values, aspirations, attitudes and feelings. In semi-structured interviews, questions are usually specified but the interviewer is freer to probe beyond the answers (May, 2001:123). Aaker (2004:191) states that unstructured and semi-structured interviews are in-depth interviews that allow to explore the matter of the interview in detail. Unstructured interviews are done with an aim in mind but the interviewee is enabled to answer questions within their own frame of reference (May, 2001:123). Since semi-structured interviews provide greater comparability compared to unstructured interviews, and the research had a specific focus (May, 2001), semi-structured interviews were undertaken.

Twelve women were interviewed face-to-face in settings that they found comfortable - at a private room at a library or at the interviewee's home. An interview guide (Appendix 2) was used during the interview to make sure that all the questions are covered, and a free conversation was encouraged. Probing questions and mechanisms were used, and follow-up questions were asked when it was necessary to gather more data on the topic, because this way the interviewees are more likely to reveal underlying motives and behaviors (Hair et al, 2006:177). All the interviews were recorded on a digital recorder and transcribed, so as to provide an accurate analysis of the collected data. Interview guide was developed keeping in mind the research question, prior literature studies and the predefined questions for the blog reading patterns.

To become familiar with the problem area and to be able to place the findings of the research within a more general context (Saunders et al, 2007:259) secondary data was compiled as well. Secondary data was based on scientific articles related to blog reading, as well as on background information related to blogs from the books and scientific articles within marketing communications, mass communication, corporate communication, consumer behavior, and communication technologies as well as other relevant fields. Some data for the problem discussion was derived from the recent surveys compiled by the World Internet Institute on Internet use in Sweden, and a blog for professionals in social media *kullin.net*.

3.4.2. Sampling method

The desired population of the study was young women aged 18 - 30, since this group includes the most active blog readers in Sweden. As it was necessary to obtain data from women that are reading blogs, a purposive sampling was conducted - women who agreed to take part in the study reported reading blogs. Further, a snowball sampling was employed as this sampling is commonly used when it is difficult to identify the members of the desired population. Women that were initially contacted and agreed to take part in the study were afterwards asked to identify other possible interviewees who met sampling criteria. Twelve women agreed to take part in the study. All of them were living in Gothenburg, had higher education or were studying at a higher education institution. The sample was not increased because no new themes were emerging from the interviews.

3.5. Validity

Validity can be defined as the extent to which the measurement method really measures the property that was intended to be measured (Lekvall & Wahlbin, 2001). The interview guide was developed with the research question in mind, and checked by several people who are experienced in performing qualitative studies with semi-structured interviews. A test interview was carried out to make sure that all the questions are understandable, unambiguous, and help to answer the research question. All interviews were recorded and transcribed, and if something was not expressed clearly, follow-up questions were asked to clarify unclear utterances or statements. In addition, each interview was transcribed before conducting the next interview, and, if necessary, notes were taken during the interviews to not miss out important threads of thought.

3.6. Reliability

Since low reliability can be caused by, e.g. interviewees condition (health, stress, motivation, etc.), environment (interaction with the interviewer, distractions, etc.), and different interviewers (Lekvall & Wahlbin, 2001) different measures were undertaken to increase it. All the respondents were interviewed by one person, the author of the study, who is experienced in carrying out interviews both for academic and professional purposes. The interviewees were motivated to take part in the study and were offered to choose the place for the interview that is

convenient for them. The interview settings were private where no disturbances were present. To create a trustful and positive atmosphere and observe the principles of ethics interviewees were informed about the aim of the study, confidentiality and anonymity. Any questions related to the study were answered as well.

3.7. Ethics

All interviewees were informed about the aim of the study, and the importance of their participation. They were also informed that the data collected during the interviews will be anonymous, i.e. the names of the participants will not be published. In addition, they were assured of confidentiality. No personal data during the research was distributed to any third parties, and codes (F1-F12) instead of the names of the participants were used throughout the study. Moreover, the interviewees were asked if they have nothing against the fact that the interviews will be recorded, and if they didn't want something to be recorded they could ask to stop the recording. They were also informed of the possibility to stop the interview anytime.

4. RESULTS

Twelve women in the age between 21 and 28 (Figure 1) living in Sweden were interviewed for this study. Majority of them were full-time university students; however, one was a part-time student, and one of the participants was a recent university graduate.

No	Age	Code	No	Age	Code
1	25	F1	7	25	F7
2	27	F2	8	22	F8
3	28	F3	9	27	F9
4	24	F4	10	28	F10
5	21	F5	11	26	F11
6	25	F6	12	26	F12

Figure 1. Age of the respondents

4.1. Internet use

All of the respondents were actively using Internet, and all replied that they are using Internet every day. F2 replied that she uses Internet all the time, and F5 said she uses Internet "every day, every minute".

When asked how many hours per day the interviewees are using internet, the answers varied from 4 hours to 14 hours. Some interviewees found it difficult to answer how many hours per day they are using Internet. Three mentioned that they use Internet on their phones. Twelve main reasons emerged for Internet use (Figure 2). The most common reasons for using Internet were: to search for information, to stay in touch with friends and to use social media.

Reason	Number of respondents	Reason	Number of respondents
to search for information	6	read news	3
to stay in touch with friends	6	do shopping	3
to stay in touch with family	2	read blogs	2
use social media	5	check traffic on Västtrafik.se	2
send emails	4	pay bills	1
watch SVT	1	work	1

Figure 2. Main reasons for Internet use

4.2. Blogging

Six of the interviewees were blogging. All of them but two had personal blogs to share how they were doing, and the things they found interesting. Two of the respondents who didn't have personal blogs were providing 1) practical information for international students, 2) information about Swedish language for those who want to learn it. Three respondents were blogging in the past but stopped doing it. Two of them claimed they didn't like to be public. One said that she lost her confidence as a blogger.

The rest of the respondents had never been blogging. The main reason for not blogging was that the interviewees didn't like the idea of being public. Moreover, one of them didn't find her life to be interesting to blog about, and another reason was that the respondent didn't feel that she writes in a very interesting way.

4.3. Blog reading patterns

Most of the interviewees were following certain blogs on a regular basis. The number of favorite blogs per one person varied considerably - from one to 25. Most common was to follow about five blogs regularly. Blogs were also read randomly because the information the interviewees were searching for on Internet was found in blogs.

Frequency of blog reading	Number of blog readers
Every day	3
Almost every day	2
2-3 times a week	2
1-2 times a week	1
A few times a week	1
Sometimes	2
Once a week to once per 15 days	1

Figure 3. Frequency of blog reading

The frequency of reading blogs varied among respondents from every day to once every 15 days (Figure 3). One of the respondents added that blog reading depends also on the blogs:

some blogs she was reading every other day, some - once a week, some - once a month. Three of the interviewees mentioned that the frequency of reading blogs depended on the frequency of blog posts and how interesting the titles of the posts were. The time spent on reading blogs varied between five minutes and two hours. Most often blogs were read for about 30 minutes.

The common ways to find blogs of interest among the respondents was by following a friend's recommendation, by using *Google* search engine to search for information or by using other social media - blogs or social networking sites. Six of the interviewees mentioned that friends recommended blogs to read, and six informed that an Internet search engine was used. One stated that she used *blogg.se* and *knuffa.se* to find blogs. She claimed that "everybody can read your blog if it comes up on this page [*knuffa.se*]". Moreover, two mentioned that since blogs are linked with each other, reading one blog can lead to reading another one. Two of the respondents found blogs on social networking sites. One of the readers stated that when she sees famous bloggers in news or on television she becomes interested and goes and checks their blogs. If she considers the blog good, she reads it every day. Two of the interviewees found blogs by following links on different websites.

The interviewees had certain ways how to get information about new blog posts. They were adding blogs to favorites or subscribing to them. Moreover, F8 mentioned that *Twitter* is helpful to get information about the blogs because it informs her about the new blog posts. Four of interviewees mentioned that they access blogs via the social networking site *Facebook*. They "like" them on *Facebook*, and this way they receive information about the new posts.

Interviewees were reading blogs on various topics. They mentioned that they were following lifestyle blogs, fashion blogs, photo blogs, news blogs, friends' blogs, personal blogs, health blogs, social media blogs, and scientific blogs. Interviewees were also following blogs with recipes, blogs about movies or books, blogs about places to visit and a mother's blog about how to raise children. The two most popular categories among the interviewed blog readers were friends' blogs and fashion blogs. Both categories were equally popular - six women respectively admitted reading one or both of them.

4.4. Reasons for reading blogs

Themes that emerged from the interview in respect to reasons why the interviewees were reading blogs were various. Several questions, probe and follow-up questions were asked to facilitate disclosure of the themes. Themes were categorized according to information emerging from the interviews as well as according to the prior literature studies.

4.4.1. Personal interest in the topic

One of the first things the interviewees usually began to talk about when asked about their reasons for reading blogs was their interests:

I'm very interested in photography and in vintage fashion. So I read a lot of blogs that include that... (F1)

Two of the interviewees stressed that the interest in the topic is the main thing to read a blog, and other things that are also important are secondary. Interest in the topic was determined by their personal interests, e.g. fashion, photography, science, area of studies.

4.4.2. Seeking inspiration and knowledge

Five of the respondents were turning to blogs for inspiration. They want to be inspired for something and by something. They want to be inspired within their areas of interest, e.g. fashion, photography, their own blog. F1 admitted reading her favorite blogs mainly for inspiration, and she's mainly interested in fashion and photography. F3 seeks inspiration for her own blog. F4 finds it exciting to get inspired by seeing something new, and she finds her favorite blogger, a New York based journalist, very colorful and inspiring. Also F5 is inspired by her favorite blogger; by the things she does and the person she is. She also gets inspiration for fashion from her blog. F8 gets inspiration from the science blogs she's reading because she's interested in science and that's her area of studies.

One of the interviewees stated that she wants to gain more knowledge and that's the reason why she reads blogs:

I read most of the blogs cause I want to improve my knowledge in case if I get a job. I have the newest ideas, and I can offer that. (F2)

F2 reads social media blogs and health blogs to increase her knowledge about social media trends and about nutrition and its impact on the body.

4.4.3. Personality of the blogger

Four of the interviewees knew a lot about the bloggers of their favorite blogs, and they were telling about them more or less extensively during the interviews:

She's really professional, a good photographer, a good writer and...she is very organized. (F1)

She has a new magazine now. She is like the main Swedish blogger but I don't know...she came from a small city from North of Sweden and came to Stockholm and then she started the whole carrier and she dated the right people cause Stockholm is a lot about contacts. (F2)

Two of the respondents stated directly that the personality of the blogger matters when choosing a blog to follow. One of them said that people like to know the blogger, see the picture of the blogger, and know the blogger's name. She called it "to feature the blog". F2 said that after getting to know one of the bloggers in person she lost the interest about the blog to some extent because she didn't like her personality. However, she continues to follow the blog just to keep up with the trends in fashion, and have a break from work.

F5 stressed that personality of the blogger mattered when she's choosing a blog to read. She was telling that the blogger of one of her favorite blogs is really beautiful, is a trendsetter and is her inspiration.

Two of the girls pointed out that the bloggers have to be similar to them to make them interested in a blog:

They are usually written by girls in my age who are very good at photographing, and we have the same interests in fashion and in other things (F1).

All the writers and readers have to be somewhere near my age group because a fifteen year old girl would not interest me in what she's writing about. (F2)

F4 mentioned that the blogger of one of her favorite blogs has the same taste for food and clothing as she does.

4.4.4. Opinions and recommendations

Three of the readers mentioned that they are interested in the opinions of bloggers, and if the blogger has an interesting opinion they feel interested in the blog. One of them added that she uses blogs as a source of reference:

It's a very good way to get recommendations about books you want to read, movies you want to see. (F11)

F11 was skeptical of companies trying to sell things, and she tends to lose interest in a blog if she suspects that it's selling something or if it has many commercials. F11 believes information published in blogs more than the information published by the companies.

4.4.5. Affiliation: friends and fashion blogs

Six of the women stated that they were reading the blogs of their friends. It was a way to know how their friends are doing:

I'm used to read one of my friend's blog. She's living in North of Sweden. I read about her life and her little children life. (F3)

Reading the blogs of the friends allow to know how the friends are feeling and have the feeling of connection:

I want know how they feel and what they are doing, and to feel close to them. (F5)

Reading blogs of friends can also serve to fulfill other needs besides acquiring information about their lives. F6 said that her friend is having a photo blog and since she's interested in photography, she follows this blog. F8 mentioned that one of her friends is very good at writing and drawing and that's one of the reasons F8 likes to follow her blog.

Although there are also other means how to stay in touch with friends that live in other cities or countries, blog readers chose blogs of their friends because of convenience especially when several friends need to be updated simultaneously:

They don't have to write a personal message to me of what's happening. (F7)

Six of the interviewees were reading fashion blogs. Three of them stressed that the bloggers of their favorite fashion blogs are famous, and that many people are reading them:

She's one of the famous bloggers here in Sweden. She has like 500 000 readers every day. (F5)

One of them admitted that probably one of the reasons she's reading it is because everybody does:

I know everyone reads. Everyone who likes fashion in Sweden reads her blog, I'll read it too. They [the fashion bloggers in Sweden] have so much power now here so it's kinda like good to know what's going on. (F2)

One of the interviewees began to read blogs because everybody around where talking about them but she didn't even know what a blog is. She searched for the famous bloggers, e.g., Blondinbella, Kenza and Tyra.se and began to read them.

4.4.6. Personal fulfillment: relaxation, emotions, fun

Another reason mentioned for reading certain blogs was relaxation. F2 reads fashion blogs mostly when she has a break of five minutes because five minutes, according to her, are not enough to do something else:

It is more like downtime. It's click and look. (F2)

F1 mentions that she reads a lot of serious newspapers and blogs are a way to relax:

I just need to [read blogs] when I need to relax or get my mind of things. (F1)

One of the reader mentioned that she likes sometimes to go to blogs with "deeper text" where people write about themselves, and she finds it beautiful. By reading these blogs she becomes emotional.

Three respondents mentioned that they are reading blogs for fun. However, one of them said that blogs have to be fun (F1), whereas other said that she is reading some of the blogs for fun (F3). F5 finds blogs fun in general. She also likes when the text is fun to read.

4.4.7. Seeking information

Two of the respondents clearly stated that they are seeking information. F7 reads blogs of companies or organisations because she wants to have more information on the things related to her studies and feel more prepared for the job market. F11, besides searching for information for her studies, is also seeking information for the things she's interested in, such as books or movies, and she finds blogs a significant source:

They have to provide me with interesting, valuable information that I'm looking for. (F11)

4.4.8. Complement to traditional media and books: free and instant

F1 was reading blogs that are features of online magazines. Those were her favorite blogs. She also mentioned during the interview that most of the Swedish magazines and newspapers have blogs:

When you go on newspaper on the internet in Sweden or a magazine, most of them, the majority will have blogs. Either it's "Svenska Dagbladet" or fashion magazine or a magazine in I don't know what. It could be anything. They will have bloggers. But when you go to "ELLE" in UK or "ELLE" in USA they don't have blogs. So, maybe in Sweden it is a huge thing, I don't know. (F1)

She enjoys reading newspapers and magazines, and blogs are "like a nice complement". Although for the possibility to read some of her favorite blogs she would even pay, she enjoys that they are for free.

F2 compared fashion blogs to magazines and pointed out that "now when all the big magazines have their own blogs (..) of course it becomes a more instant way of getting information from people. You don't have to wait". However, when she was speaking of health blogs she compared them with books and said that by reading blogs she doesn't have

to buy "hundreds of health books". F4 compared blogs to magazines. She thinks that a blog is a person's magazine.

Two of the interviewees were reading news blogs. They offer them access to the information that they wouldn't otherwise be able to receive because of media censorship. Moreover, the information in a blog is more detailed than the information in traditional media, e.g. television.

4.4.9. Presentation of the blog

Frequency of updates

Three of the readers stressed that it's important how often the blog is updated. Others confirmed that the frequency of updates is important when they were asked about it. In all cases, blog readers lose interest in a blog and forget about it if there are no frequent updates.

The preferred frequency of the updates, however, varied. Those who stressed the importance of updates were reading blogs mostly every day or even a few times a day because their favorite blogs are updating from one to three times a day.

If two of them were not sure how often the blogs should be updated, F5 said with certainty that bloggers should update twice a day. She was reading blogs a few times a day. Replies of other readers were that blogs should be updated at least once a week or once every two weeks. F7 stated that news blogs should be updated a few times a day.

Writing

Majority of the interviewees emphasized the quality of the posts. It was suggested that the posts should not be too long, that they should have a good structure - organized in paragraphs, and that the first two paragraphs should capture the attention.

Several of the readers stressed the importance of the language; it should be understandable, simple, not very formal and not too informal and that it shouldn't include many abbreviations. The writing should capture the attention, be very interesting. F5 mentioned

that the text should be fun. F8 argued that the topic of the blog is the most important factor to choose a blog, and the second most important is the language.

Photos

Several interviewees emphasized that it's important that the blog has photos, and they should preferably be of good quality and personal (related to the blogger and not some picture circulating on Internet). Some of the readers stated that photos are not that important but they help to increase understanding or replace text. For one of the respondents photos are the most important thing in a blog, followed by blogger's personality. For two other respondents photos are of great importance because they are interested in photography, and this way - in photo blogs.

Two of the interviewees pointed out that the type of the blog affects the use of photos. It was stressed that in scientific blogs the language is more important than photos, and that photos are important in fashion blogs, whereas in other blogs they are not important. However, not all of the interviewees who were following fashion blogs stressed the importance of photos as a reason for following these blogs.

Design

Two of the interviewees elaborated on different things related to blog's design. F5 thought that most importantly the blog should be symmetric, and it should look neat and simple (well-organized and without many ads or pop-ups). She also mentioned that blog shouldn't have "too much of strong colors". F9 noted that it's easier to read if the background is light, and she leaves the blog quickly if the background is dark. It also mattered for her if there are not too many ads in the blogs.

Three of the readers stated that the design of the blog is important but it is not the main reason why they would read a blog. Other things are of more importance, e.g. writing, interest in the topic. For six respondents design mattered or was important, and only two said that design of the blog didn't matter to them.

Connectedness and ease of use

One of the interviewees stressed that it's important how the blogger relates to other things, e.g. how he uses links in the blog. She also pointed out that it's important to be able to find other articles in the same category, as well as previous or latest articles easily.

4.4.10. Specific features of blogs

Three of the respondents appreciated the personal nature of the blogs. They appreciated that the information shared in a blog is more private; the author shares more of his experience, thoughts and doubts. One of the respondents mentioned that the main thing about blogs is to read somebody's personal information. Another compared blogs with websites. She argued that information in blogs is different than that of the websites because a blog contains more up-to-date information compared to the static information of the websites, and it's also more personal and informal. If compared to scientific articles, it's easier to understand information written by a scientist in a blog than in a scientific article because of the more informal approach.

Other specific features mentioned by the respondents were freedom of speech and an empowered reader. This was mentioned by three respondents. Blogs provide a very good way to produce unbiased information, and they give power to the reader and reader can also become a writer. One of the readers stressed that blogging is important because everyone can become heard. In addition, blogs give freedom to people to express themselves, and there's no censorship, and it makes a blog interesting to read.

4.5. Interaction

None of the interviewees were active in commenting blog posts and thus engaging in an interaction with the blogger or other blog readers. Four women reported that they don't comment, two said that they have commented once, two were commenting rarely, one - very rarely, one - not anymore, and one - hardly ever and only one admitted she provides comments sometimes.

The common reasons to give comments were if the published information is not correct, if the interviewee really likes something, or if the person wants to know something. F6 and F8

said they comment only friends' blogs and F7 said that it's more probable she would comment if it's a friend's blog. F1 would give comments if she would be having her own blog because it's one of the ways how to attract readers:

Most people who have blogs are the ones who comment because then other people can see your blog if they just click on your name.

The reasons for not providing the comments or not providing them actively varied among the interviewees. The common reasons were busyness, lack of knowledge, pointlessness of stating the obvious (e.g. about a good outfit) or saying something negative, as well as negativity of other comment writers.

Several interviewees expressed their disappointment with negative comments. F1 argued that "most people just like to criticize everything". F2 held a similar point of view:

In fashion blogs people are really mean. So sometimes I just check if people are that rude all the time or nicer, but lots of the blogs now have English speaking readers as well and those people would be normally much nicer than the Swedish readers. Not so many bad comments. Swedes can be really jealous. They write really bad things on people's blogs.

Nevertheless, all of the interviewees but two were of the opinion that the possibility to comment is important. F8 argued that it's important who comments. She thinks that it's valuable if people who comment are professionals in their field, then it's also interesting to read their public discussions in blogs. F2 noted that she always reads the comments of the professionals. Two of the respondents noted that it's important to have this possibility to comment because they read comments. F6 reads comments for recipes so as to know if the recipe is good and what kind of changes to do to make it better. F10 thinks it's sometimes more fun to read the comments of other people than the blog post itself.

F4 believes it's very important to have the possibility to comment because it gives the reader the opportunity to express his or her negative feelings if something "really upsets the reader", and she is sometimes reading the comments under a "very stupid post". F11 thinks it's very important because the bloggers need feedback and it is a way for the reader to connect with the blogger.

5. ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

The purpose of the study was to explore how and why young women in Sweden are reading blogs. Therefore, the study was qualitative, and semi-structured interviews were conducted. During the study the patterns of blog reading and the reasons for reading blogs were explored. None of the previous studies on blog readers (Kaye, 2005; Kaye, 2007; Li et al., 2010; Karlsson, 2007; Hsu et al., 2007; Huang et al., 2008) were exploring the patterns of blog reading but the author of this study assumed that this information can be deemed valuable to companies, which intend to use or are already using blogs in their marketing communications. Some of the findings of this study were in line with the previous studies, however, not all of the previously found reasons for blog reading were found in this study, and some new reasons emerged. Altogether 10 themes emerged from the interviews.

The reasons for reading blogs among the respondents were various. The reasons discovered were: personal interest in the topic; seeking inspiration and knowledge; personality of the blogger; seeking information; seeking opinions and recommendations; affiliation (friends and fashion); personal fulfillment; complement to traditional media and books; presentation of the blog; and specific features of the blog.

5.1. Reasons for reading blogs

The respondents' personal interest in the topic plays a significant role in choosing a blog to read. If the person is interested in photography she will find the blogs devoted to photography worthwhile, or if she likes to cook she will read about cooking. The next step is up to the blogger, whether he or she will be able to maintain the reader's interest and the reader will continue following the blog. At this stage other factors become important, e.g. frequency of updates, style of writing, photos, design, and personality of the blogger. Personal interest in the topic wasn't mentioned as the reason for reading blogs in none of the previously conducted studies.

According to Kaye (2007) users turn to blogs to access a wide variety of information for school or work, for their own blog, and to keep up with the issues of the day. Information seeking was

discovered as a motivator for accessing blogs also in other studies (Kaye, 2005; Huang et al, 2008). Seeking information on many topics was one of the reasons for reading blogs also in this study. Through an Internet search engine or other means, e.g. social media, other blogs, blog users are searching for different information, and they tend to find it in blogs. The information they are searching for are usually news on current events, information for work, future career or studies.

Blogs are considered social media or new media. Thus, the question is if they replace traditional media, and if yes, then what type of? Rettbergs (2008:20) suggests that blogs can be considered mediums with different genres and sub-genres, such as diary-style blog or political blog. None of the respondents of the study thought that blogs are replacing other media. Blogs were, however, compared with fashion magazines, books on health, websites and traditional media. The previous studies (Kaye, 2005; Kaye, 2007) focused on blog users comparing blogs only to traditional media but this study revealed that blog users are comparing blogs not only to traditional media but also to books and websites. When compared to other media, blog users stated that blogs offer information they wouldn't find anywhere else and that the information in blogs is more detailed than the one in traditional media. In addition, blog users like the notion of freedom of speech; that blogs are not censored, and that anybody can express herself. Moreover, when comparing blogs to magazines and books, respondents value that they do not have to pay for blogs and that they offer up-to-date information. Kaye (2007) discovered that blog users access blogs for their specific nature. Blogs have characteristics that are not found elsewhere. Examples included up-to-date information, links to other sources and unfiltered and unbiased information. In this study, similar to the study of Kaye (2007) respondents enjoyed that bloggers are free to express their opinions, that blogs offer unbiased and up-to-date information. However, the difference was that the respondents also enjoyed that the blogs are personal, informal and a simpler language is used. Comparisons included websites and scientific articles. Disadvantage of websites compared to blogs is also that they offer static information.

Interviewees were seeking emotions, relaxation and fun while reading blogs. These reasons were in line with Kaye's (2007) discovery of personal fulfillment motivation, as well as with the studies of Hsu et al (2007) and Huang et al (2008) where enjoyment and entertainment were named as reasons for using blogs. Kaye (2007) argues that blog users find blogs entertaining, fun, relaxing, and interesting. They also relieve boredom (Kaye, 2010). As

discovered from the interviews, blog readers read blogs when they have some free time from work or when they just want to have a break. That is their way to relax.

Blog users turn to blogs also to learn something new, for intellectual discourse and debate, to sharpen their critical thinking skills, to learn from experts and because they are drawn to good writing (Kaye, 2007). This motivation block was named intellectual/aesthetic fulfillment. In the current study, only one of the respondents mentioned that she wants to have more knowledge and that one of her favorite blogs is written by experts in the field she is interested in. Other interviewees wanted to learn something new, for instance, how to take better pictures, how to cook better or raise children. Hence, they never stressed the importance of knowledge, only the importance of their interests. Two of the interviewees mentioned that they enjoy good writing, and they said that they cannot write the same way. One argued that for her the writing is one of the two most important things in a blog. A difference compared to previous studies was that the blog readers were mentioning that they need to feel inspired, and that they seek inspiration.

Half of the respondents were reading blogs of their friends and/or blogs that they knew were read by many people, such as fashion blogs. According to Kaye (2007) blogs satisfy the need for affiliation with others and with specific bloggers. They bring together like-minded people, and users express their opinions, keep up with social trends, network, develop sense of community, make friends, as well as keep in touch with friends and family members who have blogs. In addition, Huang et al (2008) concluded that two of the reasons for reading blogs are "getting on the bandwagon" and affective exchange. However, what differs from Kaye's (2007, 2005) and Huang et al (2008) studies is that the blog readers are not trying to communicate and/or make friends with the bloggers or other blog readers. Even the blogs of friends are not much commented. They are just for reading, seeing photos and feeling updated on friends' lives. The likelihood of ever commenting, however, increases if it's a friend's blog.

Blog readers like to get to know opinions of other people; they are attracted to interesting way of thinking. Moreover, they seek recommendations on different topics, e.g. what books to read, what movies to watch, where to travel. They also rely on information published in personal blogs more than on the information offered by companies, and are rejecting the marketing messages and advertising in blogs. According to Kaye (2010), blog users are searching for support and validation of their own opinions and for help to make up their minds on important issues. Blogs offer variety of opinions and a personal analysis of the events.

Both marketing and mass media experts (Stauffer, 2002; Singh et al, 2008; Kent, 2008; Ruggiero, 2000; Mangold & Faulds, 2009) stress the importance of interactivity in blogs, and 90 percent of blogs are interactive (Lenhart, 2006:20, in Kent, 2008). Stauffer (2002) suggests that blogs invite active participants as opposed to passive consumption of the content. Nevertheless, participants of this study were not actively engaging in the possibility to comment and engage in the "on-going collective conversation" (Singh et al, 2008), even though they were actively using blogs for affiliation. Other components of interactivity such as trackbacks and permalinks were used more actively. Some of the respondents mentioned using trackbacks and permalinks if they were interested to continue reading on the topic of interest in another blog, and one mentioned that it is important how categories and links are used in the blog, how blog is linked to other blogs. Although respondents of this study were not actively engaging in providing comments, it doesn't mean that companies should not take interactivity into consideration. This said, blog readers enjoy having the freedom to choose whether to comment or not comment, and think that they should be given this opportunity. In addition, Kent (2008) claimed that messages posted to blogs are usually followed by threaded dialogue that many readers find more compelling than the blog postings. This was true for findings of this research to the extent that almost all of the respondents stated that they were reading the comments of others. The reasons for this were: to get more knowledge, information, for entertainment or to know the opinions of others.

Personality of the blogger was a significant reason for reading blogs. It might also be the reason why certain blogs are followed for a longer time (as indicated from the responses from the interviewees), and it's a reason to choose a blog to read if the blogger is a celebrity. This is in line with the study of Karlsson (2007) and the study of Li et al (2010) that blog readers are attracted to the personality of the blogger. Moreover, interviewees saw similarities and wanted to be more similar to their favorite bloggers in things that they are interested in but not that successful in, e.g., photography, view on life, art of writing blogs or expressing opinions. Two of the respondents stressed that bloggers have to be their age or close to their age. This was one of the factors contributing to similarity in the study of Karlsson (2007) where consumption of blogs was based on gender, age, place of living, race/ethnicity and education level. Moreover, Li et al (2010) discovered that blog readers are able to recognize the personality of the blogger from the way of writing, and is attracted to those bloggers that are similar to them.

The respondents stressed the importance of the blog's presentation. This motivation wasn't covered in previous studies on reasons for reading blogs. However, it provides valuable and practical information for marketing communications. Based on interviewees' responses several categories they considered important emerged: frequency of updates, writing and photos, connectedness and ease of use, as well as design. From the responses it was clear that those were not the main reasons for reading blogs but those were, nevertheless, important, for instance, to attract and keep the blog reader's interest. If the blog is not updated frequently (according to the needs of the audience), the text is not well written (e.g. is not fun, understandable, personal, inspirational, and doesn't match what the reader is looking for), the background color doesn't facilitate reading, then there's a greater likelihood that the reader will lose her interest and choose another blog that would better satisfy her needs.

Moreover, many of the blogs do not offer much written information, instead they consist mostly of photos, and one just scrolls them down to get inspiration or/and become acquainted with trends in fashion. This is probably a later trend compared to previous studies that are about analyzing blogs that consist of written information (Karlsson, 2007; Li et al, 2010). The presence of photos in the blog seemed to be a matter of personal preference or it was connected with the type of blogs chosen. For instance, according to the interviewees, fashion blogs are supposed to have photos, but news blogs or science blogs can have little or no photos. It is possible that people who prefer blogs with many photos are more interested in taking a look at pictures than reading. They have different needs, and they choose different blogs to satisfy them.

5.2. Blog reading patterns

The most common ways to find blogs among the respondents was by using *Google* search engine, social media (blogs and social networking sites) and following friends' recommendations. Thus, the task for the companies is to "make friends" with the Internet search engine *google.com*, and have the blogs as high as possible, to promote their blogs, so that people are talking about them, and to promote them with the help of other social media. One fourth of the interviewees were following blogs on *Facebook*. The mini-blog *Twitter* was also used to follow blogs, thus the companies should consider also this medium as a way to promote their blogs. Other ways to find blogs included TV (famous bloggers) and websites.

Therefore, the author suggests companies to consider having an integrated approach to marketing communications, as well as to include a combined social media approach in their marketing communications strategies (use other social media to promote their blogs).

Moreover, the companies have to know how eager their target audience is to receive new updates because this can vary from several times a day to once per two weeks, hence the most common way to read blogs was several times a week. Although the readers adapt to the frequency of updates offered by their favorite blogs, it's worth considering that not having frequent updates increases the likelihood for the blog readers to lose interest in the blog. This was discovered in the study of Karlsson (2007) where she concluded that the reason to stop reading a blog is infrequent updates. According to Singh et al (2008) blogs are time-sensitive and can play a significant role in engaging the customer through on-going communications, which in turn can help support brand loyalty.

Among the respondents it was common to follow several blogs, five on average, and spend about 30 minutes on average on reading all of the blogs. This should be considered by the companies, which intend to use blogs or are using blogs as part of their marketing mix, in order to provide interesting and valuable information that instantly captures the blog reader's rapidly fading interest. This can be combined with the finding that the blog readers prefer posts that are not very long, which means that their intention is not to spend much time on reading.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1. Summary of the results

The purpose of the study was to explore how and why young women in Sweden are reading blogs. To reach this purpose, qualitative method was chosen and 12 women were interviewed. After analysing the data, it was discovered that young women in Sweden are reading blogs because of following reasons: personal interest in the topic; seeking inspiration and knowledge; personality of the blogger; seeking information; seeking opinions and recommendations; affiliation (friends and fashion); personal fulfillment; complement to traditional media and books; presentation of the blog; and specific features of the blog. Some of the findings on the reasons for blog reading were in line with the previous studies, however, not all of the previously found reasons for blog reading were found in this study, and some new reasons emerged.

Author of the study also explored several patterns of blog reading that she deemed to be valuable to the companies that are interested to use blogs or are already using blogs in their marketing communications:

How often the blogs are being read?

How much time is spent on blog reading?

How often/what the blog readers are commenting?

How do blog readers find blogs?

How many blogs blog readers are reading regularly?

How do blog readers receive information about updates?

What types of blogs blog readers are reading?

The blog readers were reading blogs on various topics. They were following lifestyle blogs, fashion blogs, photo blogs, news blogs, friend's blogs, personal blogs, health blogs, social media blogs, scientific blogs, and blogs with recipes, blogs about movies or books, blogs about places to visit and blogs about how to raise children. The two most popular categories were fashion blogs and friend's blogs.

The blog readers were reading regularly 5 blogs on average, several times a day to once per 15 days. Time spent on reading blogs - 5 minutes to 2 hours with average time spent on reading blogs - 30 minutes. Blogs were found by using *Google* search engine, friends' recommendations, other social media (blogs, social networking sites), websites, and television (famous bloggers). To receive information about new blog posts, blog readers were adding them to favorites, subscribing to them, using *Twitter* and *Facebook*.

By analyzing the results, it was concluded that the companies should know their target audience: its demographics (e.g. age, gender, occupation) as well as their interests. Since blog readers are attracted to personality of the blogger and to similarities, the author proposes having a blogger for a corporate blog who is from the target audience and shares the same interests. Other suggestion is to know which popular bloggers the target audience prefers, and initiate cooperation with them because they are opinion leaders and blog readers are open to the influence of WOM. This, however, should be done with consideration that blog readers tend to trust bloggers and their recommendations, and they are rejecting marketing messages and advertising trying to "sell" products or services through blogs.

Companies should not only think about the message they want to bring across but also about making it appealing and memorable. One of the ways to do this is by providing recommendations on different topics their target audience is interested in as well as ensuring offering interesting opinions. Important is also to inspire. Many of the blog readers are searching for inspiration - for new ideas in the areas of their interests and for positive emotions that would lift their spirits. Blog readers like if the blog is fun, has attractive, qualitative, personal photos and speaks the language the reader speaks. Very important aspect is the frequency of updates, followed by writing, quality and length of posts, photos and the personality of the blogger. The more interested the person will be in the personality of the blogger and topics she offers to consider, the more likely she will keep on following the blog.

Important features offered by blogs and appreciated by blog readers are freedom, informality and personal touch, as well as the feeling of having the power to choose and correct. Bloggers can express their opinions; an ordinary person can become a writer, and nobody is here to stop them and censor them. Moreover, blog readers enjoy being the ones who "censor". One of the common reasons to ever provide comments is to correct a mistake published by the blogger. These features shouldn't be ignored in marketing communications and companies shouldn't

loose the informal, personal way of writing and should offer the readers to engage in conversation with the blogger and other blog readers, as well as to link the blog with other sources of information.

6.2. Limitations and future studies

This study used a qualitative method to explore how and why young women in Sweden are reading blogs and this method possess some limitations. Due to the fact that qualitative method was used, the results of the study, although providing an insight into the minds of the consumers, young women in Sweden, cannot be generalized. Moreover, the snowball sampling was used, due to the fact that it was not simple to identify the members of the population who are reading blogs. Other limitation of this study due to the method was that analysis of the data was subjective. Thus, the list of possible reasons can serve as a benchmark for further studies. A quantitative study could be conducted where young women in Sweden could verify how much they agree with the themes on reasons for reading blogs, as well the patterns of blog reading. Moreover, all of the women of this study were pursuing higher education. Therefore, another suggestion is to take this into consideration and explore blog reading among young women in Sweden who do not have higher education.

Moreover, interviewees revealed that there might be reasons that are more important than others in maintaining their interest in a blog. Taking into consideration, that companies might use blogs to build relationships with their customers and increase brand loyalty, it would be interesting to discover by using quantitative method the reasons that are important to maintain the interest of the blog readers in the long run. The author of the study assumes that seeking information might not lead to long-term interest in a blog because of its purposive character.

Other interesting area would be to assess how personality of blog readers affects their choice of blogs, as well as the reasons for reading them. This is because blog readers showed that they are having different preferences towards different blog features.

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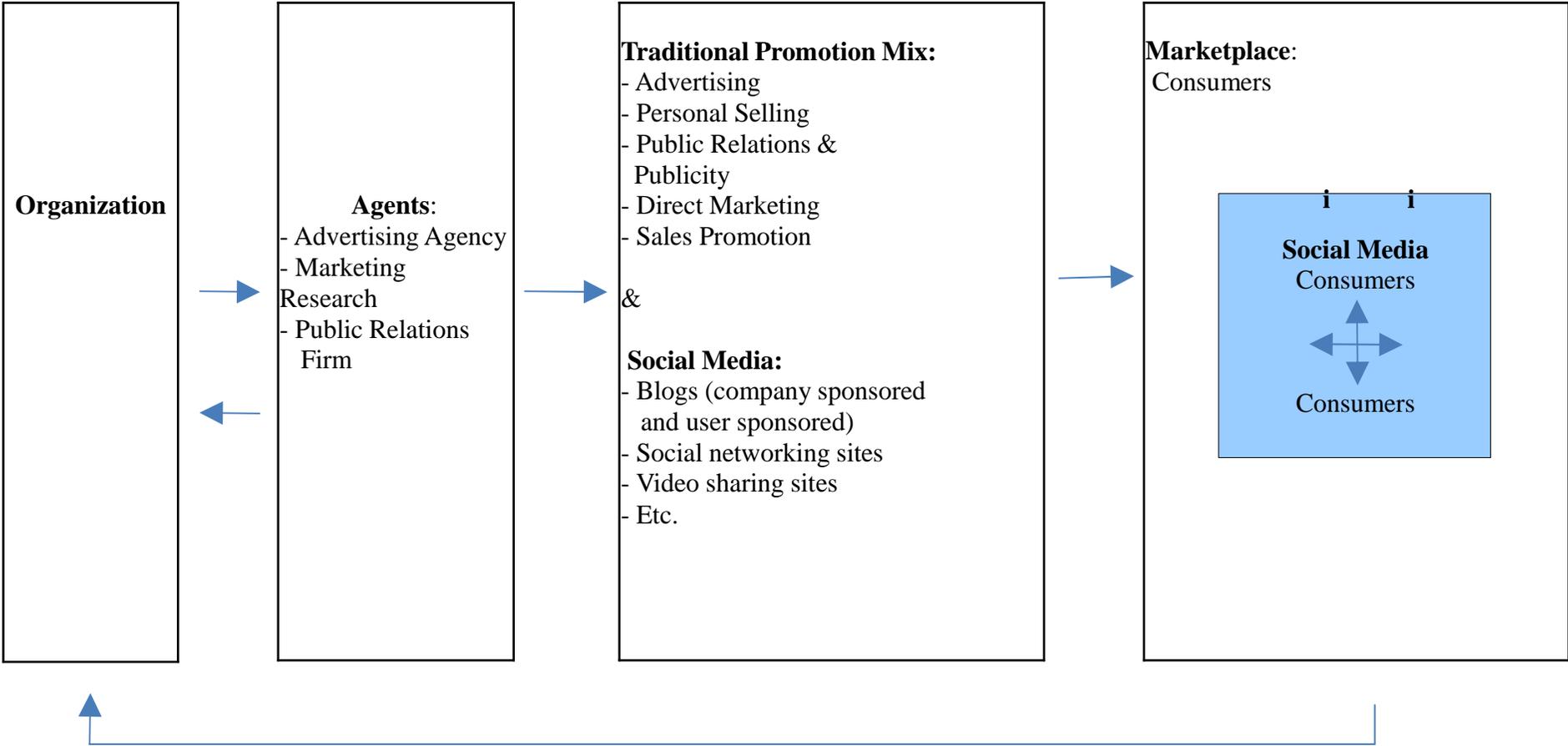
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Appendix 1



The new communications paradigm

(Mangold & Faulds, 2009)

Appendix 2

Interview Guide

1. What do you do?

Study/work

2. How old are you?

3. How often do you use Internet?

How many hours per day?

What are the main reasons why you use it?

4. How often do you read blogs?

5. How much time do you spend on reading them?

6. How many blogs do you follow?

7. Are there any blogs you're reading on a regular basis?

8. What type of blogs do you read?

9. How do you find the blogs you're interested in?

10. What are your favorite blogs? Why?

Probes: writing/ photos/ blogger's personality/ alternative to media

11. What keeps your interest in reading a certain blog?

Probes: frequency of updates/ blogger's personality/writing

12. How do you keep yourself updated about the latest posts?

13. How often do bloggers have to update their blogs?

14. What makes you to lose interest in a blog?

15. Do you comment? If yes, what do you usually comment on?

16. Do you read the comments of others?

17. How important it is for you to have the possibility to comment?

18. Do you blog?

If yes, what do you blog about?

If no, why not?