Trust And Source Credibility In Consumer Engagement:

A Fashion Blog Perspective

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of trust and credibility in consumer engagement (CE), as well the dimensions of consumer engagement relevant within the fashion blog context. A netnographic approach was applied, analyzing the content of a sample of influential fashion blogs, allowing themes to emerge from the data. The findings supported previous literature on trust and source credibility and confirmed the relevance of trust and credibility as an antecedent to engagement. A conceptual model was developed as an analytical tool for exploring the different dimensions of consumer engagement and by integrating social identity theories; this study provides further insight into the previously unsupported social dimension of CE. The findings of this study also led to the discovery of three dimensions of CE unique to the fashion blog context, *cognitive behaviours*, *social behaviours*, and *social cognition*. Overall, this thesis provided further insight into the developing theory of consumer engagement and validates fashion bloggers as an effective channel for marketing communications.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Consumer engagement (CE) has emerged as an important topic in the marketing literature in the past decade, with researchers attempting to understand its theoretical roots or conceptual domain (e.g., Brodie et al., 2011; Vivek, 2009; Vivek et al., 2010; van Doorn et al., 2010; Hollebeek, 2011; Calder et al., 2009), the antecedents of CE (e.g., van Doorn et al., 2010; Anderson & Mittal, 2000; Palmatier et al., 2006; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; de Matos & Rossi, 2008; Schau et al., 2009), the multidimensionality of CE (e.g., Brodie et al., 2011; Patterson et al., 2006; Vivek et al., 2010; Hollebeek, 2011; Mollen & Wilson, 2010; Vivek, 2009; van Doorn et al., 2010; Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010) and the consequences of CE on consumer behaviour (e.g., Sedley, 2008; Neff, 2007; Voyles, 2007; Brodie et al., 2011; Hoyer et al., 2010; Kothandaraman & Wilson, 2001; Nambisan & Nambisan, 2008; Brakus et al., 2009; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Calder et al., 2009; Wang, 2006; Vivek et al., 2010; Brodie et al., 2013; van Doorn et al; 2010). The need for further understanding of the concept is recognised by the Marketing Science Institute (MSI), who named "consumer engagement" as a key area of research in the 2010-2012 *Research Priorities* contributing to enhanced insight into consumer behaviour in complex, interactive and/or co-creative environments (MSI – Marketing Science Institution, 2010).

The notion of "engagement" is not new to the academic literature and has theoretical roots in psychology, sociology, political science, and organisational behaviour (Hollebeek, 2011), leading to varying approaches to theorisation and measurement of CE in the marketing field. The conceptual domain of CE has drawn on various consumer behaviour theories to define CE (e.g., Brodie et al., 2011; van Doorn et al, 2010; Calder et al, 2009). For example, several authors have conceptualized CE from Vargo and Lusch's (2008) "Service Dominant (S-D) Logic" (e.g., Brodie et al., 2011), McQuail's (1983) summary of the Uses and Gratification (U&G) theory (e.g., Calder et al., 2009), and Hirschman's (1970) Voice and Exit model (e.g., van Doorn et al., 2010). Though these conceptualisations provide a broad foundation for the theoretical roots of CE, there is not enough literature to support the use of these different conceptualisations and how they apply to CE within different contexts, such as online settings.

Consensus is slowly emerging in the marketing literature that the term "engagement" is appearing to replace concepts such as "participation" and/or "involvement" (Brodie et al., 2011) of consumers and therefore requires distinguishing. Brodie et al. (2011, p. 9) provide a general definition that distinguishes CE from previous concepts and will be used as the working definition of CE for the purposes of this study:

> "Customer engagement (CE) is a *psychological state* that occurs by virtue of *interactive, co-creative customer experiences* with a *focal agent/object* (e.g. a brand) in focal service relationships. It occurs under a specific set of context dependent conditions generating differing CE levels; and exists as a *dynamic, iterative process* within service relationships that *co-create value.* CE plays a *central role* in a nomological network governing service relationships in which other relational concepts (e.g., involvement, loyalty) are antecedents and/or consequences in iterative CE processes. It is a *multidimensional concept* subject to a context- and/or stakeholder-specific expression of relevant cognitive, emotional and/or behavioural dimensions."

As suggested by Brodie et al.'s (2011) definition of consumer engagement, much of the academic literature supports the notion of CE as being multidimensional (e.g., Brodie et al., 2011; Patterson et al., 2006; Vivek et al., 2010; Hollebeek, 2011; Mollen & Wilson, 2010; Vivek, 2009; van Doorn et al., 2010; Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010). Yet there is little agreement among researchers on the core dimensions of CE, and whether the identified dimensions in a particular context can be replicated in other contexts. As a result, the multidimensionality of CE requires further research and understanding. The various views on dimensionality of CE are identified and discussed in the literature review chapter.

Beyond the theoretical roots, conceptual domain, and the multiple dimensions of CE, researchers have examined the antecedents and consequences of CE that highlight the importance of the concept in the marketing field. Previous relational concepts such as involvement and participation have been identified as antecedents to CE (Vivek et al., 2010). Attitudinal antecedents such as consumer satisfaction (Anderson & Mittal, 2000; Palmatier et al., 2006), brand commitment (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999), brand attachment (Schau et al., 2009), brand performance perceptions (Mittal et al., 1999) and trust (de Matos & Rossi, 2008) have also been investigated with very high or very low levels of these factors leading to engagement (van Doorn et al., 2010). The literature surrounding the consequences of CE

equally highlight the importance of the concept as it has been found to represent a strategic imperative for generating enhanced corporate performance, including sales growth (Neff, 2007), superior competitive advantage (Sedley, 2008) and overall profitability (Voyles, 2007). It has been found that engaged consumers play a vital role in viral marketing (Brodie et al., 2011), new product/service development (Hoyer et al., 2010; Kothandaraman & Wilson, 2001; Nambisan & Nambisan, 2008), and co-creation of experience and value (Brakus et al., 2009; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). There is also a suggested link between CE and superior advertising effectiveness (Calder et al., 2009; Wang, 2006).

With the exception of Brodie et al.'s (2013) study on CE in virtual brand communities and Lee et al.'s (2011) research into the motivations of consumers to engage in online communities, few studies have been conducted on consumer engagement in the online environment. CE online is an important area of research due to the rapid growth and popularity of Web 2.0 as a platform for marketing communications, the interest in online consumer experiences and how these influence the consumer decision process. Blogs in particular are gaining more attention from academics as a topic of interest in the marketing literature (e.g., Chiang & Hseih, 2011; Kulmala et al., 2012; Chu & Kim, 2011; Halvorsen et al., 2013; Li & Chen, 2009; Hsu & Tsou, 2011; Chu & Kamal, 2008; Mendoza, 2010; Pihl & Sandstrom, 2013; Lee et al., 2011; Pihl, 2013) due to the interest in eWOM, trust and source credibility and the effects on consumer behaviours.

Blogging as a form of eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth) is prominent in the marketing literature and focuses on the WOM (word-of-mouth) marketing origins (e.g., Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Engel et al., 1969; Gilly et al., 1998; Chu & Kim, 2011; Li & Du, 2011), and supports WOM marketing as one of the most influential sources of marketing (e.g., Arndt, 1968; Alreck & Settle, 1995; Lee & Youn, 2009) due to the power of WOM to influence consumer purchasing decisions (e.g., Goldenberg et al., 2001; Herr et al., 1991; Davidow, 2003; Lee & Youn, 2008).

A major theme that attributes blogging's success as a marketing platform is trust and source credibility (e.g., Hung & Li, 2007; Halvorsen et al., 2013; Li & Chen, 2009; Hsu & Tsou, 2011; Ulicny & Baclawski, 2007; Chu & Kamal, 2008; Cheung et al., 2009; Mendoza, 2010; Johnson & Kaye, 2004; Pihl & Sandstrom, 2013), which can be related to the literature on consumer engagement that found trust to be both an antecedent and consequence of CE

(e.g., de Matos & Rossi, 2008; van Doorn et al., 2010; Vivek et al., 2010), highlighting the need for further research into CE in blogs.

An emerging topic in the blogging literature that is of particular interest is fashion blogs and fashion bloggers (e.g., Kulmala et al., 2012; Mendoza, 2010; Colliander & Dahlen, 2011; Allen, 2009; Halvorsen et al., 2013; Rudolph, 2013). Fashion bloggers are one of the loudest and most influential voices in the fashion industry today (Rudolph, 2013) and companies and brands are harnessing the power of the fashion bloggers as they begin to tap into the blogs as an effective marketing channel (Colliander & Dahlen, 2011; Corcoran, 2010; Allen, 2009; Mendoza, 2010; Halvorsen et al., 2013). Allen (2009) attributes the success of the fashion blogger as a marketing channel to the freeing of communications brought on by the internet, there has been a shift of communication from sender to receiver, and consumers are now active participants in marketing communications through user-generated content (Mendoza, 2010; Halvorsen et al., 2013).

It is clear from reviewing the literature that there is a gap regarding consumer engagement within the fashion blog context that requires further research and understanding. The aim of this thesis is, therefore, to understand how CE operates within the context of fashion blogs. This is achieved by a qualitative approach that attempts to: (i) explore the role of trust and source credibility in determining consumer engagement; (ii) identifies the dimensionality of CE within the context. This exploratory approach is necessary given the lack of studies on CE in fashion blogs. As such, the study is guided by the following two research questions:

1. **To what extent does trust and source credibility influence consumer engagement in fashion blogs?**
2. **What dimensions of consumer engagement are relevant to fashion blogs?**

In order to answer the research questions, a netnographic approach was deemed most appropriate due to its naturalistic, immersive, unobtrusive, adaptable and context-focussed nature (Kozinets, 1998).

The remainder of this thesis is organized as follows: Chapter 2 reviews the current literature on consumer engagement and blog marketing to frame the research questions. Chapter 3 elaborates on the use of netnography and the methodology used to carry out this research, including data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 presents the findings outlining the

main dimensions of CE in the fashion blog context. This is followed by chapter 5, which discusses the implications, theoretical and managerial, of the findings and the contribution of the study to the marketing field. The chapter concludes with the limitations of the study and areas of future research as well as summary of the findings and how the aims of this thesis have been fulfilled.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

To fulfil the objective of this thesis and provide further insight into consumer engagement relevant to fashion blogs, the current literature must be reviewed in order to gain understanding of concepts and theories relevant to the aims of the thesis and provide justification for further research. The review will commence with the theoretical roots and conceptual domain of consumer engagement (e.g., Brodie et al., 2011; Vivek, 2009; Vivek et al., 2010; van Doorn et al., 2010; Hollebeek, 2011), the antecedents and consequences of CE (e.g., van Doorn et al., 2010; Anderson & Mittal, 2000; Palmatier et al., 2006), and the dimensions of CE (e.g., Brodie et al., 2011; Patterson et al., 2006; Vivek, 2009; van Doorn et al., 2010). Followed by a review of the literature on blog marketing, covering blogs as a form of eWOM (e.g., Chu & Kim, 2011; Li & Du, 2011; Kulmala et al., 2012) and the themes of trust and source credibility relevant to the success of blogs as a marketing platform (e.g., Hung & Li, 2007; Halvorsen et al., 2013; Hsu & Tsou, 2011; Chu & Kamal, 2008; Mendoza, 2010). This leads to a review of the marketing literature on fashion blogs (e.g., Kulmala et al., 2012; Mendoza, 2010; Colliander & Dahlen, 2011; Allen, 2009; Halvorsen et al., 2013; Rudolph, 2013), which provides justification for fashion blogs as a context for this research. The review concludes with a conceptual model of the dimensions of CE and how these are suggested to relate to fashion blogs, to be used as an analytical aid for the remainder of the thesis.

Consumer Engagement

Consumer engagement is an emerging topic in the marketing literature, with the concept becoming more prominent in the last decade. The majority of the literature focuses on defining the term "consumer engagement", drawing on the theoretical roots and conceptual domain of CE (e.g., Brodie et al., 2011; Vivek, 2009; Vivek et al., 2010; van Doorn et al., 2010; Hollebeek, 2011; Calder et al., 2009). Through defining CE, much of the literature agrees the concept is multidimensional (e.g., Brodie et al., 2011; Patterson et al., 2006; Vivek et al., 2010; Hollebeek, 2011; Mollen & Wilson, 2010; Vivek, 2009; van Doorn

et al., 2010; Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010), however the varying ideas on what the dimensions of CE are highlights the need for further research into the concept. Research into the antecedents (e.g., Vivek et al., 2010; Anderson & Mittal, 2000; Palmatier et al., 2006; van Doorn et al., 2010; Schau et al., 2009) and the consequences (e.g., Brodie et al., 2011; Neff, 2007; Sedley, 2008; Voyles, 2007; Hoyer et al., 2010; Kothandaraman & Wilson, 2001; Nambisan & Nambisan, 2008) highlight the importance of CE as a marketing tool and the effects it can have on consumer behaviour, indicating that CE is a topic of interest to both marketing academics and managers.

It is apparent from the literature that the definitions of customer engagement and consumer engagement are the same and the two terms have been used interchangeably within the literature, however for the purpose of this study the concept will be referred to as consumer engagement (CE).

Theoretical Roots of Consumer Engagement

As discussed in the introduction, the concept of CE is an emerging topic in the marketing literature and requires further understanding from both marketing managers and academics alike. It is important to define the concept of consumer engagement more specifically as the terms "engage" and "engagement" appear to be replacing more traditional concepts such as "involvement" and/or "participation" (Brodie et al., 2011). In order to gain a better understanding of the term engagement, it is important to distinguish it from previously used terms. Different interpretations of customer engagement have emerged from the literature, and address the concepts of "attachment", "connection", "participation" and/or "emotional involvement", which are used to describe more specific engagement forms (Brodie et al., 2011).

Brodie et al. (2011) suggest that the conceptual roots of customer engagement can be explained from drawing upon theory that addresses the interactive experience and value co-creation within marketing relationships. These conceptual roots were articulated by Vargo and Lusch's (2008) "service dominant (S-D) logic", a theoretical lens which offers a more transcending view of marketing relationships versus the more traditional, transactional based approaches labelled by Vargo (2009) as a "goods dominant" perspective. This perspective recognises that certain consumer behaviour outcomes are generated by customers'

interactive, value co-creative experiences with organisations and/or other stakeholders (Brodie et al., 2011) and these behaviours may be interpreted as "engaging" (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). This is consistent with Van Doorn et al.'s (2010) findings that address customer engagement behaviours, which result from motivational drivers including word-of-mouth (WOM) activity, customer-to-customer (C2C) interactions and/or blogging activity. Coinciding with Vargo and Lusch's (2008) S-D logic, the authors suggest, "customer engagement behaviours go beyond transactions", and can be defined as "customers' behavioural manifestations that have a brand- or firm-focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers (p. 254).

Calder et al. (2009) expand on the consumer engagement discussion by drawing comparisons with the uses and gratification (U&G) theory, which provides a functionalist approach as to why people use media. Because the U&G literature is vast, Calder et al. (2009) draw upon McQuail's (1983) concise summary of the theory. McQuail (1983, p. 82-83) summarises the U&G theory into four categories; (1) information – finding out about relevant events and conditions in immediate surroundings, society and the world; seeking advice on practical matters or opinion and decision choices; satisfying curiosity and general interest; learning, self-education; gaining a sense of security through knowledge; (2) personal identity – finding reinforcement for personal values; finding models of behaviour; identifying with valued others; gaining insight into one's self; (3) integration and social interaction – gaining insight into the circumstances of others; social empathy; identifying with others and gaining a sense of belonging; finding a basis for conversation and social interaction; having a substitute for real-life companionship; helping to carry out social roles; enabling one to connect with family, friends and society; and finally (4) entertainment – escaping, or being diverted from problems; relaxing; getting intrinsic cultural or aesthetic enjoyment; filling time; emotional release; sexual arousal.

As discussed in the introduction, Brodie et al. (2011) provide a general definition that distinguishes CE from previous concepts and will be used as the working definition of CE for the purposes of guiding this thesis. The authors define CE as a psychological state in focal service relationships that co-create value, and describe the concept as multidimensional, subject to a context-dependent expression of relevant cognitive, affective and/or behavioural dimensions.

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Dimensions of Consumer Engagement

Drawing from the theoretical roots of consumer engagement, the idea of CE as multidimensional was prominent within the marketing literature. According to Brodie et al. (2011) the most comprehensive definitions of consumer engagement acknowledging the existence of cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions are provided by authors including Patterson et al. (2006), Vivek et al. (2010), Hollebeek (2011), and Mollen and Wilson (2010); while Vivek (2009), Van Doorn et al. (2010), and Phillips and McQuarrie (2010). It is important to note that the emotional dimension of CE can also be labelled affective (e.g., Vivek et al., 2010) or attitudinal (e.g., van Doorn et al., 2010) and these terms are interchangeable.

Patterson et al. (2006) were among the first to discuss consumer engagement within the marketing literature and the different dimensions that encompass the concept. The authors put forward four specific customer engagement components, including (a) absorption: the level of customer concentration on a focal engagement object, such as a brand/organisation; (b) dedication: a customer's sense of belonging to the organisation/brand; (c) vigor: a customer's level of energy and mental resilience in interacting with a focal engagement object; and (d) interaction: the two-way communications between a focal engagement object and subject.

Drawing from Patterson et al. (2006), Brodie et al. (2011) propose the concept of consumer engagement comprises of three dimensions; cognitive, emotional and behavioural. The cognitive aspect of engagement refers to the process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experiences, and the senses. In terms of attitude, it is defined by Ostrom (1969) as reflecting values and attributes to an attitude object, including beliefs regarding the object and characteristics of the object. The second dimension, emotional, refers to the affective component of attitude; Ostrom (1969) defines this as the expression of like or dislike, feelings, and emotional reactions to an attitude object. The final dimension, behavioural, is defined by Ostrom (1969) as a reflection of personal action tendencies; the behavioural dimension should be reflective of past action, future intentions, and predicted behaviour. Patterson et al.'s (2006) components of engagement can be related to Brodie et al.'s proposition of the attitudinal components of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural as dimensions of CE. Absorption corresponds to the cognitive dimension of engagement and dedication relates to the emotional dimension. While the latter two dimensions, vigor and

interaction reflect the behavioural dimension of engagement. In addition to this, Hollebeek (2011, p. 6) defines "customer brand engagement" as the level of a customer's "motivational, brand-related, and context-dependent state of mind characterised by specific levels of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural activity in brand interactions".

Consistent with Brodie et al. (2011) and Hollebeek (2011), Vivek et al. (2010) identify cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions of consumer engagement, however the authors also identify a fourth dimension; social. According to Vivek et al. (2010), the cognitive and affective components of CE incorporate the experiences and feelings of consumers, and the behavioural and social aspects relate to the participation of both current and potential consumers, within and outside of exchange situations. The authors state that CE "involves the connection that individuals form with organisations, based on their experiences with the offerings and activities of the organisation" (Vivek et al., 2010, p. 133). The social dimension of consumer engagement can be related back to Lee et al.'s (2011) findings on social identity within online communities.

Mollen and Wilson (2010) apply multidimensional aspects to customer engagement by distinguishing engagement from involvement. The authors suggest customer engagement extends beyond involvement by encompassing a proactive, interactive customer relationship with a specific engagement object. The authors also propose online "brand engagement" comprises of several dimensions, including "sustained cognitive processing", "instrumental value" (i.e., utility and relevance), and "experiential value" (i.e., emotional congruence with the narrative schema encountered in computer mediated entities) (p. 5). These dimensions are consistent with Vargo and Lusch's (2008) findings that suggest customer engagement behaviours lie within the transcending view of relationships articulated within the S-D logic, which highlights interactivity and customer experience. Similar to the S-D logic, Vivek et al. (2010) recognise the central role of consumer engagement from what the authors term an "expanded relationship marketing" perspective. The authors suggest this perspective highlights the importance of maintaining enduring, value-laden interactive customer relationships (e.g. Christopher et al., 1993; Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and value co-creation (e.g. Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

Expanding further on the multidimensional aspects of CE, Vivek (2009) identifies five dimensions of consumer engagement; (1) awareness, (2) enthusiasm, (3) interaction, (4) activity and (5) extraordinary experience. Awareness refers to the consciousness and

knowledge of the consumer and the author suggests the higher the intensity of engagement, the higher the extent to which the consumer thinks about their interactions with the focus to engage. Enthusiasm, as identified by the author, signifies strong excitement or passion when engaging and states that enthusiastic consumers are more likely to explore the offering/activity and take risks or overcome difficulties to participate. The third dimension proposed by Vivek (2009), interaction, represents the exchange of ideas, thoughts, and feelings with others. The author states engaged consumers seek others who have similar interests and interact with them, and suggest interaction is more prominent when engagement generates social benefits. Activity, the fourth dimension of CE as suggested by the author, represents the action component of engagement. Activity relates to the participation behaviours of consumers and is stated by the author as an essential dimension of consumer engagement. The final dimension put forward by Vivek (2009) is extraordinary experience and draws from Privette's (1983) definition of extraordinary experience as the "sense of newness of perception and process" (p. 1366) and are suggested to be intense, positive and intrinsically enjoyable (Arnould & Price, 1993). Vivek (2009) suggests that being engaged provides experience "beyond the ordinary" (p. 62).

Van Doorn et al (2010) also provide five dimensions for consumer engagement, however these differ from Vivek's (2009) definitions and are proposed to be: (1) valence, (2) form/modality, (3) scope, (4) nature of impact and (5) customer goals. According to the authors, valence conveys whether the engagement is positive or negative and includes all engagement has potential short or long-term positive/negative impacts on the brand/organisation based on the valence of the content. The form/modality refers to the different ways in which consumers can express CE. With reference to Bolten and Saxena-Iyer (2009), the authors identify three behaviours that compose form/modality; in-role behaviours, extra-role behaviours and elective behaviours. In-role behaviours refer to consumer behaviours that occur within the parameters defined by the organisation, e.g. complaint behaviours. The authors identify extra-role behaviours as discretionary activities in which consumers can choose engage in (e.g. offering useful suggestions to other consumers or informing staff of incorrect pricing). Elective behaviours are those in which consumers choose to engage in to reach their consumer goals (e.g. making suggestions for product/service improvement to the organisation). The third dimension of CE as identified by van Doorn et al. (2010) is scope; this refers to the temporal and geographical aspects of engagement. Temporal aspects of engagement can be momentary or on going and

geographical aspects of engagement can be local or global. In online engagement behaviours it is assumed geographical aspect is always global. The fourth dimension put forward by van Doorn et al. (2010), nature of impact, refers to the impact of the engagement on the organisation's activities; the impact can be measured in terms of immediacy, breadth, intensity, and longevity of the impact. Finally consumer goals, the fifth dimension as proposed by the authors, refers to consumers' intentions when engaging and focuses on three questions; "to whom is the engagement directed, to what extent is the engagement planned, and to what extent are the consumers' goals aligned with the firm's goals?" (van Doorn et al., 2010, p. 255).

Phillips and McQuarrie's (2010) study focuses on advertising engagement rather than CE, however the authors provide important insight into the dimensions of consumer engagement within the fashion context, which is central to this thesis. The authors propose consumers engage with fashion advertising in order to (1) act, (2) identify, (3) feel and (4) immerse. Engaging to act refers to the consumer's view of the advertisement, the consumers engage with the products in the advertisements solely in preparation for action (e.g. purchasing the product). When engaging to identify, the authors suggest the consumer pays close attention to the imagery of the advertisement rather than the products. The main focus is the appearance and potential personality characteristics of the model in the advertisement, as the consumer is looking to identify with that model. The fourth mode of engagement as suggested by Phillips and McQuarrie (2010), engaging to feel, refers to the consumers approach to the advertisement images primarily to obtain a desired emotional response. Consumers using this mode of engagement judge advertisements through the personal and idiosyncratic associations the images conjure. The final mode of engagement as proposed by the authors, engaging to immerse, refers to the consumer's immersion in the advertising image. Consumers in this engagement mode are highly influenced by aesthetic elements and look for creative, innovative, and evocative images to engage with.

While there is debate amongst the literature with regards to the different dimensions of CE, it is agreed that consumer engagement is indeed multidimensional. Although the labels and definitions of the dimensions change, all of which expand on Brodie et al.'s proposition of cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions.

Table 1. Engagement Dimensionality within the Marketing Literature

Authors	Concept	Definition	Dimensionality
Patterson et al. (2006)	Customer engagement	The level of a customer's physical, cognitive, and emotional presence in their relationship with a service organisation	Multidimensional: 1. Absorption 2. Dedication 3. Vigor 4. Interaction
Vivek (2009)	Consumer engagement	The intensity of a customer's participation and connection with an organisations offerings and/or its activities	Multidimensional: 1. Awareness 2. Enthusiasm 3. Interaction 4. Activity 5. Extraordinary Experience
Vivek et al. (2010)	Consumer engagement	The intensity of a customer's participation and connection with an organisations offerings and/or its activities initiated by either the customer or the organisation	Multidimensional: 1. Cognitive 2. Affective 3. Behavioural 4. Social
Mollen and Wilson (2010)	Online Brand engagement	The customers cognitive and affective commitment to an active relationship with the brand as personified by the website or other computer-mediated entities designed to communicate brand value	Multidimensional: 1. Sustained cognitive processing 2. Instrumental value 3. Experiential value

Van Doorn et al. (2010)	Customer engagement behaviour	Customers' behavioural manifestation toward a brand or firm, beyond purchase, motivated by drivers such as word of mouth activity, recommendations, blogging, writing reviews	Multidimensional: 1. Valence 2. Form/Modality 3. Scope 4. Nature of impact 5. Customer goals
Phillips and McQuarrie (2010)	Advertising engagement	Modes of engagement are routes to persuasion	Multidimensional: Customers engage to: 1. Act 2. Identify 3. Feel 4. Immerse
Hollebeek (2011)	Customer brand engagement	The level of a customer's motivational, brand related and context-dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, affective and behavioural activity in interactions with brands	Multidimensional: 1. Cognitive 2. Emotional 3. Behavioural
Brodie et al. (2011)	Customer engagement	A psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a focal agent/object (e.g. a brand)	Multidimensional: 1. Cognitive 2. Emotional 3. Behavioural

Antecedents of Consumer Engagement

Following on from the definition and theoretical roots of consumer engagement, the literature goes on to discuss the antecedents of CE. Van Doorn et al. (2010) draw comparisons between customer engagement and the voice and exit components of Hirschman's (1970) classic model in relation to the antecedents of CE. Hirschman (1970) states within his model, customers may choose to exercise voice (communication behaviours designed to express their experience) or exit (behaviours designed to reduce or expand their relationship with the brand). In Hirschman's (1970) conceptual model, it is loyalty that may drive a consumer's choice of behaviours. Van Doorn et al. (2010) propose certain consumer behaviours such as participating in brand communities, blogging, and suggesting design improvements to a product may imply both voice and exit (or non-exit through relationship strengthening) behaviours.

Drawing upon voice and exit behaviours, van Doorn et al. (2010) discuss antecedents of customer engagement. The authors outline the attitudinal antecedents to include customer satisfaction (e.g. Anderson & Mittal, 2000; Palmatier et al., 2006), brand commitment (e.g. Garbarino & Johnson, 1999), trust (e.g. de Matos & Rossi, 2008), brand attachment (e.g. Schau et al., 2009), and brand performance perceptions (e.g. Mittal et al., 1999). The authors state that generally either very high or very low levels of these factors may lead to engagement and these factors lead to the multidimensional aspects of CE.

Vivek et al. (2010) identify participation and involvement as antecedents to CE. The authors argue that participation is central to CE; however it is also distinct from CE and a predecessor for consumer engagement behaviours. Vivek et al. (2010) suggest that participation positively influences engagement, with reference to Dabholkar's (1990) definition of customer participation as the degree to which the customer is involved in producing or delivering the service. The authors argue that customer participation engages consumers in an interactive situation that is of common interest to the firm as well as the consumer, which can lead to high levels of enthusiasm and subsequently greater engagement with the entity (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006).

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Consequences of Consumer Engagement

Great interest in the subject comes from literature that has found customer engagement to represent a strategic imperative for generated enhanced corporate performance, including; superior competitive advantage (Sedley, 2008), sales growth (Neff, 2007) and overall profitability (Voyles, 2007). A greater understanding of the concept is necessary because it has been found that engaged customers play an important role in viral marketing efforts by providing recommendations and/or referrals for products, services and/or specific brands to other consumers (Brodie et al., 2011). It has also been found that engaged consumers play a key role in new product/service development (Hoyer et al., 2010; Kothandaraman & Wilson, 2001; Nambisan & Nambisan, 2008) and in co-creating experience and value (Brakus et al., 2009; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). In addition to these findings, there is a suggested link between customer engagement and superior advertising effectiveness (Calder et al., 2009; Wang, 2006).

In contrast to van Doorn et al. (2010) who identified similar aspects as *antecedents* of consumer engagement, Vivek et al. (2010) identify value, trust, affective commitment, word of mouth, loyalty and brand community as *consequences* of consumer engagement. The authors suggest that high levels of consumer engagement produce higher levels of trust in the relationships between brand and consumer, as well as affective commitment with a brand, a greater amount of word-of-mouth activity, higher levels of brand loyalty, and create a stronger brand community. Brodie et al.'s (2013) research on CE within the virtual brand community context produced similar consequences, identifying; (1) loyalty and satisfaction, (2) consumer empowerment, (3) connection and emotional bonds, and (4) trust and commitment as the four most notable consequences of CE.

In line with the literature on the multidimensional aspects of the concept of engagement but in contrast to Vivek et al. (2010), van Doorn et al. (2010) propose the consequences of customer engagement to be cognitive, attitudinal and emotional, stating engagement can lead to increased or decreased levels of these dimensions in regards to future interactions with a brand/organisation. In addition to these consequences, van Doorn et al. (2010) propose engagement can lead to the shaping and reinforcement of social identity, stating "identities related to an in-group (based on culture, brand preferences, consumption patterns, and ethnic groups) can be powerfully enforced by [consumer engagement]" (van

Doorn et al., 2010, p. 259). This is somewhat consistent with Vivek's (2009) findings that suggest engagement is more significant when it generates social benefits.

Consumer Engagement in Online Communities

Brodie et al. (2013, p. 107) provide a working definition of customer engagement within virtual brand communities:

"Consumer engagement in a virtual brand community involves specific interactive experiences between consumers and the brand, and/or other members of the community. Consumer engagement is a context-dependent, psychological state characterised by fluctuating intensity levels that occur within dynamic, iterative engagement processes. Consumer engagement is a multidimensional concept comprising cognitive, emotional and/or behavioural dimensions, and plays a central role in the process of relational exchange where other relational concepts are antecedents and/or consequences in iterative engagement processes within the brand community."

The broad definition from Brodie et al. (2013) will provide direction for the exploratory nature of this thesis, as central to this definition is that customer engagement embodies specific interactive consumer experiences, much like those within a fashion blog community. The authors discuss the increasingly active participants within the emerging internet environment, through interactive processes consisting of multiple feedback loops and immediate and potentially real-time communication (Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). De Valck et al. (2009) provide examples of virtual interaction and communication tools including, electronic discussion forums, bulletin boards, list servers, chat rooms, newsgroups, email, personal web pages, social networks and blogs. The authors discuss how these tools are able to enable and facilitate new and extended forms of interactive consumer experiences, which in turn contribute to the development of customer engagement.

In addition to multiple communication tools provided in the internet environment, de Valck et al. (2009) discuss the effects of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) within virtual brand communities and how these may be significant to customer engagement, as recommendations can occur at virtually no cost and spread at a rapid pace, both within and beyond the virtual brand community. The authors state that brand community members (e.g. fashion blog communities) share an interest, which produces affinity and may therefore create

a bond as well as generating consumer feelings of empowerment (Cova & Pace, 2006). These qualities along with the perceived credibility of specific consumer evaluations make the virtual brand community a powerful, interactive engagement platform for consumer-to-consumer (C2C) recommendations (Sawhney et al., 2005). Porter & Donthu (2008) define the virtual brand community as an environment where the community members and visitors through individual and collaborative effort, create and co-create value for themselves, other members and/or organisations.

Brodie et al.'s (2013) research paper found consumer engagement to be an interactive, experiential process, based on individuals' engagement with specific objects, and/or other brand community members. The authors reiterate consumer engagement to be a context-dependent, psychological state with specific levels of intensity. The authors also state the consumer engagement process is often instigated largely through the customer's need for information. The authors describe the process as highly interactive, experiential and based on multiple sub-processes, including "learning", "sharing", "advocating", "socialising" and "co-developing" (p. 112).

Lee et al. (2011) explore online communities with a specific focus on brand communities and determine what motivates consumers to engage in online community behaviours. The authors highlighted social identity to be an important motivation of individual engagement behaviour in online brand communities. Dholakia et al. (2004) identify social identity as a defining motivation for consumers to identify themselves as members of an online community, satisfy fundamental social needs, and maintain positive social identity by participating in social behaviours with their in-groups. Cummings et al. (2002) elaborate by arguing many of the traditional benefits of social belonging; support and acceptance have been found to translate to online communities as well as offline and can be positively associated with individuals' online community engagement behaviours.

The review of the literature on consumer engagement supports the need for further investigation into the concept. For example, while many of the authors agree CE is multidimensional, these dimensions do not replicate and there are differing views on what these dimensions are. The need for research into CE in online settings was also highlighted by the lack of literature regarding CE in different contexts; a context of particular interest regarding CE is the blogosphere. This requires a review of the literature on blog marketing.

Blog Marketing

In the Web 2.0 movement, blogs were an early creation and established a new paradigm of interactivity that challenges the unidirectional nature of information in traditional media (Chiang & Hsieh, 2011). As businesses begin to use blogs as a profitable marketing tool it is important to understand blogs and what they can do for brands and organisations by reviewing the literature. Academic marketing literature on the topic of blogs has so far focussed on the impact of blog marketing on consumers (e.g., Chiang & Hsieh, 2011; Kulmala et al., 2012), as a form of eWOM (e.g., Lee & Youn, 2009; Li & Du, 2011; Henning-Thurau et al., 2004; Manafy, 2010; Hung & Li, 2007; Chu & Kim, 2011; Kulmala et al., 2012) and the trust and credibility associated with the success of blogs as a marketing channel and source of eWOM (e.g., Halvorsen et al., 2013; Hung & Li, 2007; Li & Chen, 2009; Ulicny & Baclawski, 2007; Chu & Kamal, 2008; Johnson & Kaye, 2004; Colliander & Dahlen, 2011). Subsequent to the literature on blog marketing and the effects of trust and credibility on eWOM communications, is the topic of fashion blogs and the power of the fashion blogger to influence consumer behaviour (e.g., Rudolph, 2013; Colliander & Dahlen, 2011; Allen, 2009; Mendoza, 2010), which draws from previous findings on blog marketing.

Blogging and eWOM

The significance of word-of-mouth (WOM) in influencing consumer decision-making has been well recognised in marketing and advertising literature for decades (Engel et al., 1969; Gilly et al., 1998; Chu & Kim, 2011). Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) define WOM as the act of exchanging marketing information among consumers, stating that it has a very important role in changing consumer attitudes and behaviours towards products and services. Consumers often rely on WOM when searching for information before making purchasing decisions because it is created and delivered by what is perceived to be a more trustworthy source of information than messages generated by companies (Feick & Price, 1987). WOM communications have a stronger credibility than other forms of marketing, as there is no direct connection between the sender and the merchant, thus causing the information received to be viewed as subjective and independent. For this reason, in WOM recommendations, the receiver puts more emphasis on the sender of the message than other aspects of the communication (Dichter, 1966), this allows the communication to be more persuasive as the sender may have a better understanding than the receiver.

In WOM marketing, it is often an opinion leader, someone who is more interconnected and has a higher social standing, who delivers product information, provides product recommendations, gives personal comments, and supplements professional knowledge that can aid companies in promoting products (Li & Du, 2011). Li and Du (2011) go on to define WOM as a type of viral marketing and an informal way of exchanging information between consumers about certain products and services, including their characteristics, usage and ownership, and shifts communication from business-to-consumer (B2C) to consumer-to-consumer (C2C). For these reasons, WOM is considered to be one of the most influential sources of marketing in the marketplace (Arndt, 1968; Alreck & Settle, 1995; Lee & Youn, 2009). Advertising professionals have long known the importance of WOM communications and opinion spreaders, whose WOM exerts a strong influence on information dissemination (Goldenberg et al., 2001) product judgements (Herr et al., 1991), consumer satisfaction and repurchase intentions (Davidow, 2003). The power of WOM to influence consumers' decision making processes is clear within the literature and has long been known to marketers (Lee & Youn, 2008); however with the introduction of the internet, WOM marketing has become even more important within the marketing literature (Brickart & Schindler, 2001; Dellarocas, 2003) and has established a new form of marketing known as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM).

Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) define eWOM as "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" (p. 39). EWOM occurs on a wide range of channels, including but not limited to, blogs, emails, consumer review websites and forums, virtual consumer communities and social networking sites (Chu & Kim, 2011). Although eWOM has many similarities to the traditional WOM, electronic word-of-mouth has several unique qualities. Most often, eWOM occurs between consumers who have little to no relationship with each other (Lee & Youn, 2009) and Chatterjee (2001) describes this strength of relationship between sender and receiver as one of the most distinct differences between eWOM and its traditional counterpart. Consistent with this, eWOM can be anonymous (Dellarocas, 2003; Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006; Sen & Lerman, 2007), which allows consumers to share their opinions more comfortably with others without sharing their identities (Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006). The unique characteristics of eWOM encourage consumers to share information (Lee & Youn, 2011), therefore the amount of eWOM shared on the internet is increasing (Chatterjee, 2001) and diverse individual consumers are

connecting through eWOM, allowing a consumer's WOM network to open and expand from immediate contacts to the entire world and more consumers are utilising the eWOM network for product information and purchasing decisions (Cheung et al., 2009). Li and Du (2009) describe eWOM as dynamic and identify social blogs as a platform for delivering eWOM through which opinion leaders can exert influence.

Moore (2010) establishes consumers frequently create and search for information to reduce the risk in making purchase decisions and according to Manafy (2010); eWOM in fact exerts the greatest influence on purchasing decisions today. In correspondence with Manafy's (2010) findings, Hung & Li (2007) believe advice from other consumers exerts a greater influence than all marketer-generated content combined. EWOM within virtual communities is said to enhance consumers' susceptibility to the opinions of fellow consumers (Kozinets, 1999) as a result of source credibility and binding social norms; thus effective eWOM can be created through group cohesion (strong/weak ties), relational motivations and network structures. In addition to these findings, Chu & Kim (2011) attribute consumers' overall eWOM use to tie strength, trust, and normative and informational influences. In online communities consumers do not solely seek information, but also social relationships and entertainment (Kulmala et al., 2012).

In recent years, fashion blogs in particular have become a popular form of user-generated content; accordingly the fashion industry is showing increasing interest in fashion blog marketing (Kulmala et al., 2012) and the encouragement of eWOM activities is especially evident in fashion blogs (Corcoran, 2010). Marketers have acknowledged the need to encourage consumer-to-consumer (C2C) eWOM; this has been done through rewarding opinion leaders with free products and services, vouchers and discounts (Ryu & Feick, 2007). The naturally occurring and rich content of online blogs is very useful for fashion companies and marketing managers are increasingly taking actions to influence C2C interactions through opinion leader programmes and viral marketing (Kulmala et al., 2012); however, the authors also found that in order for blog marketing to be effective and credible, the marketed items, designers and brands must fit with the bloggers' personal style. This is supported by Kozinets et al. (2010), who state that for blog marketing to be successful, it is essential for companies and brands to examine the character narratives of the blogger and the prevailing culture of the blog.

Kulmala et al. (2012) analyse eWOM in fashion blogs with particular focus on organic eWOM versus amplified eWOM. According to the Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA) (2011), organic eWOM occurs naturally when a consumer wants to share with other consumers a positive or negative experience with a company, while amplified eWOM occurs when a marketer launches a campaign or in some way or another encourages others to speak about a brand or product. EWOM marketing is especially evident within the fashion blogosphere where brands and designers are a crucial part of displaying one's style to others and therefore, fashion blogs can be considered as branded storytelling where visual and textual elements are arranged so that brands become characters in the plot (Kretz and de Valck, 2010). Personal topics such as personal style, expertise, and experiences with trends or a product or service are popular topics in organic discussions according to Thomas et al. (2007). Bloggers generally prefer to create a positive atmosphere and therefore post mainly positive eWOMs (Kulmala et al., 2012); if a blogger has a negative experience it usually goes unspoken and negative eWOM is generally found in the comments. Amplified eWOM is often written to resemble organic content (Kulmala et al., 2012) and for marketers one of the most influential ways of blog marketing is through gifting a blogger with a piece of clothing that he/she then incorporates into their content in the same way as they would with items they purchased themselves (Corcoran, 2010). Because the items are presented in a way that resembles the bloggers' organic content, it becomes very difficult for consumers to tell the difference between organic and amplified eWOM. This "integrated" form of marketing has caused controversy in the past as it blurs the line between editorial and promotion. As an attempt to bring to light the rapidly evolving brand-blogger relationships, changes to the Federal Trade Commission in the United States guidelines require bloggers to disclose when they receive free merchandise or are paid by a brand (Corcoran, 2010). Despite these regulations, amplified content continues to resemble organic content and remains a powerful source of eWOM marketing. While the marketer attempts to exert influence over the content of amplified eWOM, it is ultimately at the hands of the blogger (Kulmala et al., 2012); the content therefor remains somewhat organic and thus credible and influential.

Blogging and Trust and Source Credibility

A strong theme among the literature regarding blogging and marketing is perceived trustworthiness and source credibility. As earlier discussed, word-of-mouth is widely known as one of the most trusted and credible forms of marketing (Hung & Li, 2007) and as a form

of eWOM, it comes as no surprise that blogs are perceived as a credible source of marketing communication (Halvorsen et al., 2013; Li & Chen, 2009).

Source Credibility

The theory of source credibility states that an audience is more likely to be persuaded when the source is perceived as credible (Hovland et al., 1953; Ohanian, 1991). In addition, scholars have long known that the increased personalisation of mass media, especially communications that resemble interpersonal communication, can increase the credibility and persuasiveness of advertising messages (Beninger, 1987). Much like other channels of communication, blogs feature a source, content, and receivers, all of which contribute to a blog's perceived credibility (Ulicny & Baclawski, 2007). According to Hsu and Tsou (2011) blogs are perceived as a powerful source of information regarding products and the authors identify blogs as a way for consumers to acquire the newest and most advanced information, and therefore enhance product knowledge or receive updates on the progression of products.

Expertise and trustworthiness are the two most common dimensions of source credibility according to Hovland et al. (1953) and Ohanian (1991). Expertise is defined by Hovland et al. (1953) as the extent to which the communicator is perceived as qualified to provide accurate and valid information on a particular subject. Trustworthiness refers to the perception of the audience that the source of communication provides information in an honest, fair, sincere and honourable manner (Ohanian, 1991). In contrast to this, Romani's (2006) findings suggest that when product information is communicated through misleading practices, consumers develop lower levels of trustworthiness towards the communicator and therefore have negative effects on purchase intentions. Another dimension of source credibility commonly discussed in the literature is attractiveness (Baker & Churchill, 1977; Choi et al., 2005); defined by McCroskey and McCain (1974) as the source's perceived social value, such as physical appearance, personality, social status, or similarity to the receiver. Joseph (1982) found that physically attractive sources are often more liked by audiences and therefore have a positive impact on attitudes and product evaluations. The three dimensional model of expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness provides sound theoretical framework for discussing source credibility of fashion bloggers.

Johnson and Kaye (2004) found reliance to be a strong predictor of perceived credibility in sources. In other words, the more a person uses a certain medium, the more credible they perceive it to be. This could translate to bloggers being perceived as credible

because viewers read them more often than other traditional media, or readers view blogs more often because they find them credible. The same study by Johnson and Kaye (2004) found that blog users rated blogs very high on depth of information (compared to traditional media); but found them to be extremely biased. The authors did not find this to be an issue however, because blog users often seek out information that supports their own views.

Chu and Kamal (2008) discuss the effects of perceived blogger credibility on message elaboration and brand attitudes; their findings suggest that when perceived blogger credibility was high, argument quality has a higher impact on brand attitudes. These findings support the use of bloggers as sources of advertising communication when the bloggers are perceived as a trustworthy and credible source of information. Reader evaluations of eWOMs such as fashion blogs rely significantly on the credibility of the writer (Cheung et al., 2009), Ohanian (1991) suggests that highly credible sources produce a more positive attitude and induce more behavioural compliance than sources that are perceived as less credible; therefore, fashion blogs are more likely to have a positive message evaluation because of the perceived credibility of bloggers. Much of the literature agrees that personal bloggers have high trust, credibility and recognition with their peers (Mendoza, 2010; Pihl & Sandstrom, 2013; Johnson & Kaye, 2004) and as a source of communication (Halvorsen et al., 2013). Bloggers are perceived as credible opinion leaders due to their personal interest, enthusiasm and excitement regarding the products and brands that they promote (Sedeke, 2012). The readers view the bloggers as credible due to their genuine approach and this can be excellent promotion for a brand/product.

Hsu and Tsou (2011) investigate the role of perceived blogger credibility in relation to customer experiences online. The author's findings indicate blogger credibility is crucial for facilitating customer experiences, which was found to be necessary in enhancing purchase intentions. Furthermore, the authors found that involvement with a blog increases the effects of consumer experiences online and therefore increasing purchasing intentions. This would suggest high levels of engagement within fashion blogs would increase purchase intentions among consumers and is therefore an important area of research.

Trust

In contrast to the findings of Johnson and Kaye; Colliander and Dahlen (2011) argue that there is a still a need for transparency in personal blogs and it is essential that the information remains unbiased. This is to ensure that the blog remains trustworthy and

credible as a source as the information is coming from "people like me" rather than corporations. Likewise, Hope (2002) finds that brand related messages on blogs are perceived as highly credible due to bloggers remaining independent from corporate interests. In order to maintain trustworthiness and credibility within fashion blog communications the United States Federal Trade Commission guidelines require fashion bloggers to disclose when they have been sponsored by a brand or received free merchandise in order to maintain this transparency (Corcoran, 2010).

Fashion Blogs

One of the loudest voices in the fashion industry today is the fashion blogger. With approximately 20 million blogs within the fashion and lifestyle blogosphere (Rudolph, 2013), fashion blogs have millions of admirers and followers. Fashion bloggers have transformed from consumers who are obsessed with fashion into icons within their field, "in the past a young woman interested in fashion might have been lucky to be featured in a magazine, now she is creating that environment herself. She can be a muse, celebrity, stylist, editor and publisher all at once" (Corcoran, 2010). Fashion bloggers represent the new generation of fashion and are surpassing celebrities and fashion magazines as the most influential people within the fashion industry. "Fashion and Lifestyle bloggers are a market of a new generation of fashion experts, fashion journalists and marketing tools. Nowadays, they are the designers, stylists, journalists, muses and models" (Rudolph, 2013).

Blogging and other forms of social-media engagement have been embraced by a number of major brands and companies (Colliander & Dahlen, 2011). Due to the breadth and inherent quality of fashion blogs to build and be part of networks (Berkman, 2008), marketers are beginning to tap into bloggers as additional channels of communication, with proposals from brands on the rise since 2008 (Corcoran, 2010). These channels, as Allen (2009) describes, have expanded in recent years and society is adapting and finding new ways to get their voice heard, as well as building relationships, socialising, interacting and learning. According to Mendoza (2010) consumers are now active participants in the production of content, people are taking control for them defined by their own interests and individualised agenda (Allen, 2009). Bloggers adhere to an audience interested in specific categories and therefore marketers can be confident their message will be transmitted their target audience (Mendoza, 2010). This is consistent with Halvorsen et al. (2013) who state that the blogging phenomenon has become an important marketing channel, allowing a new way of

communicating and sharing information through user-generated content. Allen (2009) states that the authoritative voice of the fashion journal is being challenged by assertive fashion bloggers; control has begun to shift from sender to receiver, as audiences are no longer passive and instead actively seeking out information and engagement. Allen (2009) goes on to say the rules of engagement have changed, top down communications no longer exist and we are witnessing the democratising of communication. The authors pins this down to the internet freeing communications, thus allowing this embrace and the celebration of the subjective nature of fashion. Corcoran (2010) believes that blogs offer a more conversational, integrated way of marketing to potential consumers as well as exerting more control over search engine results.

Deuze (2005) believes the internet gives way to a "new era of producer-consumer interaction" and consistent with earlier statements from Allen (2009) and Mendoza (2010), consumers are not just audiences anymore, they are active participants in the production of content that was formally exclusive to companies, describing bloggers and their blogs as a testament to this. Deuze (2005) therefore believes the evolution of bloggers into product endorsers as a natural process. The need for product endorsers stems from the concept of opinion leaders. According to Kotler et al. (2007), opinion leaders are individuals within a reference group who hold an influence over others due to knowledge, personality or special skills. Fashion bloggers serve as highly influential opinion leaders as they have high trust and recognition with their peers (Mendoza, 2010). As opinion leaders, fashion bloggers are able to advocate brands and products as tools that will allow others to be more like them (Mendoza, 2010). These bloggers are beginning to surpass celebrities as valuable product endorsers. While companies are able to bound celebrities by contracts that specify how much money the endorser receives, as well as having to maintain a certain personality that suits the brand and never failing to believe in the brand (Mendoza, 2010); the same cannot be done for bloggers. The successes of blogs stems from the fact that they are able to provide every point of view on a subject and are open to feedback from their audience (Fraser & Dutta, 2008). Bloggers have the ability to decide what they endorse and how they endorse it, therefore the endorsement may not solely include praises and admiration and therefore companies and brands must be prepared to receive criticism from a blogger they choose to approach (Mendoza, 2010). This means companies and marketers using bloggers as product endorsers are taking a risk. However, Mendoza (2010) describes the benefits of partnering with fashion bloggers; they have the ability to post on their products instantaneously, receive feedback

immediately and marketers are able to measure success through links and comments connected to the blog post. Newson et al. (2009) support this statement by stating blogs encourage interaction through comments and feedback, which can prove to be as important as the blog post itself; this can be a valuable tool for companies as it allows instant access to feedback from consumers regarding their products and services. As well as being less expensive than celebrity endorsers, fashion bloggers are more efficient than celebrity endorsements because of a "one-to-one" approach (Research Recap, 2008) resulting in what Deuze (2005) describes as an "empowered consumer" – one who eludes the clutter of traditional mass media.

Colliander and Dahlen (2011) found that blogs generate higher brand attitudes and purchase intentions. This is supported by an article published by *The New York Times* that reported a popular blog endorsement had helped one company's sales grow from $100,000 to $4 million in one year (Jaret, 2006). Colliander and Dahlen (2011) explain these effects by the bloggers' higher para-social interaction (PSI) with their users. PSI is described by Horton and Wohl (1956) as the illusion of a face-to-face relationship with a media performer. After repeated exposure to a blog, a relationship develops and because of this perceived intimacy, readers may begin to consider the blogger a friend (Colliander & Dahlen, 2011). This is supported by Corcoran (2010) who believes blogs can offer readers an intimacy that cannot be matched by print mediums; the author states that fashion magazines offer the untouchable fantasy while fashion blogs have the ability to keep it real and personal. Corcoran (2010) describes blogs as more interactive and accessible than other forms of media.

Part of the appeal of the fashion blogger is that they themselves are consumers. Research suggests audiences are more interested in real life people as they are able to identify themselves with them (Rudolph, 2013). Fashion blogs are perceived as a "street of fashion", a source of opinion and display real fashion within the general public (Bollier & Racine, 2005). Colliander and Dahlen (2011) describe bloggers as "fashionable friends" and liken the relationship between bloggers and audience to a powerful word-of-mouth relationship, thus the reader becomes more susceptible to the bloggers opinion. This is supported by *The Economist* (2009) who reported that contemporary consumers use blogs and social media to help make purchasing decisions because they rely on "recommendations from friends". This is consistent with Fraser and Dutta's (2008) findings that suggest consumers turn to family, friends and people who they consider are like them when choosing a source of information on a product before making purchasing decisions. Colliander and Dahlen (2011) warn that while

the relationship can be powerful, it can also be frail; it is highly important that the fashion blogger is seen as unbiased and as a credible source of information. The authors go on to explain that due to a bloggers' PSI, publicity becomes more sensitive to the readers' perceptions of source credibility and relationship with brands. Corcoran (2010) maintains this argument by stating it is important for fashion bloggers to stay true to their personal brand.

It is apparent from the fashion and marketing literature that fashion bloggers have become brands themselves and for the purpose of this thesis, will be treated as such in relation to the consumer engagement concept.

Conclusion

The review of the current literature on consumer engagement highlights the need for a greater understanding of the multiple dimensions of CE; while there is agreement among the authors that consumer engagement is in fact multidimensional (e.g., Brodie et al., 2013; Vivek, 2009; van Doorn et al., 2010; Vivek et al., 2010; Patterson et al., 2006), there is debate regarding what these dimensions are and how they relate to different contexts, this demands for further investigation into the proposed dimensions.

A developing topic in the consumer engagement literature was CE in online settings (e.g., Brodie et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2011), which encouraged further review of literature surrounding blog marketing. Similarities between the antecedents and consequences of CE and the effects of blog marketing on consumer behaviour, for example trust and credibility (e.g., van Doorn et al., 2010; Vivek et al., 2010; Halvorsen et al., 2013; Hung & Li, 2007; Li & Chen, 2009; Ulicny & Baclawski, 2007; Chu & Kamal, 2008; Johnson & Kaye, 2004), emphasize the need for further research into this gap in the literature. The literature supported the concept of fashion blogs as an topic of interest to marketing managers and academics alike by providing insight into the power of fashion blogs as a marketing channel (e.g., Rudolph, 2013; Colliander & Dahlen, 2011; Allen, 2009; Mendoza, 2010).

After reviewing the literature, there was a noticeable gap concerning emerging topics within the marketing literature in the way of the multiple dimensions of CE, CE in different contexts, and blog marketing with particular reference to fashion blogs. This thesis aims to explore this gap and provide a greater understanding of consumer engagement, the role of trust and credibility in CE, and the dimensionality of CE relative to the fashion blog context.

Conceptual Model

Dimensions of CE

There was much debate within the marketing literature regarding the different dimensions of consumer engagement, which demonstrates the need for further development of these concepts. The majority of the literature on CE is theoretically based and fails to apply the concept to the online context with the exception of Brodie et al. (2013) who explore CE within the virtual brand community context. It is important to note, Brodie et al. (2013) acknowledge the presence of the cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions of CE, however do not provide an in-depth analysis of how these dimensions apply to an online setting as this was not the focus of the research. The focus of this thesis, however, is to address these gaps in the literature and provide a comprehensive understanding of the different dimensions of consumer engagement and how these dimensions apply to the fashion blog context.

The dimensions deemed most appropriate for the fashion blog context, drawn from the literature from Brodie et al. (2011), Vivek (2009), and van Doorn et al. (2010), are; cognitive, affective, behavioural, awareness, enthusiasm, interaction, activity, social, and extraordinary experience. Definitions for these dimensions are provided below, Ostrom's (1969) findings on attitudes will be used as a basis for cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions, while the other dimensions are identified using the definitions put forward by the authors.

Cognitive Dimension

The cognitive dimension can be identified by the definition put forward by Ostrom (1969) as reflecting values and attributes to an attitude object, including beliefs regarding the object and characteristics of the object. In the case of this study the object refers to the blog content or the blogger herself.

Affective Dimension

The affective dimension can identified by the definition put forward by Ostrom (1969), as the expression of like or dislike, feelings, and emotional reactions to an attitude object. As well as the use of affective words, this includes the use of punctuation to express emotion or feelings, for example the use of exclamation marks, 'x' or 'o' as a symbol of kiss or hug, or the use of emoticons such as smiley faces.

Behavioural Dimension

The behavioural dimension can also identified using the definition from Ostrom (1969), who states the behavioural dimension should be a reflection of personal action tendencies and should be reflective of past action, future intentions, and predicted behaviour.

Awareness Dimension

The awareness dimension can be identified using the definition put forward by Vivek (2009); displays of consciousness and knowledge by the consumer. This is very similar to the cognitive dimension of engagement.

Enthusiasm Dimension

The enthusiasm dimension can be identified using the definition by Vivek (2009), who defines the enthusiasm dimension as strong excitement or zeal from the consumer. Like the affective dimension this included the use of words that display excitement or passion, as well as the use of punctuation to display these emotions, such as exclamation marks.

Interaction Dimension

The interaction dimension can be identified using the definition provided by Vivek (2009); the exchange of ideas, thoughts, and feelings with others. In the case of this study, it can include exchanges between blogger-to-consumer or consumer-to-consumer.

Activity Dimension

The activity dimension can also be identified using the definition provided by Vivek (2009); participation behaviours of consumers. Activity is similar to the behavioural dimension put forward by Brodie et al. (2011) and defined by Ostrom (1969), however the activity dimension focuses particularly on *participation* behaviours, this could include participating in the blog itself by commenting, or participating by purchasing items the blogger has displayed.

Social Dimension

The social dimension is not a developed theory in the literature, however was identified as one of the dimensions of CE by van Doorn et al. (2010). For the purpose of this thesis, the social dimension will remain open for interpretation, however it's theoretical roots

can be established in Lee et al.'s (2011) findings on social identity in online communities and social comparison theory as put forward by Festinger (1954). Social identity theory in online communities has theoretical roots in self-concept theory.

Social Identity Theory

At the very base of the self-concept theory, Rosenberg (1989) describes self-concept as representative of the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings that have reference to him- or herself as an object of thought. Building on self-concept is the theory of social identity; which Turner and Oakes (1986) define as the portion of an individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership in a relevant social group. The social group in the case of this study is the fashion blog online community, inclusive of the fashion bloggers and those who engage with the bloggers in the online environment. The fashion blogger acts as a group leader and a visual symbol of the in-group.

A key assumption within the social identity theory is that individuals strive for a positive self-concept (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and achieve this through multiple positive distinctiveness strategies, including individual mobility.

Individual mobility

Individual mobility occurs when group boundaries are permeable (a member could go from a low-status group to a high-status group) and an individual chooses to dissociate from the group to pursue individual goals that benefit them personally rather than the group as a whole.

Social Comparison Theory

Social comparison theory draws from the belief that there is a drive in individuals to gain an accurate self-evaluation (Festinger, 1954). Festinger (1954) explains how individuals evaluate their own opinions and abilities by comparing themselves to others in order to reduce uncertainty in these domains. Gruder (1971) found that a main motivation for social comparison is self-enhancement, with the use of upward and downward comparisons to increase self-esteem.

Willis (1981) first introduced the concept of downward comparison and defined it as a defensive tendency used as a means of self-evaluation. Individuals look to other individuals or groups they consider to be worse off than them in order to feel better about their own

situation and elevate their self-regard. In contrast to downward comparisons where similarities are dissociated, upward comparisons occur when individuals make comparisons highlighting similarities between themselves and other individuals or groups they perceive to be better off or superior in order to create a more positive perception of their self and improve self-esteem. Upward comparisons also motivate individuals or inspire self-improvement according to Collins (1995).
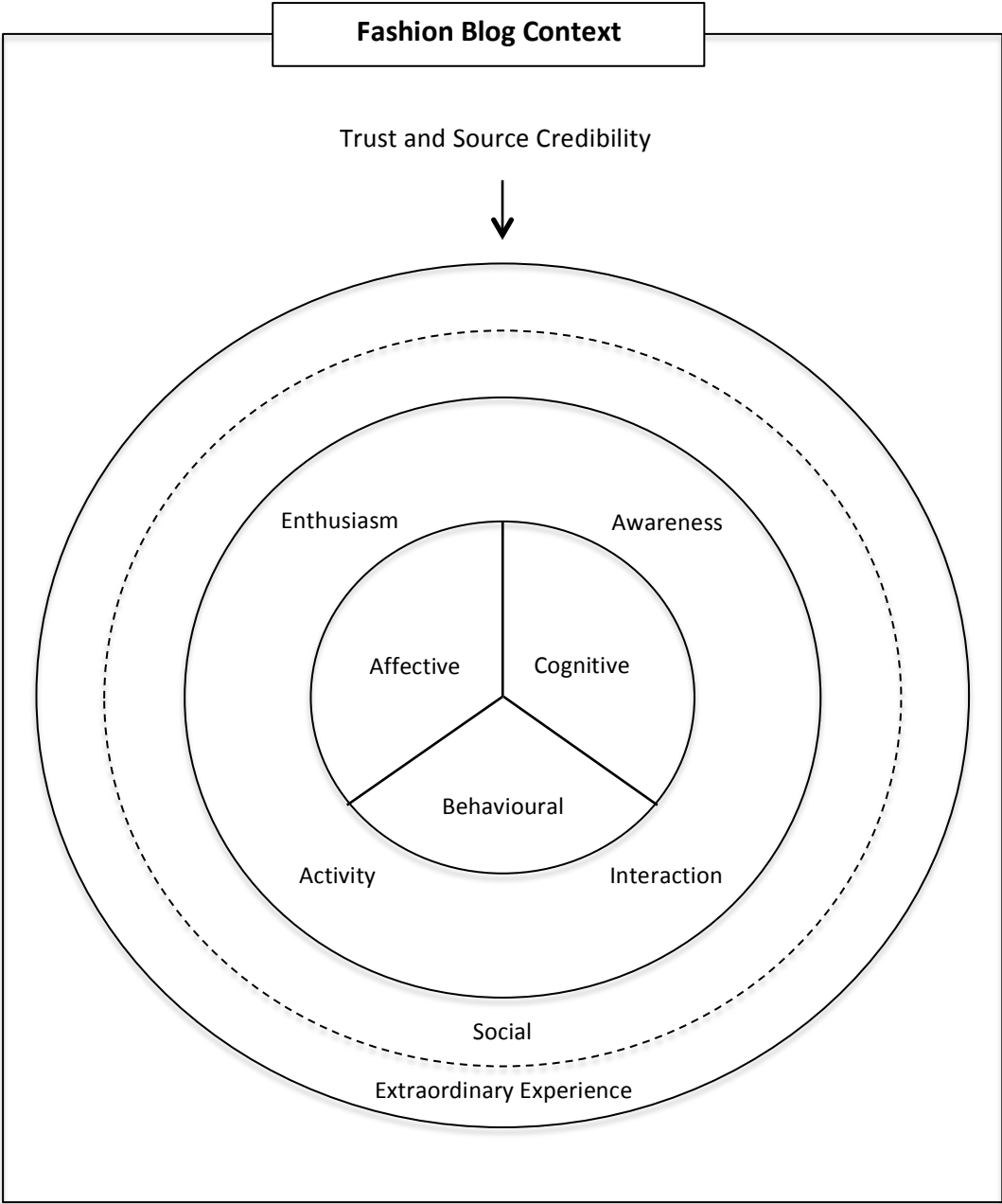
Extraordinary Experience Dimension

The extraordinary experience dimension can be identified using the definition used in Vivek (2009) provided by Privette (1983); a "sense of newness of perception and process" (p. 1366).

Conceptual Model

A conceptual model is developed drawing from the literature on the multiple dimensions of consumer engagement (e.g. Brodie et al., 2011; Vivek, 2009; Van Doorn et al., 2010). Clear links between the different dimensions of CE as put forward by several authors can be made and this has been conceptualised in a model, as shown in Figure 1. Initially, the model suggests trust and source credibility as an antecedent to consumer engagement within the fashion blog context. The conceptual model then illustrates consumer engagement as having three core dimensions; cognitive, affective and behavioural. These dimensions then become more in-depth in the next layer, which is applicable to form/modality as discussed by van Doorn et al. (2010), and refers to the ways in which consumers express engagement and can include in-role, extra-role and elective behaviours. The dimensions within this layer of the model draw from Vivek (2009); awareness, enthusiasm, interaction and activity. Two-way arrows have been used to indicate the possible relationships between the core dimensions and the second-level dimensions. The second-level dimensions are surrounded by an implied social (Vivek et al., 2010) dimension, shown through a dotted line to illustrate the implied nature of this dimension as it has not been fully explored in previous literature. Encompassing the conceptual model is Extraordinary Experience; suggesting the dimensions of consumer engagement lead to an overall extraordinary experience. Extraordinary Experience, as well as the core dimensions and next level dimensions, are represented with a thick black line in contrast to the social dimension, indicating strong literature support of these dimensions. The circular model is placed within a context that is the fashion blogosphere.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Consumer Engagement Dimensions within Fashion Blog Context

Fashion Blog Context

Trust and Source Credibility

Enthusiasm   Awareness

Affective   Cognitive

Behavioural

Activity   Interaction

Social

Extraordinary Experience

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this thesis is to address the gap in the literature regarding consumer engagement within fashion blogs. In order to explore this gap the research has been summarised into two research questions in relation to trust and credibility and the dimension of CE relative to the fashion blogs. A netnography has been deemed the most appropriate research method in order to explore consumer engagement within the fashion blogosphere, supported by the guidance of Kozinets (2010), who explains a clear definition of the technique and its practical use, as well as explaining any potential limitations and risks. For sampling, the ranking list "Style99 – The 99 Most Influential Fashion and Beauty Blogs" assembled by YM Ousley for Signature 9, was chosen as it was recognised as a credible, well researched ranking, containing an optimal amount of blogs. A sampling method was adapted from McQuarrie et al. (2013) to determine a sample of ten blogs appropriate to the nature of this research.

Research Questions

After reviewing the complex nature of consumer engagement in the literature, as well as how fashion blogs have become a prominent marketing tool in recent years, this thesis aims to address the gap in the literature in regards to CE within the context of the fashion blogosphere. The main aim of this study is to develop a greater understanding of the role of trust and credibility, as well as the multiple dimensions of consumer engagement relative to fashion blogs. The dimensions of consumer engagement were adapted from literature from Brodie et al. (2011), Vivek (2009), and van Doorn et al. (2010) and a conceptual model was created drawing from this literature, illustrating how the dimensions of consumer engagement may be applied to fashion blogs. Therefore, the research will use the conceptual model as an aid in analysing the data. The research questions, as discussed in the introduction are as follows.

1. **To what extent is trust and source credibility relevant to consumer engagement within fashion blogs?**

The first question asks whether the theme of trust and credibility, as reviewed in the literature, is relevant to engagement in this setting. The aim is to develop a greater understanding of the role of trust and source credibility, whether it is unique to the fashion blog context, and what effect it may have on engagement behaviours among consumers.

2. **What dimensions of consumer engagement are relevant to fashion blogs?**

The second research question addresses the dimensionality of consumer engagement relevant to the fashion blog context. The study will initially be looking for the presence of the different dimensions within multiple fashion blogs, and once the dimensions have been detected, the dimensions must be further analysed in relation to the context.

The aim of this study is to understand the different dimensions of CE within the fashion blog context and therefore it is important to understand how the different dimensions relate to each other and whether this is unique to the context. Due to the exploratory nature of this thesis, themes will be allowed to emerge from the data and dimensions that are unique to the context that have not been fully explored in the literature to date. This question aims to provide insight into consumer engagement in the fashion blog context and how this may differ from other online environments.

Through exploring and answering the research questions, this study aims to provide a clearer understanding of the role of trust and credibility in consumer engagement and the dimensions of consumer engagement and how these apply to the context of the fashion blogosphere.

Methodology and Sampling

In order to explore consumer engagement in fashion blogs and address the research questions, a qualitative approach was deemed the most appropriate. This study is exploratory because the concept of consumer engagement is an emerging topic in the marketing literature and needs to be further understood within different contexts. A qualitative study will allow

for themes to emerge from the data and is therefore best suited to answer the research questions and is vital for discovering new insights into CE theory. A qualitative approach has also been deemed appropriate because this study draws from literature from Brodie et al. (2011), Vivek (2009), and van Doorn et al. (2010), who also use a qualitative approach to explore consumer engagement. In order to answer the research questions, the comment section within fashion blogs in relation to the blog content has been chosen as an empirical setting where communication from consumers to the fashion blogger is most prominent and is therefore an appropriate data set for this study.

Netnography

A netnographic approach has been applied to analyse the different components of consumer engagement within fashion blogs. As the name suggests, netnography is a similar approach to the methods of ethnography that can be traced back to techniques used in cultural anthropology (Kozinets, 1998). Kozinets (2010, p. 1) describes that, similar to in person ethnography, netnography is naturalistic, immersive, descriptive, multi-method, adaptable, and focused on context. Netnography offers an unobtrusive approach to gaining consumer insight that is more naturalistic than surveys, quantitative models, and focus groups; making the approach ideal for the exploratory nature of this research as it is looking to discover themes and new ideas within the context as well as detecting the presence of established themes.

Kozinets (2010, p. 2) explains how the online environment offers nearly unlimited access to consumer to consumer communications that are; relevant and detailed, from a naturally occurring context, unelicited, obtained in an unobtrusive way and obtainable in a timely, effective, and efficient manner. This allows the data collected in a netnographic approach to be raw, authentic, unforced and highly involved. Possible limitations of the netnographic technique include a subjective data interpretation by the researcher influenced by their own perspective, as well as excessive simplification of data. Both possible limitations were taken into account during the data collection and analysis in order to achieve the most credible and reliable results.

Sampling

To identify an appropriate data set, a sample was chosen from Signature 9's Style99 "The 99 Most Influential Fashion and Beauty Blogs". This list is regularly updated with the most recent list being published on September 4, 2014, with research and maintenance led by YM Ousley for Signature 9. The Style99 was deemed as a suitable and credible ranking as it is the most up to date and data driven ranking of fashion blogs available. Unlike other rankings such as Teen Vogue's "Today's Top 100 Bloggers" or Harper's Bazaar's "14 Bloggers We Love", the Signature 9 ranking uses a method to score each blog in order to assemble the ranking; including sharing activity and links from other sources to determine the influence of the blog rather than relying on traffic numbers. This method is explained on the website:

> "After building our initial index of websites, a score is assigned to each blog based on link data and sharing activity across social networks. Links represent 30% of the total score, with weight placed on the number of unique linking websites rather than the number of links in general. Sharing activity across Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest represent 50% of the total score, with emphasis placed on the social actions that are more closely linked to the spread of content beyond its original source. Finally, while traffic isn't everything, it is 20% of the total score. We base the score on estimated unique visitors to a site during the first half of 2014." (Ousley, 2014)

The ranking contained an optimal amount of blogs from which ten suitable blogs that met the selection criteria could be sampled. The sampling method was adapted from procedures used by McQuarrie et al. (2013) as they also use a qualitative netnography method to explore theory in the fashion blog context. The authors identify five criteria for selecting fashion blogs:

- Every blog must be written as a consumer as a personal blog and therefore, brand, corporate, and retail blogs must be eliminated.
- Only amateur blogs were to be selected, therefore freelance photographers or journalists must be excluded from the sample.
- The sample can only contain blogs written by women, this is because men's and women's blogs tend to be quite different; men's blogs focus on the fashion of others while women focus on their own fashion choices.

- A homogenous sample must be sought, as this is suitable for in depth understanding, in the case of this particular research the sample will focus on women's personal style.
- The sample blogs must be written in English, as translated blogs may not capture the same word choice. A sample of 10 blogs was chosen as an appropriate sample size in accordance to McQuarrie et al. (2013).

The Style99 ranking was already organised by colour into 12 categories;

1. Bags and Purses
2. Beauty
3. Beauty – Hair
4. Fashion Business
5. Fashion News
6. Fashion Video and Film
7. Celebrity Style
8. Men's Personal Style
9. Men's Fashion and Style
10. Personal Style
11. Shopping
12. Street Style and Event

As per the selection criteria all categories were eliminated bar Personal Style. Eliminating blogs that did not comply with the selection criteria then chose a sample of 10 blogs.

Table 2. Sample Blogs

Name of Blog	Name of Blogger	Ranking
1. Atlantic Pacific	Blair Eadie	**#16**
2. Fashion Toast	Rumi Neely	**#18**
3. Gabi Fresh	Gabi Gregg	**#73**
4. Karla's Closet	Karla Deras	**#76**
5. Kayture	Kristina Bazan	**#81**
6. Sincerely Jules	Julie Sarinana	**#31**
7. Song of Style	Aimee Song	**#46**
8. Style Scrapbook	Andy Torres	**#45**
9. The Blonde Salad	Chiara Ferragni	**#12**
10. Wendy's Lookbook	Wendy Nguyen	**#44**

Data Collection and Analysis

Blog observation was the main tool in collecting data. According to Kozinets (2007, p. 138) blogs as a source of information can contain "rich, detailed, longitudinal data about individuals and their consumption practices, values, meanings and beliefs". The researcher's role in the data collection was unobtrusive and due to the nature of blogs, the data consisted of naturally occurring texts.

It was deemed that a week's worth of blog posts and the accompanying comments would provide an appropriate amount of data to analyse. The week of the fourth to 11th of September 2014 was chosen as it coincided with New York Fashion Week, a popular time within the fashion industry. This resulted in a data set of 41 blog posts and 4,801 comments to be reviewed and analysed. These blog posts and the relevant comments were saved as documents, and along with field notes were further analysed to identify displays of multidimensional consumer engagement by applying netnographic procedures and by reading the material repeatedly to identify emerging themes with relation to consumer engagement between the fashion blogger and consumer within the sample.

After initial observations were made, the sample was then randomly condensed to 200 comments to be coded and further analysed. The comments were categorised into the two types of commenters that were identified through the initial observation; *other bloggers* and *end consumers*. Other bloggers could be identified because they would leave a link to their own blog as a signature or have their blog name as their username when leaving comments. Whether commenters were other bloggers or end consumers was based solely on the content of the comment and it should therefore be noted that if no indication of a personal blog was made, the commenter was categorised as an end consumer.

Using Microsoft Excel, a codebook was created categorising the commenters into other bloggers and end consumers. The dimensions displayed within the conceptual model; cognitive, affective, behavioural, awareness, enthusiasm, interaction, and extraordinary experience, were used as the coding elements, and a column was added for field notes where notes of interest were made and emerging themes. The dimensions were identified using the definitions provided and the presence of a dimension was acknowledged with a tick in the corresponding column. An example of the codebook is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Example of Codebook

Code	Dimensions								Field Notes
Other Bloggers	C	Af	B	Aw	E	I	Ac	EE	**Field Notes**
Adrian Osle: "You look great. Greetings. NEW OUTFIT ON MY BLOG!!: http://diamondconestilopropio .blogspot.com.es/(HTML)" 11/09/14 *Gabi Fresh, Cherry, 11.09.14*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Self promotion Individual mobility
Elle: "You look so natural and beautiful! I love to write too, it feels like such a natural part of me. http://www.cherryblossomstre et.com (HTML)-Swedish blogger and Model in Tokyo" 4/09/14 *Kayture, Write Your Own Story, 4.09.14*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Social comparison
End Consumers	C	Af	B	Aw	E	I	Ac	EE	**Field Notes**
Christina: "I'm already trying to envision all the ways i'm going to wear this dress. You do it such justice!" 5/09/14 9:31AM *Atlantic Pacific, Dark Horse, 05.09.14*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		"going to wear this dress" implies purchase intentions Social comparison Trust + credibility
Shanay: "I just noticed that you are left- handed. I am too!!" 4/09/14 *Kayture, Write Your Own Story, 4.09.14*	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Social Comparison Relating to the blogger

The field notes were indicative of the themes and topics that emerged from the data outside of the eight dimensions already strongly supported in previous literature. This pertains to the role of trust and credibility and the *social* dimension, which is implied in the conceptual model but so far lacks the literature to fully understand its role in consumer engagement. The best examples of the blog comments have been selected to represent the dimensions or emerging themes.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The main aim of this research is to fully understand how the dimensions of consumer engagement apply to the context of fashion blogs. A conceptual model was developed to provide a working understanding of how the different dimensions may relate to different contexts and functions as an analytical aid when exploring the data. Following the methodology, the chosen method of netnography provided insight into the presence of trust and credibility and the different dimensions of CE and how those dimensions specifically relate to the fashion blog context. The netnography also allowed for themes to emerge from the data that supported the ideas regarding social dimension and provided further insight, and therefore a deeper understanding of how it relates to the fashion blog context and the other dimensions of consumer engagement.

Trust and Source Credibility

The initial aim of this thesis was to explore the role of trust and source credibility as discussed in the marketing literature and its relevance to CE within fashion blogs. The findings of trust and credibility in the data set support fashion bloggers as trustworthy and credible as perceived by their consumers. The findings particularly support the dimensions of trust and credibility such as transparency (Colliander & Dahlen, 2011) and expertise (Hovland et al., 1953), as well as the effects of trust and source credibility on consumer behaviours such as brand attitudes (Chu & Kamal, 2008) and purchase decisions (Hsu & Tsou, 2011).

> *"Andy, one of the reasons why I like reading your blog and following you on IG is because you are so clear and 'human', showing us, by posts and pics, what you are feeling! ... Thanks for being so real!" (Sonjin, September 4, 2015)*

The findings demonstrate the need for transparency in personal blogs as discussed in Colliander and Dahlen (2011) and how it can affect engagement. In the above example, Sonjin expresses her loyalty by stating she follows the blogger and attributes it to the blogger being 'clear' and 'human' and thanks her for being so real. This is indicative of the genuine

approach discussed in Sedeke's (2012) findings, which state bloggers are perceived as credible opinion leaders due to their personal interest, enthusiasm and excitement regarding the content they produce.

> *"I love that you team sportiness into your outfits. And if I'm going to listen to anyone about hair? You are my girl! Looking forward to seeing what you are up to" (Jenelle, September 8, 2014)*

The findings also support the suggestion that a major dimension of source credibility is perceived expertise (Hovland et al. 1953). By stating, "If I'm going to listen to anyone about hair? You are my girl", Jenelle is implying she believes the blogger to be an expert on hair styles and that she finds her to be a credible source of information on the subject of hair and would therefore trust her opinion. In relation to Hovland et al.'s (1953) definition of expertise, it is the extent to which the communicator is perceived as qualified to provide accurate and valid information on a particular subject. Evidence from the data set supports the perception of fashion bloggers as experts in their field, which is a significant aspect of trust and source credibility.

> *"What a beautiful store! So very well merchandised and although I am not the biggest BR fan, I might have to check out her designs at the store!" (Stephanie, September 5, 2014)*

The findings supported the notions that trust and source credibility can influence consumer brand attitudes (Chu & Kamal, 2008). In the above example, Stephanie is displaying how her trust in the blogger has affected her brand attitudes about Banana Republic and reading the blogger's thoughts on the brand has altered her opinions of the brand. This would suggest Stephanie also finds the blogger to be a credible source of information and supports the findings of Chu and Kamal (2008) who found high levels of perceived blogger credibility to have a higher impact on brand attitudes.

> *"Discovered your blog the other day. Absolutely obsessed. Impeccably chic style. You have inspired quite a few (a lot of) purchases!" (Carrie Robertson, September 11, 2014)*

As well as influencing brand attitudes, trust and credibility was also found to be relevant to fashion blogs in influencing purchase decisions, as suggested by Hsu and Tsou (2011). In the above example, Carrie Robertson is expressing the effects of trust and

credibility by admitting that by following the blogger, her purchasing decisions have been largely influenced. It is clear that Carrie trusts the blogger as a credible source of information as she has purchased items based on her suggestions. This is relative to Hsu and Tsou's (2011) study which found blogger credibility to be necessary in enhancing purchase intentions, the authors also suggested involvement with a blog can enhance purchase decisions.

> *"Thank you for showing us how great F21 jeans fit, I bought a high waisted one that fit like a glove" (Leelee77, September 8, 2014)*

Again, Leelee77 is displaying purchase decisions that were influenced by the fashion blogger. The above example shows involvement with the blog as she is referring to a past post, and by stating she has purchased the jeans based on the suggestion of the blog is a clear example of source credibility and trust. This is also an example of customer satisfaction in relation to the overall customer online experience as discussed in Hsu and Tsou (2011).

Dimensions of Consumer Engagement

The data provided evidence to support the presence of all of the proposed dimensions within the conceptual model, as well as providing further insight into the implied social dimension in the context of fashion blogs. The comments section of the sample blogs provided valuable insight into the different dimensions of consumer engagement within the context of fashion blogs. Table *x* illustrates examples of these dimensions present within the data set, with further explanation of how these dimensions relate to the fashion blog context below.

Cognitive dimension

The cognitive dimension was identified within the data set through the definition provided by Ostrom (1969) as reflecting values and attributes to an attitude object, including beliefs regarding the object and characteristics of the object. The data supported the proposed presence of a cognitive dimension to consumer engagement in the fashion blog context in relation to the conceptual model. The following examples illustrate the presence of the cognitive dimension within the comments sections of the sample blogs.

> *"I love this comfortable yet chic outfit specially the dress! Unfortunately the link to buy it is broken" (Clara, September 8, 2014)*

Clara is expressing beliefs regarding the characteristics of the outfit in the content of the post, "Ease" by *Kayture,* by stating the outfit is "comfortable yet chic".

> *"Love the white blazer. I've always shy'ed away from linen because it wrinkles so easily, but I may have to reconsider!" (Chanelle, September 11, 2014)*

By providing an opinion on the blazer shown in *Sincerely Jules'* post, "Keepin' it Neutral", Chanelle is expressing an attitude towards the content and is therefore expressing the cognitive dimension of engagement. Chanelle is also displaying beliefs and characteristics regarding the nature of the linen material.

> *"I can not agree more with what you said about fashion! Many people think it's really all just about clothes and accessories, but people do not realize how it impacts us all individually and as a whole on a daily basis" (Janina, September 9, 2014)*

In the above example, Janina is expressing the cognitive dimensions through her beliefs and opinions on the topic of fashion by stating its impact is more than people realize. She is also aligning these opinions with the blogger's by saying she agrees with her statements on fashion.

The cognitive dimension is essential to consumer engagement in that cognitive processes are required in order voice ones opinion and to engage in this type of online setting. The cognitive dimension was present throughout the data set.

Affective Dimension

The affective dimension was identified within the data set through the definition provided by Ostrom (1969) as the expression of like or dislike, feelings, and emotional reactions to an attitude object. The data supported the proposed presence of an affective dimension to consumer engagement in the fashion blog context in relation to the conceptual model. The following examples are indicative of the presence of the affective dimension within the data set.

> *"LOVE the blue aviator sunglasses — even though I hardly wear shades because I feel like I have a billboard on my face most times lol" (MSCF, September 8, 2014)*

MSCF is illustrating the affective dimension through the use of both language and tone in the above comment on *Song of Style*'s post, "An Accessories Packed Week". All

capital letters on the word "love" has been used to emphasise the emotive word, expressing her emotional reaction to the content. She has also used a humorous tone, with the use of the word "lol" (an abbreviation for 'laugh out loud') to express the intended humour of her comment.

"Insane hair! :) I don't like the shoes though…" (Nefeli, September 10, 2014)

Nefeli has used punctuation to express both like and dislike towards the content of *The Blonde Salad*'s post, "NYFW Day 1". The use of exclamation mark emphasises her like and the use of punctuation to create a 'smiley face' is a common expression of a happy emotion, indicating she likes the hair. In saying she does not like the shoes; Nefeli is demonstrating how the affective dimension can be both positive and negative, and her use of the ellipsis signifies a hesitant, negative tone to the second half of the comment.

"So in love with your outfit (and your bag). You look (as always) so chic and elegant <3" (Sanaz, September 5, 2014)

Once again, the word "love" has been used to display the affective dimension in the above comment. Sanaz has also used punctuation to display emotion as she has created a symbol of a heart using the "<" key and the number "3". Using a heart symbol represents a love for the focal object; in this case it is the content of the blog.

The affective dimension had a strong presence in the data set and could be detected through use of words, punctuation, and tone of the comment. The affective dimension is associated with the cognitive dimension because affect is often used to express an individual's cognition, that is, opinions and beliefs about the blog content. The affective dimension seems to follow from the cognitive dimension in many of the cases analysed.

Behavioural Dimension

The behavioural dimension was identified within the data set also using Ostrom's (1969) definition. Ostrom (1969) describes the behavioural dimension as a reflection of personal action tendencies and should be reflective of past action, future intentions, and predicted behaviour. The data supported the proposed presence of a behavioural dimension to consumer engagement in the fashion blog context in relation to the conceptual model. The following comments are examples from the data set that supported the presence of the behavioural dimension.

"You look so feminine and romantic. I also gotta try out this perfume! :)" (Natali, September 4, 2014)

Natali describes her future behavioural intentions to try out the perfume *Song of Style* was promoting in her blog post, "Daisy Dreaming". The words "I also gotta try out this perfume!" are a display of future intentions and important to note, purchase intentions.

"I love the pen! I love that you hold it as bad as I do too! funny. It is way more comfy than holding it the "appropriate" way." (Paulina, September 4, 2014)

Here, Paulina is using the expression of her current behaviour (the way she holds her pen) as a way to relate to the blogger *Kayture* and the blog content in her post, "Write Your Own Story.

The behavioural dimension, like the cognitive dimension, is essential to consumer engagement in this online setting. The act of engaging via online commenting requires behaviour, as commenting is an action tendency. Through analysing the data, it was apparent the behavioural dimension emerged from both the cognitive and affective dimensions. In the above examples, we can see expressions of both cognitive and affective dimensions; both commenters are expressing beliefs and opinions regarding the content of the blogs, and using affective language and punctuation to do so. However, more themes emerged from the data as commenters expressed past, present and future behavioural tendencies and these were most often expressions of purchase intentions, or intentions to replicate the behaviours of the fashion bloggers.

Awareness Dimension

The awareness dimension was identified within the data set using the definition provided by Vivek (2009), who defines the awareness dimension as a reflection of knowledge or consciousness. The data supported the proposed presence of an awareness dimension to consumer engagement in the fashion blog context in relation to the conceptual model. The following examples confirm the presence of the awareness dimension within the data set.

"Love the skirt – perfect for our NYC transitional weather. Now looking for a more affordable version – I am sure Asos or & Other Stories would be a great start xx"(YP, September 9, 2014)

YP is showing consciousness by having an opinion on the skirt shown in *Song of Style*'s post, "NYFW Day One". She also shares her fashion knowledge about the need for fashion that works with the "transitional weather" and is also showing knowledge in regards to wear she may be able to buy an affordable version of the skirt.

> *"Great jacket, boots and jeans. What you're saying about our clothing reflecting how we feel is spot on. Personally, I feel the need to dress according to the mood I'm in. A rough day is no time to be adventurous, but to trust the old favourites, no?" (Emma Wilde, September 4, 2014)*

Again, by having an opinion on the content, Emma is displaying consciousness. She also displays knowledge by referring to clothing reflecting clothing and how she believes this is a time to "trust the old favourites".

It was evident throughout the data that the cognitive and awareness dimensions were interchangeable, therefore there is no need for the dimensions to be considered separate and can both be classified as the cognitive dimension.

Enthusiasm Dimension

The enthusiasm dimension was identified within the data set using the definition put forward by Vivek (2009), defining the enthusiasm dimension as a reflection of passion or zeal about the content. The data supported the presence of an enthusiasm dimension to consumer engagement in the fashion blog context in relation to the conceptual model. The following examples present evidence of the enthusiasm dimension within the data set.

> *"That hair is everything!!! As usual your whole look is giving me life!!!!" (Jasmine, September 5, 2014)*

It is clear Jasmine is displaying excitement and passion for the hairstyle and look displayed by *Atlantic Pacific* in her post, "Dark Horse". Jasmine uses two common phrases in Web 2.0 society to express her excitement; describing the hairstyle as "everything" and stating the whole look is "giving her life". The use of punctuation in the form of multiple exclamation marks conveys an overall very enthusiastic tone to the comment.

> *"Your Are My Inspiration!! You're so beautiful outside and inside as well! Your photos always make me smile and always give me inspiration! I also really love your*

style! Thank You for everything! Keep posting for us! xoxo Adri" (Adri, September 5, 2014)

Like Jasmine, Adri is using punctuation, and more specifically exclamation marks to express her passion and excitement. Adri is also showing gratification for *Kayture*, as well as calling her an inspiration.

The enthusiasm dimension was prominent in the data set, this is most likely because consumers engage with the fashion blogs because they are passionate about fashion and therefore tend to express enthusiasm about the content. Enthusiasm can be connected to the affective dimension, as it is an expression of an emotional reaction to the content. Unlike the cognitive and awareness dimensions, the affective and enthusiasm dimensions are not interchangeable, however enthusiasm is derivative of the affective dimension. Due to affective expressions being both positive and negative, the affective dimension can be present without the enthusiasm dimension, vice versa cannot occur.

Interaction Dimension

The interaction dimension was identified in the data set using the definition of the interaction dimension as provided in Vivek (2009); an exchange of feelings, ideas, and thoughts with others. The data supported the proposed presence of an interaction dimension to consumer engagement in the fashion blog context in relation to the conceptual model. The following examples illustrate the presence of the interaction dimension within the data set.

"Hi Wendy, I cant get enough of seeing those shoes.. What is the material of the shoes (suede, leather, goosebump, satin, etc)? Looking forward to your reply.. Many thanks in advance Wendy" (Coffey, September 8, 2014)

Coffey is addressing Wendy of *Wendy's Lookbook* by name and asking her a question in relation to the content posted in her blog post, 'Shades of Blue'. By replying,

"Hi Coffey! It's goosebump =) But if they had the leather (nappa, not the patent) in my size, that would have been my first choice. Thank you for dropping by!" (Wendy, September 8, 2014),

Wendy and Coffey are exchanging thoughts and ideas. The data found that Wendy of *Wendy's Lookbook,* Andy of *Style Scrapbook,* and Gabi of *Gabi Fresh* were the only bloggers that replied to the comments from consumers. Most attempts to interact from consumers, even

in the cases of these three bloggers were ignored or answered by other consumers exerting extra-role behaviours.

Interaction was the dimension that occurred least within the data set and was not an essential dimension to consumer engagement in the fashion blog context. Consumers attempted to engage with the fashion bloggers, however the fashion bloggers very seldom replied and consumers' attempts at interaction often went ignored.

Activity Dimension

The activity dimension was identified within the data set using the definition presented by Vivek (2009); a display of participation behaviours. The data supported the proposed presence of an activity dimension to consumer engagement in the fashion blog context in relation to the conceptual model. The following examples are indicative of the presence of the activity dimension within the data set.

> *"YAYYYYY I am so incredibly happy for you all! i voted for you for blog of the year (:*
> *I am so glad that you won. many many congratulations!! Xx" (Sabina Khan,*
> *September 9, 2014)*

Sabina is showing participation behaviours by stating that she voted for *Kayture* for blog of the year.

Much like the behavioural dimension, consumers displayed the activity dimension by commenting as they are participating in an online forum. However consumers displayed further examples of participation behaviours by expressing intent to participate further with the blogger on other social forums.

Social Dimension

The social dimension has not been thoroughly explored in previous literature and is therefore not fully understood, especially within the fashion blog context. Themes emerged from the data set that provided evidence to support the social dimension within the context of fashion blogs, with reference to the self-concept and in particular, social identity theory and social comparison theory.

Social Identity Theory

As discussed earlier, the theory of social identity; which Turner and Oakes (1986) define as the portion of an individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership in a relevant social group. The social group in the case of this study is the fashion blog online community, inclusive of the fashion bloggers and those who engage with the bloggers in the online environment. A key assumption within the social identity theory is that individuals strive for a positive self-concept (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and achieve this through multiple positive distinctiveness strategies, including individual mobility.

Individual Mobility

Individual mobility occurs when an individual chooses to pursue individual goals that personally benefit them rather benefit the group as a whole (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The findings supported the notion of individual mobility as an aspect of the social dimension of engagement in fashion blogs. It was especially evident when the other bloggers would use the comments section of the blogs purely to promote their own fashion blogs instead of adding to the conversation or engaging in a way that benefits the online community.

> *"By the way, I just hosted a new GIVEAWAY on my blog that features a 3.1 PHILLIP LIM BAG! That's right, my BIGGEST GIVEAWAY till date, it's international and all you need to do is follow me on BLOGLOVIN' and/or INSTAGRAM to win!! Good luck to all! INSTAGRAM: @THE_PROVOKER http://www.the-provoker.com/2014/09/giveaway-31-phillip-lim.html"* (*The Provoker, September 6, 2014*)

The Provoker is an example of an *other blogger* who uses the comments section of other fashion blogs to promote their own blog. It is clear through the use of language and capitalisation for attention that this comment is more of an advertisement than a contribution to a conversation in an online community about fashion in relation to the content posted by the blogger. Individual mobility is not an aspect of the social dimension that has been previously researched in relation to engagement in online communities and it could be an element of CE that is unique to the context of fashion blogs.

Social Comparison Theory

As discussed earlier, social comparison theory draws from the belief that there is a drive in individuals to gain an accurate self-evaluation (Festinger, 1954). Festinger (1954) explains how individuals evaluate their own opinions and abilities by comparing themselves to others in order to reduce uncertainty in these domains. Gruder (1971) found that a main motivation for social comparison is self-enhancement, with the use of upward and downward comparisons to increase self-esteem. For the majority, the fashion bloggers were viewed as being superior and were definitely perceived as in a better position by the commenters. For this reason, downward comparisons were not evident within the data set, however upward social comparison was a strong theme to emerge.

> *"I love day dreaming too! Maybe someday I'll be able to live my dream like you do!" (Belen, September 4, 2014)*

The findings supported upward social comparison as an element of the social dimension of consumer engagement. The above example illustrates how consumers view the fashion bloggers to be in a better position to themselves; Belen is expressing her want to be able to live her dream like the blogger and using the fact that she also likes to day dream to draw an upward social comparison between herself and the fashion blogger.

> *"I adore this outfit! Those printed trousers are amazing, I've been wearing similar non-stop recently!" (Joanne, September 7, 2014)*

In the above example, Joanne is using upward social comparison to validate herself as fashionable by stating she has been wearing similar printed trousers to the blogger. This cements Joanne's position in her perceived in-group and enhances her self-concept.

Upward social comparison, like individual mobility, has not been fully explored in the marketing literature in regards to consumer engagement, and could be a unique aspect of the social dimension within fashion blogs. It was a strong theme to emerge from the data as it was common for those commenting to find comparisons between themselves and the bloggers in attempts to enhance their self-concept as suggested by Gruder (1971).

Adapted Conceptual Model

Figure 2. Adapted Conceptual Model
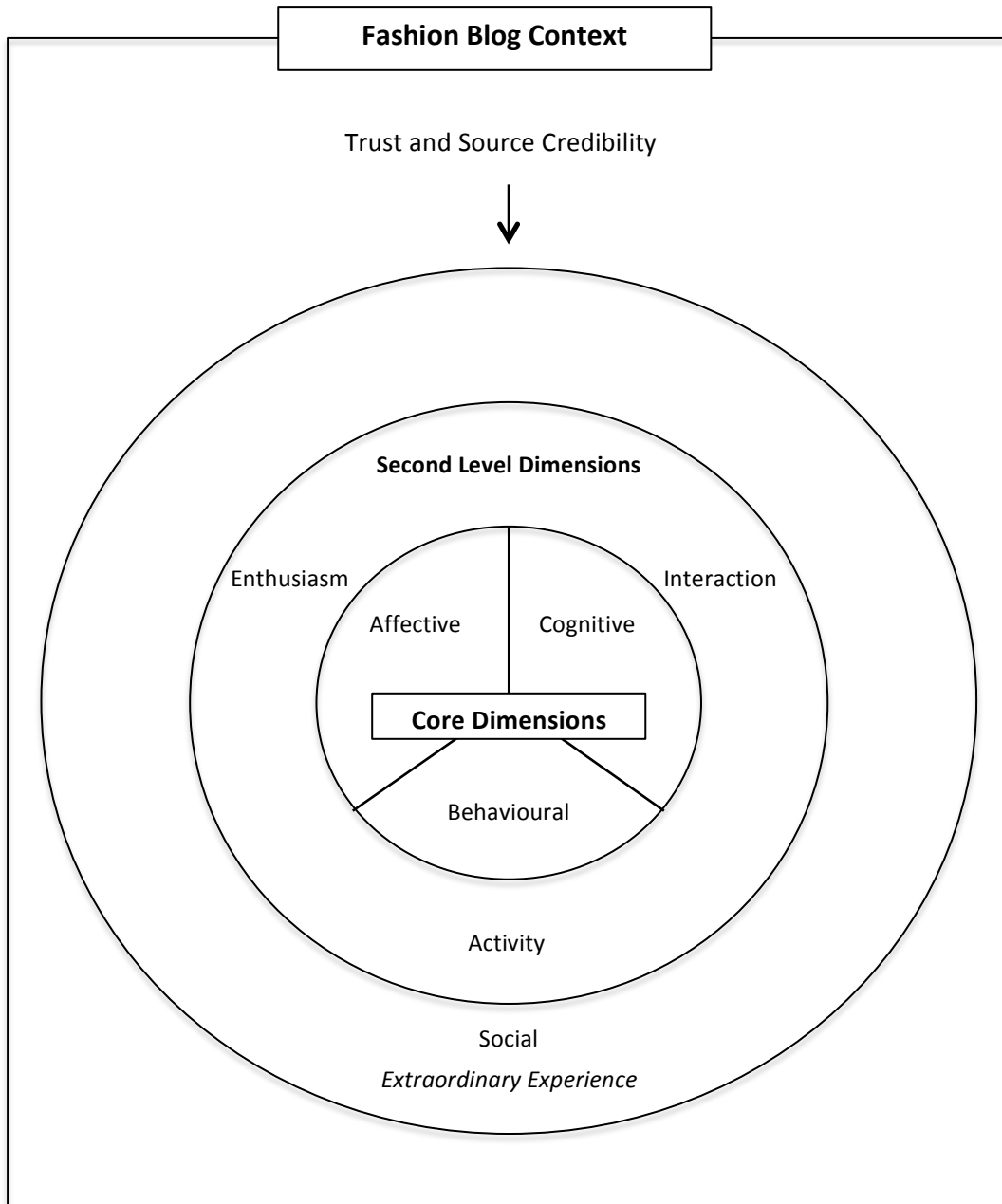
As a result of the findings, an adapted conceptual model was created to illustrate the dimensions of consumer engagement that are relevant to fashion blogs. Trust and source credibility remains an antecedent to consumer engagement. The findings supported cognitive, affective and behavioural as proposed by Brodie et al. (2011) as the core dimensions of CE. The second level dimensions were adapted as it was found that the awareness dimension of

CE as proposed by Vivek (2009) did not differ to the cognitive dimension and was rather superfluous. The findings supported the relevance of the remaining second-level dimensions; enthusiasm, interaction and activity. The core dimensions are necessary for second level dimensions to occur within engagement, as the second level dimensions are enhanced versions of the core dimensions.

The most notable findings were concerned with the social dimension of CE. The findings provided insight into how the social dimension of CE is relevant to the fashion blog context and supported studies that suggested the existence of a social dimension to CE but didn't explore it within different contexts. One of the major adaptations to the conceptual model was to make the line surrounding the social dimension solid, rather than dotted, as this dimension is no longer implied, and has evidence to support its relevance to the context. It is also suggested that the extraordinary experience is linked to the social dimension and this is further explained in the following section on consumer engagement dimensions that are unique to the fashion blog context.
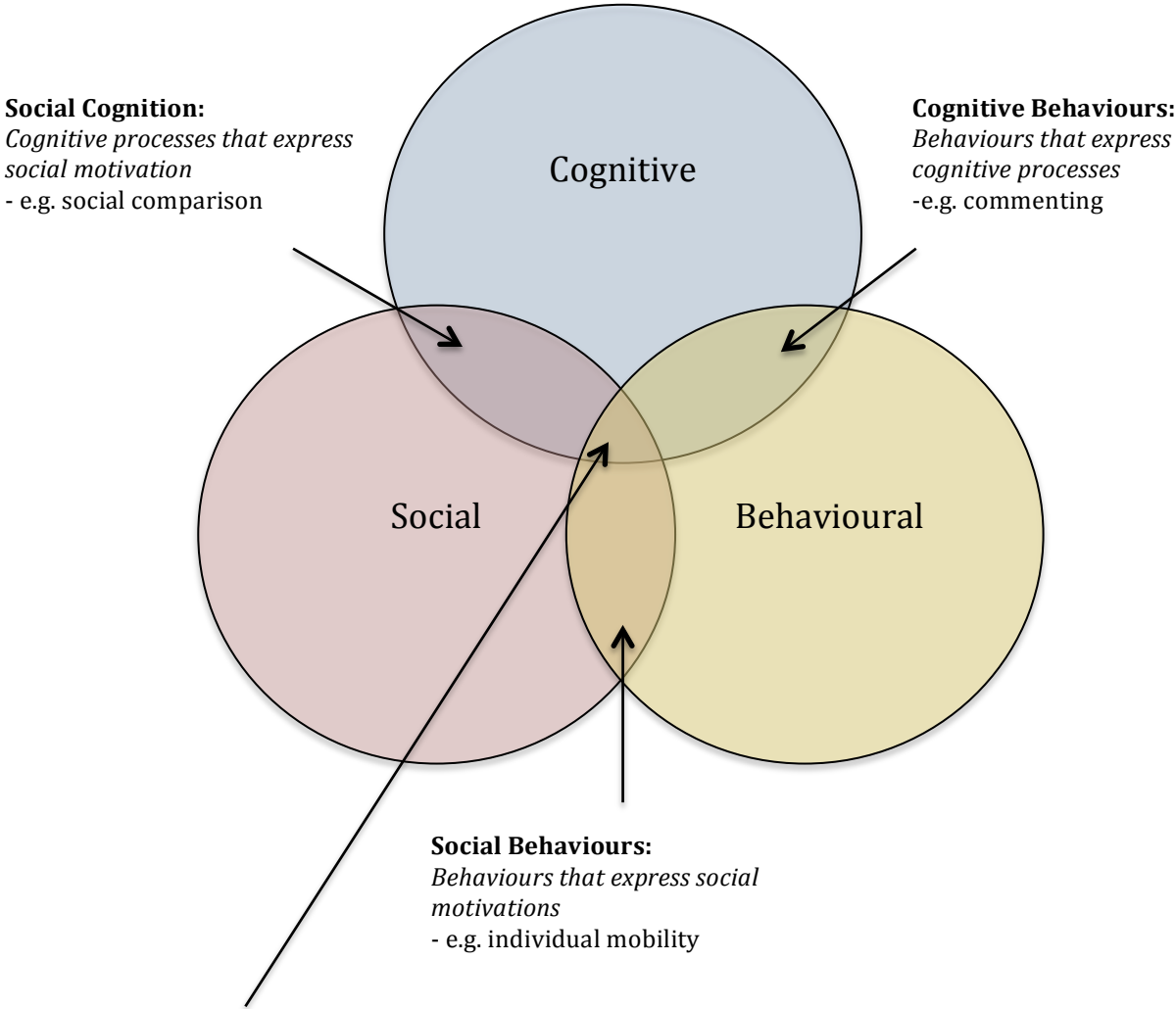

Consumer Engagement Dimensions Unique to Fashion Blogs

While the data supported the presence of all the dimensions proposed in the conceptual model, not all of the dimensions were as prominent within the context of fashion blogs. The purpose of this study is to understand the dimensions of consumer engagement and how these dimensions function within the fashion blog contexts, therefore the study must focus on the dimensions that were prominent in the data set. These dimensions were cognitive, behavioural and social. The reason these were chosen as the three main dimensions relevant to the fashion blog context was because there was some cognitive element behind every single comment, as well as behavioural, because there needs to be a cognitive process behind sharing an opinion online, and the process of doing so is behavioural and these two dimensions are at the core of the engaging dimensions. The social dimension was chosen as it was a major theme to emerge from the data and with links to social identity and social comparison theories it can be related to the motivations of consumers to engage online.

One of the aims of the second research question was to establish whether the way the different dimensions of CE function within fashion blogs is unique and the evidence suggests

that the three main dimensions, cognitive, behavioural and social, relate to each other in a way that can be classified as unique to the fashion blog context. This is illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3. CE Dimensions Unique to Fashion Blogs

Social Cognition:
Cognitive processes that express social motivation
- e.g. social comparison

Cognitive Behaviours:
Behaviours that express cognitive processes
-e.g. commenting

Cognitive

Social

Behavioural

Social Behaviours:
Behaviours that express social motivations
- e.g. individual mobility

Extraordinary Experience

The way in which these three dimensions relate to each other and function together lead to three new dimensions that are specific to the fashion blog context; (1) cognitive behaviours, (2) social behaviours and (3) social cognition. It is thought that through a combination of all the dimensions, an overall extraordinary experience will be achieved.

The three dimensions addressed in the previous section; cognitive behaviours, social behaviours and social cognition are new to the marketing literature and are unique to fashion blogs. It is suggested these dimensions occur through the combination of the other core dimensions.

Cognitive Behaviours

Cognitive behaviours are the result of both the cognitive and behavioural dimensions. Cognitive behaviours can be defined as behaviours displaying cognitive processes, in other words, engaging in behaviours displaying cognitive expressions including beliefs and values regarding an attitude object. In the context of fashion blogs, this includes commenting on a blog with the intention of expressing one's opinion on the content. Cognitive behaviours are closely related to the affective dimension of CE, as the expression of opinion often comes from a positive or negative perception of the blog. Links can also be drawn to the activity dimension of CE and include participatory behaviours such as regularly commenting on the blog.

Social Behaviours

Social behaviours are the result of both social and behavioural dimensions and can be defined as engaging behaviours that express social motivations, which have theoretical roots in social comparison and social identity theory.

> *"I love the pen! I love that you hold it as bad as I do too! Funny. It is way more comfortable than holding it the "appropriate" way" (Paulina, September 4, 2014)*

A social behaviour can be an engaging behaviour motivated by social comparisons. At the base of the concept, this includes commenting on the blog in order to make an upward social comparison, however can also include using a personal behaviour to base a social comparison on. In the above example, Paulina is using a behaviour to draw an upward social comparison to the fashion blogger by stating that they hold their pens in the same way.

> *"Great style!! Greetings. NEW POST ON MY BLOG !!:* http://diamondconestilopropio.com.es/*" (Adrian Oslo, September 5, 2014)*

Another example of social behaviours are those related to the individual mobility aspect of social identity theory. In the above example, Adrian is an *other blogger* who uses the comments section of the fashion blogs to promote his own blog and benefit himself rather

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than the group as a whole. It is common for other bloggers to use popular blog sites to promote their own blogs and gain attention and this is a dimension of engagement that is unique to the fashion blog communities.

Social Cognition

Social Cognition occurs as a result of both the social and the cognitive dimensions of engagement. The social cognition dimension can be defined as cognitive processes that express social motivations, with theoretical roots in self-concept theory.

> *"Great jacket, boots and jeans. What you're saying about our clothing reflecting how we feel is spot on. Personally, I feel the need to dress according to the mood I'm in. A rough day is no time to be adventurous, but to trust the old favourites" (Emma Wilde, September 4, 2014)*

A common example of the social cognition dimension is other bloggers expressing their opinions and beliefs regarding the fashion content by conveying their own knowledge on the subject, as if validating themselves as bloggers and gaining self-enhancement through comparing their knowledge to the bloggers. In the above example, Emma Wilde, another blogger, agrees with the opinions the fashion blogger has expressed in her blog post and shares her own knowledge on how fashion reflects one's mood.

> *"fun article! How many bags do you actually own? I tried to count mine once, and stopped at 20 because it got too overwhelming! And my boyfriend only owns one backpack!" (Olga, September 5, 2014)*

End consumers tended to express socially motivated cognitive processes with a more personal focus, in contrast to a knowledgeable focus like the other bloggers tended to express. In the above example, Olga is expressing her thoughts on the content in a more personal way. Although the comment is fashion based, Olga uses a personal anecdote and humour to relate personally to the blogger.

Extraordinary Experience

It is suggested that a combination of these dimensions will lead to an overall extraordinary experience that is unique to engagement in the fashion blog context.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to provide further insight into consumer engagement, the relevance of trust and credibility and the dimensions of CE relevant to the fashion blog context. The first aim of this study focussed on gaining insight into the relevance of trust and credibility to consumer engagement in fashion blogs. The findings supported the relevance of trust and credibility to consumer engagement and supported findings regarding trust and credibility from authors such as Colliander and Dahlen (2011), Hovland et al., (1953), Chu and Kamal (2008), and Hsu and Tsou (2011). The major themes of trust and credibility in fashion blogs were transparency (Colliander & Dahlen, 2011) and expertise (Hovland et al., 1953) and these led to consumer behaviours such as increased brand attitudes (Chu & Kamal, 2008) and purchase intentions (Hsu & Tsou, 2011). The findings validate Kulmala et al.'s (2012) discussion of the need for organic eWOM in fashion blogs when they are being used as a channel for marketing communications. Although no new themes emerged from this study, the findings on trust and credibility and the relevance to consumer engagement supported the marketing literature and previously researched themes on the subject, therefore further validating the works of previous academics.

The second aim of this study was to distinguish the dimensions of consumer engagement relevant to fashion blogs. A conceptual model was developed as an analytical aid using relevant CE dimensions provided by Brodie et al. (2011), Vivek (2009), and van Doorn et al. (2010), including; cognitive, affective, behavioural, awareness, interaction, enthusiasm, activity, social and extraordinary experience. The conceptual model suggested cognitive, affective and behaviour to be the core dimensions of CE, and awareness, interaction, enthusiasm, and activity to be the second-level dimensions of CE. The social dimension was initially implied as it was not as supported by the literature as the other dimensions and the model suggested extraordinary experience to occur as a result of the other dimensions. Initial findings supported the relevance of all dimensions, except awareness, which was deemed too similar to cognitive to be considered a separate dimension. The findings supported the social dimension and the connection to social identity theory as suggested by Lee et al. (2011). The main themes relevant to fashion blogs were found to be individual mobility (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and social comparison theory (Gruder, 1971). Individual mobility is suggested to be unique to fashion blogs as other bloggers were displaying individual mobility by using the

comments section of the blogs to promote themselves rather than to add to the conversation and benefit the online community as a whole. Upward social comparisons were common among commenters and it was found that other bloggers tended to use social comparisons to validate themselves as fashion bloggers and their knowledge on the subject, whereas end consumers would focus on self-enhancement on a more personal level.

Cognitive, behavioural and social were found to be the most relevant dimensions of CE to fashion blogs. From this, three new dimensions emerged from the data as a result of the combinations of the dimensions, these are; cognitive behaviours, social behaviours and social cognition. Cognitive behaviours can be defined as behaviours with a cognitive motivation; in the case of this study this included commenting on a blog to express an opinion or belief. Social behaviours can be defined as behaviours with social motivations; examples of this in the findings included other bloggers commenting on the blogs to promote themselves. The final dimension is social cognition; this can be defined as expressions of cognitive processes with social motivations. An example of this in the findings were expressions of opinions with the intention of making a social comparison with the fashion blogger.

Overall, the aims of this thesis were met through the findings in relation to trust and credibility and the dimensions of consumer engagement relevant to the context of fashion blogs. The findings supported and further validated previous literature on consumer engagement and provided further insight regarding the themes of CE. This research provides marketing literature with a basis for future research and provides new dimensions for consumer engagement that are unique to fashion blogs.

IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical

Initially, this study provides a conceptual model based on what has been established in previous literature that can be used to better understand the dimensions of consumer engagement and how these function within different contexts. This conceptual model can be used as an analytical aid or as a basis for further research into CE in different contexts.

The findings confirmed trust and credibility as a major antecedent to engagement and provided support for previous literature on the subject, especially the work on transparency (Colliander & Dahlen, 2011) and expertise (Hovland et al., 1953), and provided further evidence of the effects of trust and source credibility on consumer behaviours such as brand attitudes (Chu & Kamal, 2008) and ultimately purchase decisions (Hsu & Tsou, 2011).

It is already known that consumer engagement is an emerging topic of interest in recent marketing literature due to its suggested influence on consumption behaviours and post-consumption behaviours (e.g. Brodie et al., 2011; Vivek et al., 2010; van Doorn et al., 2010) and this study provides evidence to support those findings. Previous literature on the dimensions of CE was divided in terms of what the dimensions actually were and there is no set of dimensions that are applicable to multiple contexts. This study provides a clearer understanding of the dimensions of CE as well as providing a set of dimensions that are replicable and can be used as a foundation for further research into CE in online settings.

The most insightful contribution this study provides relative to the dimensions of CE are the findings on the social dimension. This study supported the social dimension's theoretical roots in self-concept theory as suggested by Lee et al. (2011) and individual mobility and social comparison theory were found to be aspects of the social dimension that are unique to the fashion blog context, thus providing insights into potential motivations for consumers to engage in online settings.

This study has provided preliminary insights into how consumer engagement functions specific to the context of fashion blogs, which is a platform that has not been previously researched in relation to the consumer engagement concept. It is suggested that the cognitive, behavioural and social dimensions are the most relevant to CE within the fashion blog context. The combination of these has led to the discovery of three new dimensions,

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cognitive behaviours, social behaviours, and social cognition. These offer further understanding of consumer engagement in fashion blogs and act as a catalyst for future research in CE in online communities, which is required to verify the findings of this study.

Overall, this study has verified previous literature on CE and blog marketing, and has provided preliminary insights into the role of trust and source credibility in shaping engagement online, as well as CE and the application of its dimensions to the context of fashion blogs. These findings act as a catalyst for future research and provide a conceptual foundation for the dimensions of CE specific to fashion blogs. Further research is required to support and verify the preliminary findings of this thesis.

Practical

Managerial

This thesis also generates multiple managerial implications for the use of fashion blogs as a platform for marketing communications. Firstly, the research provides managers with an enhanced understanding of the role of trust and source credibility in enhancing engagement, and secondly, a greater understanding of the dimensions of CE relative to fashion blogs; both of which should be utilised when designing strategies for marketing through the fashion blog channel. The conceptual model and proposed dimensions can be used as a guide for developing managerial strategies/tactics.

In order to utilise fashion bloggers as a platform for marketing, marketers need to fully understand the most effective ways in doing so. The findings on trust and credibility strengthen the need for transparency from fashion bloggers as a source of marketing communications and support Kulmala et al.'s (2012) findings on organic eWOM when using blogs as a marketing channel. Combined with Kulmala et al.'s (2012) study, marketing managers need to understand the importance of organic eWOM and transparency in creating trust and credibility in consumers and therefore making them more likely to engage with the online community.

An understanding of the dimensions of consumer engagement within the fashion blog context will provide marketing managers with knowledge of how to best encourage engagement within fashion blogs. In order to do so, managers must draw from the findings on how CE functions within the fashion blog context. For effective marketing to occur through

the fashion blog channel, communications should be integrated into the blog content in a way that establishes cognitive processes in the consumers, encouraging them to share their ideas and provide consumers with social motivations to engage, drawing from theories in social identity and social comparison. This involves working closely with the blogger, keeping to their brand image, and making the marketing object a catalyst for conversation.

If managing marketers encourage engagement in fashion blogs with special focus to the three main dimensions, they will be able to create an extraordinary experience for a consumer, which is suggested to lead to higher levels of overall customer satisfaction.

Fashion Bloggers

This thesis generates managerial implications for both marketing managers and the fashion bloggers themselves. Marketing through fashion blogs is a collaborative process between the marketing managers and fashion bloggers, and therefore requires an understanding of how to effectively apply CE concepts from both parties. Fashion bloggers also require an understanding of CE in order to attract attention from brands to collaborate with as this is a valuable source of revenue.

As mentioned above, trust and source credibility is highly relevant to CE in fashion blogs, and therefore fashion bloggers must remain transparent and trustworthy as a source of communications for their consumers. Brands will want their marketing communications to be organic, in line with suggestions from Kulmala et al. (2012), and thus fashion bloggers need to understand how to effectively portray marketing communications, while remaining trustworthy to their consumers. This can be achieved by remaining true to the blogger's brand image and only promoting products that work with the image of the blog.

While this study found cognitive, behavioural and social dimensions to be integral to the engagement behaviours of consumers, it must be noted that there was a visible lack of interaction between the fashion bloggers and their consumers. Consumers made attempts to interact with the bloggers by asking questions, however more often than not, those attempts at interaction went ignored. Previous literature (e.g. Vivek, 2009) has highlighted interaction as an essential element to consumer engagement, which can lead to value, trust, affective commitment and loyalty (Vivek et al., 2010). Fashion bloggers must take note of this lack of interaction if they wish to improve their influential efforts and gain more attention from marketing executives. Fashion bloggers should answer any questions consumers have on their

blog and use this as an opportunity to pass on advice and encourage interaction in the blog by asking consumers to share what they think about a certain item in their content, or how the consumer may choose to style the clothing the blogger has included in the post. By encouraging consumers to interact, the blogger is creating a deeper sense of community and providing consumers with social motivations to engage.

The social motivations behind engagement are specifically related to social identity theories. Therefore, fashion bloggers need to understand and utilise their role as an opinion leader and representation of the in-groups. Once again, it is important that fashion bloggers stay true to their personal brand and have a solid understanding of what consumers view as their in-group.

If fashion bloggers take on the recommendations of this report, they will be creating a better experience for consumers, which will lead to higher follower numbers and increasing engagement and therefore generating more interest for collaborations and advertising from major brands.

Consumers

It is suggested that if marketing managers and fashion bloggers can encourage consumer engagement in a trustworthy and credible manner, with the right motivations, an overall extraordinary experience will occur for the consumer. This has positive implications for the consumer, as they will experience higher levels of customer satisfaction. If both marketing managers and fashion bloggers follow the recommendations, consumers will have a more positive experience within the online fashion community and will have more opportunities to validate their social needs. The recommendations made in this thesis can lead to engaging with fashion blogs becoming an overall better experience for consumers.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

A qualitative approach was applied because the nature of the aims of this research was exploratory. Exploratory research allows for themes to emerge from the data, this type of qualitative research can be susceptible to interpreter bias, and conclusions and forecasts can not be made from this type of research. A netnography was the chosen method of this study due to it being an effective, unobtrusive method for obtaining context-rich data that is naturally occurring, however its limitations are in line with exploratory research in that the insights drawn from the data are subjective to the researcher. The context from which the data was derived was effective in gaining insight into the way consumers behave in online forums, however because of the observant nature of the method, it is difficult to gain in-depth understandings of why consumers behave in that way and the motivations behind their behaviour. While there are limitations to this type of research, one of the major advantages of exploratory research is that it offers valuable insights into emerging marketing issues and provides a foundation for future research.

This study provided valuable insights into consumer engagement behaviours in a context specific to fashion blogs, however because of the exploratory nature of the research conclusions can not be drawn regarding any causal relationships and forecasts cannot be made relative to future behaviours of consumers. This demands future quantitative research into consumer engagement to support the insights of this study, particularly in regards to the findings of the social dimension of CE and the dimensions found to be specific to the fashion blog context, cognitive behaviours, social behaviours and social cognition. It would also be valuable to the marketing literature to research whether these dimensions are in fact unique to the fashion blog context or whether they can be applied to other online communities.

Because of the observational approach of the netnography, the motivations of consumers were only implied, and an in-depth understanding of why the consumers behave the way they do could not be achieved. It would be beneficial to the marketing literature to research the social motivations of consumers, including individual mobility and social comparison theories in relation to the self-concept and how these lead to engaging behaviours.

The conceptual model provided in this study can act as an analytical aid for exploring consumer engagement in other online settings. It would be valuable to research and compare the dimensions of consumer engagement in other contexts in order to gain a greater understanding of how to effectively utilise the concept for marketing communications.

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APPENDIX

Dimension	Definition	Quotes	Details
Cognitive	Reflecting values and attributes to an attitude object, including beliefs regarding the object and characteristics of the object	"I love this comfortable yet chic outfit specially the dress! Unfortunately the link to buy it is broken"	Clara – 8.09.14 *Kayture* *'Ease'* *7.09.14*
		"Love the white blazer. I've always shy'ed away from linen because it wrinkles so easily, but I may have to reconsider!"	Chanelle – 11.09.14 *Sincerely Jules* *'Keepin' it Neutral'* *11.09.14*
Affective	The expression of like or dislike, feelings, and emotional reactions	"LOVE the blue aviator sunglasses — even though I hardly wear shades because I feel like I have a billboard on my face most times lol"	MSCF – 8.09.14 *Song of Style* *'An Accessories Packed Week'* *8.09.14*
		"Insane hair! :) I don't like the shoes though…"	Nefeli – 11.09.14 *The Blonde Salad* *'NYFW Day 1'* *10.09.14*
Behavioural	A reflection of personal action tendencies; the behavioural dimension should reflective of past action, future intentions, and predicted behaviour	"Such a beautiful photos! You look so feminine and romantic. I also gotta try out this perfume! :) http://lartoffashion.blogspot.com"	Natali – 4.09.14 *Song of Style* *'Daisy Dreaming'* *4.09.14*
		"I love the pen! I love that you hold it as bad as I do too! funny. It is way more comfy than	Paulina – 4.09.14 *Kayture*

		holding it the "appropriate" way. http://www.thepaarblog.com/"	*'Write Your Own Story'* *4.09.14*
Awareness	Display of consciousness and knowledge	"Love the skirt – perfect for our NYC transitional weather. Now looking for a more affordable version – I am sure Asos or & Other Stories would be a great start xx"	YP – 9.09.14 *Song of Style* *'NYFW Day One'* *8.09.14*
		"Great jacket, boots and jeans. What you're saying about our clothing reflecting how we feel is spot on. Personally, I feel the need to dress according to the mood I'm in. A rough day is no time to be adventurous, but to trust the old favourites, no? http://www.thewildethings.com"	Emma Wilde – 4.09.14 *Style Scrapbook* *Dark Paradise* *4.09.14*
Enthusiasm	Signifying strong excitement or passion	"That hair is everything!!! As usual your whole look is giving me life!!!!"	Jasmine Sinclair – 5.09.14 *Atlantic Pacific* *'Dark Horse'* *5.09.14*
		"Your Are My Inspiration!! You're so beautiful outside and inside as well! Your photos always make me smile and always give me inspiration! I also really love your style! Thank You for everything! Keep posting for us! xoxo Adri"	Adri – 5.09.14 *Kayture* *'Write Your Own Story'* *4.09.14*
Interaction	The exchange of ideas, thoughts, and feelings with others	"Hi Wendy, I cant get enough of seeing those shoes.. What is the material of the shoes (suede, leather, goosebump, satin, etc)? Looking forward to your reply.. Many thanks in advance Wendy"	Coffey – 8.09.14 *Wendy's Lookbook* *'Shades of Blue'* *8.09.14*
		"Beautiful ring. Where is it from?"	Steph On – 5.09.14

			Wendy's Lookbook *'A Photo Diary'* *5.09.14*
Activity	Participation behaviours of consumers	"YAYYYYY I am so incredibly happy for you all! i voted for you for blog of the year (: I am so glad that you won. many many congratulations!! Xx"	Sabina Khan – 9/09/14 *Kayture* *'Blogger of the Year Awards'* *8.09.14*
Extraordinary Experience	Sense of newness of perception and process	"This outfit is just so cool and different from everything else you'd see during NYFW. Your hair tops it all off perfectly, you look so funkaaay!"	Karen – 10.09.14 *The Blonde Salad* *'NYFW Day 1'* *10.09.14*
		"I know this post is supposed to be about the bag, but I also love the turban! I bought one from asos a while ago, but always seem to feel silly whenever I actually try and wear it. However, you've managed to make it look so chic, I may have to start wearing mine again!!!"	Jilli – 5.09.14 *Kayture* *'The Bag to Live With'* *5.09.14*