

# **Evaluating the Influence of Beauty Bloggers on Young Irish Female Consumers**



Waterford Institute *of* Technology

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“This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Beauty blogging is quickly evolving and becoming more significant to consumers informing them of different makeup and beauty products. The use of social media in blogging means that the bloggers message can reach hundreds and thousands of people instantly. The vast amount of trust placed in these bloggers has led to beauty and cosmetics companies attempting to use beauty blogs as marketing techniques. A number of studies have been carried out in the past on blogging and the motivations behind it however the topic of beauty blogging and the influence it has on female consumers remains underexplored.

The primary purpose of this study is to evaluate the influence beauty bloggers have on young Irish female consumers. Initially, the way female consumers engage with beauty bloggers and with each other on social media will be investigated. This research seeks to evaluate the extent to which female consumers trust beauty bloggers. Additionally, the influence of beauty bloggers recommendations on female consumers will then be analysed.

The research objectives of this study were achieved by carrying out focus groups and interviews. To ensure holistic and rounded results, the research was gathered from two separate sources. Interviews were carried out on six of the most successful beauty bloggers in Ireland and three focus groups were carried out on young female blog followers between the ages 18 and 23.

The findings of this study reveal that Facebook and Snapchat are the two most popular sites for blogger engagement and that two-way communication is crucial in blogging to build trusting relationships. It was found that the level of influence a blogger has on their followers is based on the trust which is earned through the blogger being honest and relatable. Furthermore, marketing techniques are becoming a part of blogging which gives blog followers doubt and puts the bloggers credibility at risk thus lowering the level of influence behind blogger recommendations.

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## **ETHICAL DECLARATION**

I declare that this dissertation is wholly my own work except where I have made explicit reference to the work of others. I have read the Structured Masters' Programmes Research Policy, Procedures and Guidelines and hereby declare that this dissertation is in line with these requirements. I have discussed, agreed and complied with whatever confidentiality or anonymity terms of reference were deemed appropriate by those participating in the research and dealt appropriately with any other ethical matters arising.

I have uploaded the entire dissertation as one file to Turnitin® in Moodle®, examined my 'Originality Report' by viewing the detail behind the overall 'Similarity Index', and have addressed any matches that exceed 3%. I have made every effort to minimise my overall 'Similarity Index' score and the number of matches occurring.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the area of research that the author chose to investigate in this dissertation. The research question is described followed by the research objectives that the author aims to address. The research methodology will then be discussed and finally the contribution of the study will be emphasized.

#### **1.2 Rationale for the study**

This dissertation aims to identify the influence that beauty bloggers have on female consumers' purchase intentions in Ireland particularly through social media platforms. There are numerous reasons why the author chose to carry out this study. As a result of the proliferation and success of digital media and devices, it is important that companies maintain a competitive edge and are aware of what influences their potential consumers in purchasing their products. The beauty brand market is becoming increasingly saturated and social media users are becoming increasingly interactive. Furthermore, the amount of beauty bloggers on social media platforms is rising significantly. Mangold and Faulds (2009) note that since the emergence of social media or consumer generated media as it is sometimes referred to, managers of beauty brands must actively recognise how influential these bloggers recommendations can be on their target market.

The author has a personal motivation to carry out this study. As a marketing professional, the author has a genuine interest in how bloggers' recommendations can influence consumers buying decisions. It may be beneficial to use bloggers as part of a marketing strategy in the future. The author believes that the knowledge gained from this dissertation will contribute greatly to her future career in marketing and advertising.

Hsu *et al.* (2013) observed that blogging has become a part of a consumer's decision making process prior to purchase. However, understanding and measuring of the effect of beauty bloggers recommendations on female consumers' purchase decisions is still undetermined. The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of blog readers' trust towards the blogger and the perceived usefulness of beauty bloggers' recommendations to female consumer behaviours in Ireland. The findings of this study are expected to elucidate and assist in the development of marketing strategies for beauty and cosmetic companies to promote their products and for bloggers to understand what encourages their followers to trust them.

### **1.3 Research Question and Objectives**

Bryman and Bell (2015) maintain that an inadequately established research question will lead to an unstructured and unfocused research study. It is for this reason the author took a significant amount of time to discover the research question. For this dissertation, the research question is:

“How do beauty bloggers influence young adult female consumers purchase intentions on social media platforms in Ireland?”

Wei and Lu (2012) declare that the internet has dramatically altered how information reaches the public. Chittenden (2010) maintains that the younger population born into the culture of digital age are exposed to this virtual world and become accomplished social network site users. Furthermore, they seek social identity by engaging in blogging to increase their cultural capital. Therefore, blogging has become a crucial factor in influencing purchasing decisions (Hsu *et al.*, 2013).

The following research objectives have been established by the author:

- To identify how young adult female consumers' engage with beauty bloggers and with each other on social media platforms;
- To evaluate the extent to which female consumers' trust beauty bloggers on social media platforms;

- To explore how beauty bloggers recommendations influence female consumption of beauty brands.

#### **1.4 Research Methodology**

This dissertation comprises two main sections. Firstly, the author researches the current literature available relating to the research topic in question. This consists of an evaluation of secondary data acquired from academic journals, books and a variety of online sources. The data is then synthesised to form a literature review.

The second section comprises a description of the primary research carried out by the author. The author chose to carry out qualitative research in the form of focus groups and in-depth interviews. Three focus groups were carried out consisting of females from the ages of eighteen to twenty-three with a mix of students and those in full time employment. To ensure the author obtained the most comprehensive piece of research for this dissertation, in-depth interviews were carried out with six of the most successful beauty bloggers in Ireland. The findings from the focus groups provides an understanding of the engagement between beauty bloggers and their followers from their follower's perspective. The findings from the interviews provides an insight into the relationship bloggers have with their followers from the bloggers' perspective. These findings were then compared with current literature. Reed (2009) is an advocate for this type of research which highlight the importance of identifying the theory-practice gaps to help establish the contracting views of managers and researchers.

#### **1.5 Structure of Dissertation**

This dissertation contains seven chapters as follows:

##### **Chapter One: Introduction**

This is the introduction chapter which provides an overview of the study, highlighting the research question and objectives, the rationale and overall contribution of the study.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

This chapter examines the current literature on this topic. It looks at the rise of the digital era and the effect of WOM and eWOM communications. It then examines the evolution of social media and the types of social media. The author focuses on blogging, bloggers motivations and credibility in beauty blogging. How blogging can be used as a marketing tool is then discussed. Blogging is discussed in more detail on three social network platforms in particular, Facebook, YouTube and Snapchat. Finally, the author evaluates the benefits and risks associated with bloggers on social media.

## **Chapter Three: Research Methodology**

This chapter discusses the research design that was chosen for this study. The author evaluates the advantages and disadvantages associated with qualitative and quantitative research followed by a rationalisation regarding the chosen qualitative methods.

## **Chapter Four: Primary Research Findings**

This chapter discusses and evaluates the research findings that were gathered from carrying out the primary research.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

This chapter consists of a detailed discussion about the primary findings, compare and contrast them with existing literature that was found in the literature review. This discussion specifically addresses the research question and objectives.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusion and Recommendations**

This chapter concludes the dissertation. It recognises the limitations of the study and offers some future recommendations for this area of study.

### **1.6 Overall Contribution of the Study**

The findings presented in this dissertation will assist future academic researchers and marketing practitioners in the area of beauty blogging. The author will gain knowledge on the effectiveness of blogging on social media and how it can influence

consumers' purchasing decisions. This research interest will be very beneficial in her future career. The dissertation will also enhance the authors research and discipline skills from putting together an extensive literature review.

Blogging has become increasingly popular and the beauty and cosmetics market has become saturated. Furthermore, social media has become a necessary marketing tool for every business, so much so, that if a business was not established on social media, customers may look the other way. This study evaluates how beauty bloggers influence female purchase decisions in Ireland. Studies such as Chai and Kim (2010) and Hsu *et al.* (2013) have explored the influence of bloggers and have developed online marketing recommendations. However, to the authors knowledge, no previous studies have been conducted on the topic of beauty bloggers influence on females between the ages 18 to 23 year olds in Ireland. The author believes that this study will be very beneficial to beauty bloggers, beauty brand managers and future researchers focusing on the beauty industry in Ireland.

## **Chapter 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

The research question focuses particularly on the influence of beauty blogging in Ireland. This chapter discusses the proliferation of digital marketing particularly in Ireland. WOM is defined and the emergence of eWOM is examined followed by the evolution of blogging. The evolution of social media and the different types of social media available are examined. In order to appreciate the influence that bloggers have over their followers, it is firstly important to understand what motivates bloggers and why their followers trust them. Therefore, two credibility theories will be discussed, the source credibility model and the source attractiveness model. The use of blogging as a marketing tool will be considered. Blogging on different social media platforms is then reviewed with respect two three sites in particular, Facebook, YouTube and Snapchat. Finally, the benefits and risks associated with blogging via social media sites are discussed.

#### **2.2 The Rise of the Digital Era**

Technology is constantly evolving and with this comes the definitive growth of an online community. Berthon *et al.* (2012) highlights Web 1.0, which emerged in 1991, as the introduction of the World Wide Web whereby information was retrieved globally by consumers on this multimedia platform. Web 2.0, which emerged in 2000-2004, was the result of further technological innovations. The development of Web 2.0 meant that consumers could create and consume content using the World Wide Web. Also, Tapscott and Williams (2007) contests that as a result of this revolutionary

innovation, mass communication and collaboration can be enhanced. Wei and Lu (2012) declare that the internet has dramatically changed how information reaches the public. Sellers no longer control the distribution of their product information. Instead, product information delivered through online reviews has become hugely influential and proved more trustworthy to consumers because of the truth that comes from them.

Web 2.0 tools such as virtual communities, social networks and blogs have opened up huge opportunities for consumers to communicate through online platforms before finalising their purchasing decision (Duan and Whinston, 2008). Online customer reviews influence purchasing decisions significantly. Mudami and Scuff (2010) define an online customer review as a type of product information and evaluation created by users on the basis of their own experiences. These reviews have a dual role in providing information about the product to the consumer and make recommendations from the consumers' perspective (Lee *et al.*, 2008).

Consumers today have more choices than ever due to the increase in products available to them. Previously, a company's website comprised the extent of their online presence however with the rise of the digital era, this is longer adequate (Sumita and Isogai, 2009). Lecinski (2011) developed a concept known as the Zero Moment of Truth (ZMOT), it is that moment when you grab your laptop, mobile phone or some other wired device and start learning about a product or service that you're thinking about purchasing. It applies in a consumer and a B2B context. In 2011, 84% of Americans engage in ZMOT activities prior to purchase and the average shopper used 10.7 sources of information before buying (Lecinski, 2011).

### **2.3 WOM and eWOM Communications**

Arndt *et al.* (1967) defines Word-of-Mouth (WOM) as a consumer-dominated channel of marketing communication where the sender is independent of the market. Thus, it is considered to be more credible, trustworthy and reliable by consumers compared to firm-initiated communications. Global communication has changed and there is an increase in reciprocal collective empathy facilitated by blogging activities (I-Ping *et*



*al.*, 2013). Yoo *et al* (2015) considers that direct face to face communications and social rituals which facilitate connections with various networks are diminishing at the hands of technology. According to Neilsens Global Trust in Advertising (2015) the most credible advertising comes straight from the people we know and trust. More than eight-in-10 global respondents (83%) say they completely or somewhat trust the recommendations of friends and family. However, trust is not confined only to those in our inner circle. In fact, two-thirds (66%) say they trust consumer opinions posted online and Blogs—the third-most-trusted format.

Global Communications and the rise of the Digital Era has led to the adaption of the traditional WOM to electronic Word-Of-Mouth (eWOM). The rise of new media channels during the last few years has offered fertile ground for electronic word-of-mouth communication (Cheung and Thadani, 2012). Increasing numbers of consumers substantiate Web 2.0 tools such as online discussion forums, consumer review sites, blogs and social network sites to communicate their opinions and exchange product information and reviews. Channel Advisor (2015) concluded that internet users trust online customer reviews more than traditional media, user-generated content in the form of online customer reviews was found to significantly influence consumer purchasing decisions. Cheung and Thadani (2012) found that 91% of respondents mentioned that they consult online reviews, blogs, and other user-generated content before purchasing a new product or service, 46% of which are then influenced to make the purchase.

## **2.4 Trust**

Trust is referred to as one of the positive powerful factors on online user's decision making in information transaction in the online context (Kim *et al.*, 2007). In addition, trust performs an important role in maintaining successful relationships between beauty bloggers and their followers. Chai and Kim (2010) proffered that trust among people was a critical element for fostering knowledge sharing in networks. Trust is a main attribute in relationship building, promoting effective knowledge creation and sharing in networks (Abrams *et al.*, 2003). In the online context, trust is acknowledged as one of the positive influential factors in users' decisions to share

information as well as their intention to engage in e-commerce online (Kim, Ferrin, & Rao, 2007). Amongst online community members, trust plays a critical role in promoting information and knowledge sharing among members (Chai and Kim, 2010).

## **2.5 Evolution of Social Media**

Boyd and Ellison (2007) claimed that the first site to be recognized as social media was called “Six Degrees” and was launched in 1997. Six Degrees allowed users to create profiles, list their friends and surf the friends lists. It was the first site to combine these features. The Origin of Social Media stems from the creation of Web 2.0 which outlines how different users are constantly modifying online content and applications in a participative and collaborative manner (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

Within the decade, social media went from virtual insignificance to over a billion active users. LinkedIn, Facebook, and the once-popular MySpace were launched in 2003 and 2004; forerunners of Plaxo and Friendster in 2002 (Zhang *et al.*, 2014). New users and sites appear and established sites evolve, but as experience accumulates, habits and social conventions form. The emergence of social media has made it possible for one person to communicate with hundreds or even thousands of other people about companies and the products they provide (Mangold and Faulds, 2008). Previous studies carried out by Mangold and Faulds (2009) and Hajli (2014) highlighted that social media is dynamic in nature and is therefore hard to define (Schmidt and Ralph, 2011). It consisted of online technologies which allowed users to interact and communicate through interactive platforms (Montavlo, 2011).

Hajli (2014) declares that social media is a combination of social networking sites (SNS) and online communities where individuals and consumers can immediately engage with one another to create new connections and access information from other members while sharing content and other information. Research on social media has matured from exploring general questions about why people use social media to identifying the specific needs which people satisfy by frequently visiting these sites.

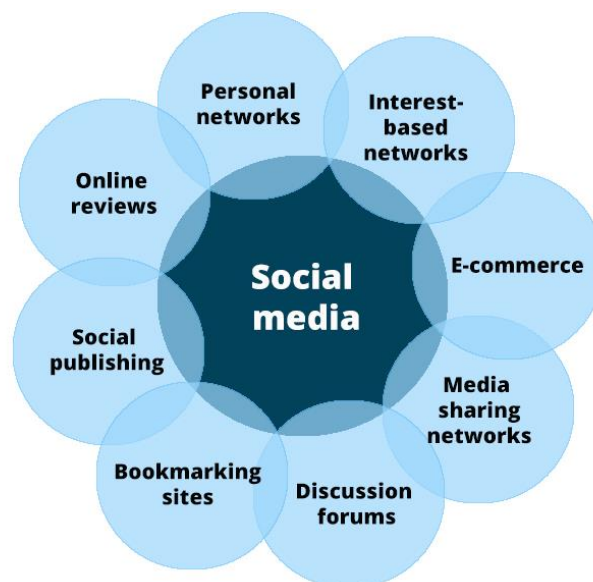
The theoretical support for the need theory comes from Maslow (1987), who argued that people sort needs into a hierarchy, satisfying primary needs such as hunger and thirst first and then moving to secondary needs, such as needs to engage with people, recreate, gain information, affiliate, or self-disclose. Chen (2015) argues that there are two psychological needs associated with the use of social media, affiliation and self-disclosure. Affiliation is the need to reform relationships with others and self-disclosure is the extent to which people offer information about themselves, such as thoughts or feelings. These psychological needs are what motivates social media usage.

## 2.6 Types of Social Media

Sorokina (2015) identifies eight different types of Social Media as presented in figure 2.2 below. People use different types of social media depending on what their reason for use is. Whiting and Williams (2013) state the various reasons for young female adults using social media as shown in figure 2.1 to be:

Social Interaction	Information Seeking	Pass Time
Entertainment	Information Sharing	Express Opinions
Communicatory Utility	Convenience Utility	Relaxation

**Figure 2.1: Reasons for Social Media Usage**



## **Figure 2.2: The 8 types of Social Media**

Source: Sorokina (2015)

### **2.7 The Evolution of Blogging**

In 1997, blogging quickly became a passion amongst Internet users. The term originated from “WeB log,” and was promoted further by [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com) as a blog (Gao *et al.*, 2010). Huang *et al.* (2007) defines blogs as personal journals on the internet arranged in reverse chronological sequence that facilitate interactive computer mediated communication through text, images and video objects. Blogging is a web-based form of communications which is quickly becoming mainstream (Nardi *et al.* 2010).

In recent years, blogging has grown significantly and has become one of the most popular channels for discussing personal opinions and feelings related to specific products or services (Hsu *et al.*, 2013). According to a report by MyYearbook, 81% of consumers seek advice before making a purchase through a social site and 74% of those found the advice to be influential in making a purchase (Wegert, 2010). Chittenden (2010) maintain that the younger population born into the culture of digital age are exposed to this virtual world, and become accomplished social network site users. Furthermore, they seek to establish and promote a social identity by engaging in blogging to increase their cultural capital. Therefore, blogging has become a crucial factor in influencing purchasing decisions.

Online transactions are not carried out face-to-face, this means customers need reliable and useful information about the potential purchase to support their decision. Perceived trust and usefulness of the product have become vital elements in influencing online shopping buying behaviour (Pavlou and Fygenon, 2006; Hsiao *et al.*, 2010). The success level of blogs has increased significantly as it differs from formal marketing channels such as advertisements. Hsu *et al.* (2013) states that bloggers recommendations represent a non-formal communication network.

Consumers believe in these recommendations more so than celebrity endorsements because they are non-commercial (Wei and Lu, 2012).

Bernoff and Li (2008) indicate the reason for the success of bloggers recommendations is because blogs are two-way communication channels unlike traditional commercials which are purely one-way. Recommendations made by bloggers are more valuable and trustworthy than commercial advertisements because the recommendation is coming from a genuine use of the product as opposed to a paid advertisement (Wu, 2011) thus, leading to the huge evolution and growth of the blogosphere.

## 2.8 Blogger Motivations

Personal growth and achievement may be considered an intrinsic part of blogging as bloggers can record thoughts and experiences over time, compile resources, post useful memos, create a body of knowledge and build and maintain connection with peers (Cameron & Anderson, 2006). Nardi *et al.* (2004) as cited by Huang *et al.* (2007) came to the conclusion that there are five blogging motivations; to document their life experiences, to provide commentary and opinions, to express deeply felt emotions, to articulate ideas through writing, and to form and maintain community forums. The increase in blog readers has led to bloggers becoming more valued, therefore, more materialistic motivations exist today in relation to extrinsic aims around blogging.

Costa *et al.* (2015) suggests that there are five benefits to blogging namely:

**Online Profile:** As companies are linked to online platforms, it is common when they are recruiting employees to search them online. A blog can act as an online profile and can assist job applicants who want to showcase their knowledge and experiences;

**Financial Perks:** Blogging can be a means of generating income if they have built up loyal followers. It is becoming increasingly common for companies to advertise their

products through bloggers. In the case of beauty blogging, free samples of beauty products would be sent out to the blogger to review via their blog;

**Improve Skills:** An active blogger will write thousands of words each week, improving their writing skills significantly. An active video blogger will improve their confidence and public speaker if they are constantly on camera;

**Feedback:** With a blog, feedback is easy to receive. Blogging is a great way to share your wisdom or experiences with other online readers, and have them contribute their knowledge to you also;

**Networking:** A blog is an easy and effective way of establishing a contact network. Once a blogger becomes known as an industry expert, they can introduce themselves to other industry professionals and experts, thereby expanding their professional network.

## **2.9 Blogger Credibility**

A reputable blogger values his/her hard-earned reputation and stands behind the recommendations, opinions and services whilst building trust with their followers (Hsu *et al.*, 2013). Chai and Kim (2010) investigated the relationship between trust and knowledge sharing in the blogosphere. Trust is acknowledged as one of the most positive influential factors in users' decisions to share information online (Kim *et al.*, 2007). Trust is a crucial feature in the formation of relationships, promoting effective knowledge creation, sharing information and enhancing credibility (Abrams *et al.*, 2003). The reason for the level of trust involved in blogging is the repeated interaction between bloggers and blog readers. Johnson and Kaye (2009) contend that these readers become familiar with the blogging community and the recommendations provided by them and in turn build trusting relationships. The aim of the blogger is to engender and develop trusting relationships (Hsu *et al.* 2013).

There are two theory models which were developed by Ohanian (1991) which referred to the effectiveness of the message given based on the source that provides it. These models can be applied to celebrity endorsers, non-celebrity endorsers and

bloggers. They are called the Source Credibility Model and the Source Attractiveness Model.

### **2.9.1 Source Credibility Model**

This Source Credibility Model contends that the effectiveness of a message depends on perceived level of *expertise* and *trustworthiness* of an endorser (Ohanian 1991). This model rests on findings from research in social psychology. Information from a credible source, for example a reputable blogger, can influence beliefs, opinions, attitudes and/or behaviour through a process called initialisation, which occurs when receivers accept a source influence in terms of their personal attitude and value structures (McCracken, 2005). Credibility is the extent to which the recipient perceives the endorser as having relevant skills and knowledge and trusts the endorser proffers unbiased, objective information. Wei and Lu (2012) concluded that a high-credibility blogger will be more influential when it comes to consumers' purchasing behaviour.

### **2.9.2 Source Attractiveness Model**

The source attractiveness model also has its theoretical foundations in social psychology (Erdogan, 1999). This model is based on the assumption that the significance of the message varies depending on the desirability of the source. This attractiveness depends on three attributes namely similarity, familiarity, and likeability. Similarity refers to the resemblance between the blogger and the receiver of the message; it requires that the consumer relate with the celebrity in some way. Familiarity is the knowledge the receiver has regarding the blogger; this is achieved through the creation of a personal blogosphere (Kim and Chen, 2016). Likeability is the affection that is held for the blogger, and more often than not depends upon physical attractiveness (Dean and Biswas, 2001). Physical attractiveness of a communicator determines the effectiveness of persuasive communication through a process called identification, which is assumed to occur when information from an attractive source is accepted as a result of a desire to identify with such endorsers (Erdogan *et al.*, 2001). Physically attractive bloggers can be more effective when it comes to beauty blogs. Beauty blogging requires the blogger videoing themselves

using beauty products and positing it online (Rocamara, 2011). Furthermore, if the blogger looks attractive after using the products, the consumer will be influenced to purchase them (Wu, 2011).

## **2.10 Beauty Blogs**

Numerous studies found that females tend to search for more information about a product than men as they are more concerned about whether a product review is false than males (Park *et al.*, 2009; Wei and Lu, 2013). Beauty blogs are primarily directed at the female market. Rocamora (2011) highlights the increase in the amount of personal beauty blogs that have emerged on the World Wide Web. These bloggers display new acquisitions including their rediscovery of old pieces of clothing, bargains on beauty products, make up reviews, skin care product reviews and hair product reviews. The setting is often unadorned with minimal props (Rocamora, 2011). Chang (2014) declares that there is money and fame to be made from beauty blogging today. Due to the saturation of the beauty market at the moment, the women's desire to look beautiful and the growth in social media, beauty blogging is growing fast.

## **2.11 Blogging as a Marketing Tool**

Buying behaviour is a process by which a person searches for the product/services they need or want, makes the decision to buy the required item, uses it and the disposes of it (Ahmed *et al.*, 2015). Understanding consumer behaviour is fundamental in marketing. Solomon *et al.* (2012) suggest that consumer behaviour to be a field that draws from different disciplines such as psychology, economics and sociology to explain the choices that consumers make. Consumers purchasing decisions can be highly influenced by their peers or certain stimuli such as influential blogs. From a marketing perspective, blogging has been viewed as a new type of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Osman *et al.*, 2009). It has been established that a bloggers' perceived credibility ultimately leads to consumers' adoption of eWOM recommendation (Cheung *et al.*, 2009).



Brewster *et al.* (2007) considers the factors that affect consumer's buying behaviour which vary from person to person, age to age, and area to area. Age difference is significant and every individual has their own culture, values and norms to follow. At different stages of a life cycle, preferences change because of age, needs, lifestyle, earning and psychological factors. These can be internal factors, the way consumers think or external factors as a result of the media and blogs. There are numerous elements which influence consumers buying behaviours:

- **Cultural influences:** These have a significant influence over consumer behaviour. Brewster *et al.* (2007) defines culture as a "shaping process". Cultural values are not always fixed, they can change and have to be maintained by marketers. Ignoring these factors can be extremely costly for companies;
- **Social influences:** These influences are considerably clear and affect buying behaviour through reference groups, family members and social class behaviours (Ahmed & Saeed 2014);
- **Family influences:** Family life cycle and family decision-making varies in importance from one's buying behaviour (Ahmed & Saeed 2014);
- **Psychological influences:** These influences are linked to perception, memory, motivation and learning. It changes buying behaviour through the generation of an image of the product and brand in the mind of the potential customer. Customer buying behaviour can be influenced by different factors such as perception, beliefs, society, personality, information choices, preferences and communication. Celebrity endorsement can play a huge role in this factor of consumer behaviour.

The blogs which readers will choose to follow are based on these personal influences. The majority of blog readers finalise their purchasing decisions by reading reviews, interacting with bloggers or complying with a blogger's recommendation (Hsu *et al.*, 2013). From a practical standpoint, Hsu *et al.* (2013) findings suggest that bloggers eWOM can be an advantageous marketing strategy to boost sales and for this reason companies are moving towards sending free samples of their products to bloggers to publicly review and endorse.

## **2.12 Blogging and Facebook**

Facebook is the largest social network in the World with over 1.5 billion monthly active users (Smith, 2015) and 1.01 billion daily active users. Statistics show that 72% of online adults visit Facebook at least once a month (Ajmera, 2014). Facebook has a status update feature allows users to publicly post how they are feeling. It works mainly with a prompt (“What’s on you mind?”) and a textbox that will appear on the user’s profile and the homepage (Thurlow and Mroczek, 2011). These status’ can contain up to 420 alphanumeric characters. With the rise of the digital era and the emergence of Web 2.0, Facebook demonstrates multimedia adaptation (Lee, 2011), intertextuality and convergence (Androutsopoulos, 2010) and mash-up, the co-existence of various media and web spaces on a singular platform (O’ Reilly, 2007).

Facebook expanded its blogging potential in 2006 with the launch of the Facebook Notes app, which allows longer form content suitable for blog posts (Shane, 2014). Goins (2012) proclaims that bloggers need to be on Facebook, it’s a breeding ground for bloggers to share links and market themselves. Facebook allows bloggers to interact with their followers through the “share”, “like” and “comment” features. There is a “question” feature on the share tab which allows bloggers to make a poll for their readers (Goins, 2012). Facebook allows bloggers to share photos, videos and written content to a huge variety of people allowing two-way interaction. It is a one stop shop for bloggers (Nardi *et al.* 2010).

## **2.13 Blogging (Vlogging) and YouTube**

By combining the content in blogging with the richness of expression available in video, video blogs, also known as “vlogs”, have become a powerful new media source (Gao *et al.*, 2010). Vlogs have gained much attention worldwide, especially with Google’s acquisition of YouTube. Smith (2015) highlights that over 1 billion people have their own YouTube channel, it has an estimated revenue of 4 billion euro and it reaches 4 million views every day.

YouTube allows bloggers to create their own channel, the public can then subscribe to these channels and follow the blogger through their videos (Fahs, 2007). Chang (2014) gives an example of a successful beauty blogger named Michelle Phan who's "vlogging" allowed her to create her own make up line named Michelle Phan cosmetics. This make up line was only one example of her business success which stemmed from her Beauty Blog, she also attained a sponsorship from Estee Lauder. Driven by the prevalence of digital cameras and mobile phones and the near-ubiquitous availability of broadband network connections, vlogging has surged to an unprecedented level, and gained much attention worldwide and brought about a new revolution of multimedia World Wide (Gao *et al.*, 2010).

#### **2.14 Blogging and Snapchat**

Ephemeral social media platforms that display shared content for a limited period of time, have become a prominent component of the social ecosystem (Bayer *et al.* 2015). The privacy-related Snapchat smartphone application allows users to share time-limited photos or videos, which "disappear" after a specified number of seconds once opened. (Roesner *et al.*, 2014). Users take photos or videos using the application and specify the number of seconds (up to ten) for which the recipient is allowed to view the content. After this time, the content "disappears" — i.e., it is no longer accessible via the Snapchat user interface. Smith (2015) highlights that since Snapchat was launched in September 2011, it maintained a rapid advance to prominence with over 100 million daily users today. Snapchats reported revenue in 2014 was 3 million euro, it's projected revenue for 2015 is €50 million (Smith, 2015). These figures reflect the extent of the rapid growth of Snapchat.

Snapchats' rise in popularity is the reason why many bloggers have started adapting to the application. There is much to gain by bloggers understanding the value of snapchat content to followers, it can be perceived as exclusive given its transient nature (Wakefield and Bennett, 2015). Established bloggers would have a higher number of followers on Snapchat. Unlike Facebook and YouTube, there is no way of creating a hyperlink to a bloggers snapchat account Snapchat is unique since it

demands that the user engage with the content, because it's such a short-lived piece (Silverman, 2014).

### **2.15 Advantages of Blogging via Social Media**

Chen (2015) suggest three motivations that drive people to use social media that include information, engagement, and for recreation. Research has found that social media gratifies social needs, such as the need for affiliation, information and popularity (Utz *et al.*, 2012). Mangould and Faulds (2009) recognise that social media has amplified the power of conversation online by enabling one person to communicate with hundreds of others quickly and easily. The following are the strategies of technologies that bloggers can use social media effectively to shape the discussions of their followers:

**Providing Networking Platforms:** Consumers like to network with people who have the same interests and mind sets as themselves. Bloggers can use this by creating like-minded online communities whereby followers can easily interact with each other. For example, new mothers and animal lovers;

**Use Social Media tools to Engage Followers:** One of the reasons for the success of online blogging is the two-way communication process in endures (Goins, 2012). Followers feel more engaged with bloggers if they are able to give feedback. Social Media allows and encourages bloggers to engage with their audience;

**Use a mix of both Traditional and Internet-Based Promotional Tools:** People are likely to communicate through social media and WOM when interested in a product or service idea. Social media allows for this communication process to be creatively simulated. Bloggers can use voting games or reward contests with their followers to aid engagement. These tools give followers a sense of importance and ownership;

**Provide Information:** Consumers will be more likely to talk about products which they know a lot about. It is the blogger's responsibility to provide as much information as the can about the product they are talking about. For example, beauty bloggers would leave links under their blogs or vlogs as to where they can purchase the beauty products in question;

**Provide Exclusivity:** Everybody likes to feel special. Bloggers can provide exclusivity to followers by offering products or information to a sub-set of their audience. In terms of Social Media, Snapchat is an example of an application which can be perceived as exclusive given its transient nature (Wakefield and Bennett, 2015);

**Be Outrageous:** WOM stems from people talking about a topic which interests them. Bloggers can do something outrageous in their blog and describe this to their fan base; they will talk about this and tell their friends and peers, thereby expanding their network;

**Support Important Causes:** Loureiro *et al.* (2012) highlights the importance of companies having an emotional connection with their brands. The same principle applies with bloggers and their followers. Bloggers can leverage emotional connections by embracing one or more causes that are important to their audience.

## **2.16 Risks for Bloggers on Social Media**

There is increasing hype around social media and online marketing that has created a number of misconceptions about what these tools can and cannot do. Schlinke and Crain (2013) argue the importance of understanding that once a post is put up on social media, it cannot be removed. A damaging post can have an irreversible impact on the Bloggers reputation. Nicholls (2014) discusses four risks associated with bloggers using social media:

**Reputation Management:** Social media can cause risk to a blogger's reputation by creating negative publicity. If the blogger makes a wrong comment, it can cause upset on social media platforms and the mistake can be seen by hundreds of people, thus, damaging their reputation;

**Security Issues:** Although social media is cost effective and easy to use, there is always the risk of hacking. This means there is a risk of the bloggers personal work being leaked or misappropriated in a certain way;

**Engaging in Potential Criticism:** While social media allows bloggers to interact directly with followers in a two-way dialogue, it also gives people a public platform to voice their dissatisfaction;

**Wasting Time:** Social media can become quite addictive and it is easy for bloggers to get distracted and engage elsewhere which can lead to the quality of their blog suffering.

## **2.17 Conclusion**

This chapter examines existing literature on the evolution of blogging due to the rise of the digital era as well as WOM and eWOM communications. Blogger's motivations and credibility are discussed with reference to the source credibility model and the source attractiveness model. The enhancement of technology has led to an increase in consumer's online presence. Traditional means of marketing and advertising are becoming less effective whilst marketers search for new ways of influencing their customers. Existing literature is reviewed on how blogging is beginning to become marketing tool for beauty and cosmetic companies. Social media is a part of day to day life for many consumers today and is an ideal base for bloggers. Blogging is examined with reference to Facebook, Snapchat and YouTube. Blogging is increasingly regarded or acknowledged as a reliable and trustworthy source of information and for this reason, bloggers recommendations are significantly influencing consumers purchasing decisions.

## **Chapter 3:**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The previous chapters examined the existing literature surrounding social media and the topic of blogging, in particular, beauty blogging. The purpose of this chapter is to focus on the methodology utilised to address the research questions of this study. The authors aim was to achieve credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability from the research findings. This chapter outlines the research question

and objectives of this dissertation. It provides an outline of the research methods chosen as well as a justification as to why they were chosen and how they will help meet the research objectives of this dissertation. The author then focuses on the advantages and disadvantages of the chosen research methods and a review of how the results are analysed. Finally, the limitations of this study are highlighted to prompt any future research in this area.

### **3.2 Research Question**

Bryman and Bell (2015) maintain that an inadequately established research question will lead to an unstructured and unfocused research study. It is for this reason the author took a significant amount of time to refine the research question.

Wei and Lu (2012) state that the internet has dramatically altered how information reaches the public. Chittenden (2010) maintains that the younger population born into the culture of digital age are exposed to this virtual world, and become accomplished social network site users. Furthermore, they seek to define and redesign their social identity by engaging in blogging to increase their cultural capital. Therefore, blogging has become a crucial factor in influencing purchasing decisions (Hsu *et al.*, 2013). The research question emerged from this increased popularity of blogging.

As beauty blogging has only become a mainstream source of information and entertainment in the past decade or so, there is a paucity of research undertaken on the topic and its effect on young adult females between the ages of 18-23. As the beauty industry is constantly expanding every year, beauty companies are looking for more innovative and effective ways to promote their products. This study aims to explore the effectiveness beauty blogging and blogger recommendations have on young women's purchasing decisions.

For this dissertation, the research question is:

“How do beauty bloggers influence young adult female consumers purchase intentions on social media platforms in Ireland?”

### **3.3 Research Objectives**

Using the research question as a starting point, research objectives are then derived, further shaping the study. Burns (2006) define a research objective as a clear, concise, declarative statement that is expressed in the present tense. The following research objectives have been established by the author:

- To identify how young adult female consumers engage with beauty bloggers and with each other on social media platforms;
- To evaluate the extent to which female consumers trust beauty bloggers on social media platforms;
- To explore how beauty bloggers recommendations influence female's consumption of beauty brands.

### **3.4 Research Design**

Creswell (2013, p.3) defines research approaches as “plans and procedures for research that span the steps from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation”. Furthermore, Creswell (2013, p.12) maintains that “research designs are types of inquiry within research approaches that provide specific direction for procedures within research design”. To address the research questions, many research methods can be employed. The purpose of research design is to identify the most appropriate method which will give the most accurate results (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Saunders *et al.* (2003) state that there are three different ways to classify research design namely they are exploratory, descriptive and explanatory. This study is descriptive in that it will provide a more accurate understanding of the topic and will conduct both primary and secondary qualitative research. The primary data that was gathered through the use of three focus groups with blog followers and six in-depth interviews with successful Irish bloggers.

### **3.5 Qualitative and Quantitative Research**

Primary Research can be qualitative or quantitative in nature. Normally, quantitative would be more concerned with descriptive research whereas qualitative would be



concerned with exploratory (Malhorta and Birks, 2007). Bryman (2012) suggests that a researcher using quantitative techniques will choose a relevant sample and generalize their findings whilst a researcher using qualitative research seeks to analyse the behaviour of the sample population. In this dissertation, the author decided to adopt a qualitative approach. Qualitative research allows respondents to communicate their own opinions, views, feelings and experiences on their own terms (Taylor *et al.*, 2015).

### **3.5.1 Quantitative Research**

According to Byrne (2013, p. 230) quantitative data is that which is “consisting of numbers or data that have been quantified, such as tables of figures”. Jha (2008) states that studies evolving from this type of research usually already have an established theory background from which the hypotheses are drawn out. Creswell (2013) highlights the strength, objectivity and respectability of quantitative research due to the use of numbers and its presentation in tabular or graphical forms. This type of research is particularly useful when seeking a statistical representation of a chosen sample of a population.

### **3.5.2 Qualitative Research**

According to Byrne (2013, p.230) qualitative research is “non-numerical data or data that has not been quantified, such as text materials, and non-text materials such as videos, voice recordings and images”. It is unstructured and is based on small sample sizes and it provides an insight and understanding into the research topic (Malhorta and Birks, 2007). Maxwell (2012) states that the main aim of qualitative research is to understand the convoluted world of human experience and behaviour from the point of view of those involved in the situation of interest. The author chose to use this method in her dissertation. See figure 3.1 for the differences between quantitative and qualitative research

<b>Qualitative Research</b>	<b>Quantitative Research</b>
Deductive and involves theoretical	Inductive and involves the generation of

testing	theory
Idealism – reality exists in the mind of the observer i.e. many realities can exist	Realism – a reality exists which is independent of the observer.
Naturalism - an investigation in naturally occurring settings. Should use non-intrusive methods and avoid the influence of pre-conceived ideas.	Artificiality – an investigation where the phenomena has been artificially created by the researcher. A structure is applied to the issue through its conceptualisation and/or research method/s.

**Table 3.1: Fundamental differences between quantitative and qualitative research**

**Source: (Adapted from Baker, 2003)**

### **3.6 Data Collection**

There are two methods of collecting data which have been identified according to Saunders *et al.* (2003) namely primary and secondary methods. The author has used both in order to methodically examine the research problem. The author believes that secondary data will highlight gaps in the existing literature which she will then use primary data collection methods to fill despite the financial and time limitations necessary to collect primary data.

#### **3.6.1 Secondary Data Collection**

O' Leary (2013) maintains that secondary data is data which already exists, it has been previously gathered for a research purpose that is different from the one being carried out at present. The data can be quantitative or qualitative in nature. Bryman and Bell (2015) state that this method of data collection is both more time and cost effective as opposed to primary data collection where there is an issue of feasibility due to high costs and time limitations. The secondary data used in this dissertation was gathered from various books, academic journals, online social media platforms and electronic databases.

### 3.6.2 Primary Data Collection

Primary data is data that is collected for a specific purpose. This should take place after secondary data has been examined, it occurs when research questions arise from the previous data collected. O' Leary (2013) posits the researcher must collect the information which has not been previously gathered using primary data collection methods. The author has decided to carry out her own primary research. This will help identify the specific information the author wishes to require for the research question. The author has chosen to employ both focus groups and interviews from two sources, bloggers and blog followers, in her dissertation to ensure trustworthy and dependable results.

### 3.7 Focus Groups

A focus group can be defined as a group discussion where the researcher may obtain and gather useful information or solutions to a marketing problem. These groups are popular when examining at consumer's behaviours and attitudes and they have proved to be an effective means of research (Cooper and Schindler, 2008). Whilst focus groups are similar to group interviews, Bryman and Bell (2015) claim that there is a difference. They maintain that in group interviews, there is a certain themed topic throughout however in focus groups, the candidates have a genuine interest and the unstructured nature of them means they can express their opinions more freely. The researcher used focus groups to gain an insight into the perspective of young females between the age of 18-23 in relation to beauty blogging.

#### 3.7.1 Advantages of Focus Groups

The benefits of focus groups shown in figure 3.1 are synopsized by Zikmund (1994) under the following ten headings:

**Synergy:** Due to the presence of numerous candidates, more information can arise from the meeting as opposed to single interviews

**Snowballing:** One individuals answer may result in other group members further input.

**Stimulation:** After introductions, the candidates in the group are keen to communicate their views on the research question.

**Serendipity:** Due to there being no structure in these groups, candidates can voice their opinion freely, these opinions may not have previously been identified by the researcher.

**Security:** A focus group can provide security to its members. Candidates can voice their opinions easier as they feel comfortable in a setting of people with similar opinions.

**Speed:** Focus groups involve gathering a group of opinions at the one time, this type of data analysis is quicker than one-to-one interviews.

**Scientific Scrutiny:** Recording a focus group allows more analysis of the gathered data after it has concluded.

**Spontaneity:** As a result of candidates not having to give their opinion for every question, the ones they do state accurately represent their beliefs.

**Structure:** The nature of focus groups allows topics to be discussed in both a flexible and in depth manner.

**Specialisation:** It may be beneficial to hire a trained interviewer to carry out the focus group as a result of the potential number of candidates in the group in order to maximise the group discussion

**Figure 3.1: Advantages of Focus Groups**

Source: Zikmund (1994)

### 3.7.2 Disadvantages of Focus Groups

The disadvantages of focus groups shown in figure 3.2 are synopsised by Malhorta and Birks (2000) under the following five headings:

**Misinterpretation:** As a result of concentrating on a set target group, there is a possibility that the results may not be accurate.

**Meeting:** Due to candidates in the group having conflicting schedules, time restrictions may occur.

<p><b>Messy:</b> It may take time to filter through, code and analyse the data collected in the focus group as a result of the unstructured nature it acquires.</p> <p><b>Misjudgement:</b> If the results are misjudged, Researcher and client bias can play a role.</p> <p><b>Moderation:</b> There is an important role to be played by the moderator of a focus group.</p>
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**Figure 3.2: Disadvantages of Focus Groups**

Source: Malhorta and Birks (2000)

### 3.7.3 Focus Group Design and Schedule

For the purpose of this study, there were 3 focus groups containing 6 people each. The criteria for the focus groups were females between the ages of 18 and 23 and are shown in table 3.1. The author recruited the participants from a variety of backgrounds to ensure unbiased results. The participants were contacted prior to the focus groups to organise a date which suited them all. The author sent them an email explaining the purpose of the research and information on the study. A pilot focus group was undertaken with a sample group to eliminate errors. Cooper and Schindler (2008) maintain that focus groups are most effective and commonly used when analysing the behaviour of consumers. The focus groups were conducted using a question guide with open-ended questions. The focus groups took place in a classroom in Waterford Institute of Technology. The participants in all three focus groups became more comfortable and open towards the end of the discussion. These focus groups were recorded to and transcribed.

Focus Groups	No. of Participants	Duration	Criteria
1	6	60 min	18-20 years' old
2	6	60 min	20-23 years' old
3	6	60 min	18-23 years' old

**Table 3.1: Criteria for Focus Groups**

### 3.8 Interviews

Hennink *et al.* (2010) describe an in-depth interview as a one-to-one data collection method which involves an interviewer and an interviewee discussing precise topics in detail. The aim of these interviews is for the researcher to gain an insight into specific issues following an interview guide and using a semi-structured approach. Taylor *et al.* (2015) refer to these interviews as a conversation with a purpose. If conducted well, the interviewee will feel relaxed and as though it is a conversation. However, an in-depth interview is not a two-way dialogue. The interviewer will ask the questions and motivate the interviewee to share their opinions. The researcher used in-depth interviews to gain an insight into the perspective of beauty bloggers around Ireland. An interview guide was created prior to the interviews to establish an organised structure.

#### 3.8.1 Advantages and Disadvantages of Interviews

Hennink *et al.* (2010) affirms the strengths and limitations of in-depth interviews which are shown in figure 3.2

Advantages of Interviews	Disadvantages of Interviews
1. The interviewer can gather information on the interviewee's personal life stories, experiences and feelings	1. Conducting a one-on-one interview means there is no feedback from other participants.

2. It is a useful method when dealing with sensitive topics.	2. In order for interviewers to be successful, they must develop skills to establish rapport, use motivational probes and listen and react to interviewees.
3. The interviewer can gain an in-depth knowledge of the topic.	3. The interviewer must be flexible and open to shift from the interview guide when needed.
4. The interviewer can observe face-to-face the reaction of the interviewee and read their body language.	4. A large amount of transcript is needed.

**Table 3.2: Advantages and Disadvantages of Interviews**

Source: Hennink *et al.* (2010)

### **3.8.3 Interview Design and Schedule**

Bryman and Bell (2007) state that a pilot interview is helpful when identifying potential problems in the interview framework. The researcher carried out a pilot interview based on the interview guide on a local beauty blogger using open questions to eliminate any difficulties. For the purpose of this study, six interviews were carried out with six of the top beauty bloggers in Ireland to gain their perspective on beauty blogging. The researcher recruited the participants by writing to these bloggers on their social media platforms and requesting an interview with them. Prior to the interviews, the author emailed the bloggers and informed them of the reason behind the research and assured them that their names will not be used in the study. As a result of their busy schedule, two of these interviews were carried out via Skype, two were over the phone and two were face-to-face. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The types of interviews conducted are shown in table 3.3

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Type of Interview</b>	<b>Duration</b>
A	Skype	20-30 mins
B	Skype	20-30 mins
C	Phone	20-30 mins
D	Face to Face	20-30 mins
E	Phone	20-30 mins
F	Face to Face	20-30 mins

**Table 3.3: Types of Interviews**

### **3.9 Data Analysis**

Bryman and Bell (2015) recognise that data collection in qualitative research is subject to plausible interpretation. The researcher carefully analysed the data collected from the interviews and the focus groups establishing similarities and differences with all of the respondents. The author analysed the data using thematic analysis and established a number of key themes namely trust, honesty and doubt. A word cloud was created to establish clarity and visual results. Conclusions were then drawn up based on the results.

### **3.10 Limitations**

The author is aware that there are limitations with this dissertation. The main issue with this type of primary research would be the time restrictions. It is difficult to arrange for a group of people to be available at the same time to conduct the focus group. There are financial constraints also. The financial capital is not available to invest in a qualified moderator for the focus groups. Another limitation is the participant's possible reluctance to share their thoughts and ideas leading to unconformable credibility.



### **3.11 Ethical Issues Surrounding the Research**

The author is aware of the importance of acting in an ethical manner when conducting any form of research. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) assert that ‘right to privacy’, ‘informed consent’ and ‘protection from harm’ are the most renowned and upheld ethical concerns. The requirement of the researcher is to use both ‘moral responsibility’ and ‘common sense’ throughout the research process. The researcher followed ethical guidelines throughout the research process by creating an ethical protocol and creating a consent form for every participant of the focus group and interview. The author assured all respondents that their identities would remain anonymous and informed them that their participation was completely voluntary.

### **3.12 Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the research methodology used for this dissertation. It began by defining the research question and the key objectives of this dissertation. The researcher justified her choice of using qualitative research for the purpose of this research. Six interviews and three focus groups were carried out. The benefits and limitations of each research method was drawn upon. The author highlighted any limitations to the research and finally, the ethical issues surrounding the process.

## **Chapter 4:**

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to present the main findings that the author found when carrying out the primary research. These findings were obtained through an in-depth thematic analysis of all aspects of beauty blogging. To ensure the results gave a holistic view of the beauty blogging sector, the author decided to carry out in-depth

interviews with six highly successful beauty bloggers in Ireland and three focus groups with female blog followers between the ages eighteen and twenty-three. This chapter will give a brief description of the bloggers interviewed, the social media platforms they prefer and their justification for this choice, the marketing element of beauty blogging and the importance of their reputation. The author will then discuss the findings from the focus groups, these findings will be presented under a number of key headings which correspond with the main research objectives. They are both narrative and descriptive in nature and in order to further highlight areas of importance, a number of direct quotations from respondents have been included. Due to the nature of the method, the identity of the six interviewed bloggers will remain anonymous and will be presented as Bloggers A, B, C, D, E and F.

## **4.2 Interview Findings**

### **4.2.1 Bloggers Profiles and Motivations for Blogging**

**Blogger A** is 21 years old. She completed her leaving cert in 2013 and progressed to undertake a year-long course in Senior College Dun Laoghaire (now BFEI) called Theatrical and Media Makeup which covered all aspects of makeup from the theory behind it to the practical application. She is now working independently as a freelance Makeup Artist. She has been blogging since September 2015. When asked what motivated her to start blogging, she declared:

*“I just really enjoyed reading beauty blogs online and following bloggers on snapchat and I figured I had enough info and wanted to help people out with products etc. plus I wanted to use it to build a client base for makeup and to show my work online!”*

**Blogger B** is 20 years old. She started blogging one year ago. She is the most followed beauty blogger in Ireland. She completed her leaving cert in 2014 in the presentation secondary school in Waterford and has worked in numerous jobs since. She went to college in CTI where she studied travel and tourism for one year. She later attended an Inglot make up course in Cork City. She then moved down to Cork and worked in Inglot makeup store for 6 months and is currently a full-time

beauty blogger. The reason for her success differs to the rest of the bloggers due to the fact she had a following prior to her blog. Her boyfriend is famous and as a result, she started receiving attention. When asked what motivated her to start blogging, she revealed:

*“I first started it off because my boyfriend has a lot of followers on his own pages, 4 million on Facebook and 600k on Instagram. People then started noticing me and I just made my own as so many people were following my private pages! I saw a huge opportunity for myself and took the plunge!”*

**Blogger C** is 25 years old. She has been blogging for 3 years. She has a Bachelor’s Degree in Business Studies from Waterford Institute of Technology and currently works at a Public Relations company. She is a trained make-up artist and has worked in the beauty industry for 6 years. She described herself as brutally honest. When asked what motivated her to start blogging, she stated:

*“I always had a passion for beauty and felt like I had good opinions, so I just went for it. It was something I always wanted to do but couldn’t find the courage. Looking back, I can’t believe I was so scared, it was the best decision of my life so far, it gives me such confidence to help young women like me.”*

**Blogger D** is 34 years old. She has been blogging for 3 years. She has a degree in history, geography and music and a post grad degree in primary school teaching. She has been working as a primary school teacher since 2006. She blogs as a hobby however she posts as frequently as possible. She began blogging as a distraction to help her past a hard time in her life. When asked what motivated her to start blogging, she expressed:

*“In 2013, I was diagnosed with Thyroid cancer. I knew I was going to be off work for quite a while and needed something to distract me. I didn’t start blogging for any other reason but to give my day some structure. I also started blogging before the rise of the superstar bloggers.”*

**Blogger E** is 34 years old. She is a relatively new blogger, she began less than one year ago and has since gained a huge following. She studied music in UCC back in 2000 and at 25, received a diploma in counselling and psychotherapy. Before pursuing her dream of being a successful makeup artist and beauty blogger, she managed multiple hair salons. She worked in Peter Marks and Debenhams before finding her job an Inglot, which is where her story began. She recently left Inglot to teach makeup courses and set up her own makeup studio. When asked what motivated her to start blogging, she stated:

*“Well, I got an A1 in Art in my Leaving Cert, and since then I always wanted a career in Art and Design. I never thought of makeup like that but after years of working in different professions and realising how deep my passion and love for makeup and beauty is, I found the strength to start a new career doing something I love. I love my job, I love it.”*

**Blogger F** is 26 years old. She has been blogging for 2 years. She left school at an early age and went back to complete her Leaving Certificate in 2014. She was told she could never amount to anything however she built an empire for herself. She is hugely successful in Dublin with her own makeup headquarters. When asked what motivated her to start blogging, she explained:

*“When I was sixteen, I got pregnant. I got thrown out of my house and was forced to raise my baby boy in homeless shelters until I was old enough to get my own lease. After I found a home, I decided to go back and do my leaving cert. Turns out I was a lot smarter than I thought, I got 3 A’s, 2 B’s and a C in all higher level subjects. I wanted to show my son that it’s never too late. It is because of this and my love for makeup that I started my blog, to show everyone that it is never too late to turn your life around.”*



### **Figure 4.1: Word cloud based on blogger motivations**

This word cloud in figure 4.1 was created from the interview transcripts to aid the author in establishing the key themes for motivating bloggers. It is evident that the reoccurring motivations for bloggers are their love and passion for makeup and beauty.

### **4.3 Bloggers Social Media Platform Preferences**

The overwhelming favourite social media platform that bloggers use is Snapchat with five of the interviewees choosing it as their first preference. Facebook was the second favourite social media platform. There was a noticeable pattern throughout the interviews of bloggers stating that Snapchat has been their base platform, meaning that they gain followers on this platform and afterwards, they spread to other platforms. Blogger A believes that *“Snapchat is the best for engaging with them quickly, it’s immediate contact”*. Blogger C agreed supported this disclosing that *“snapchat was a game changer for me, once that took of the rest followed”*. Facebook was the second preference the bloggers chose noting that *“Facebook contains everything that you need, it has a mix of all the blogging essentials like videos, pictures, posts all of it”*. Table 4.1 highlights the bloggers who were interviewed social media following.

Blogger A	Blogger B	Blogger C	Blogger D	Blogger E	Blogger F
Facebook 8K	Facebook 250K	Facebook 6.2K	Facebook 51K	Facebook 18K	Facebook 25K
Instagram 10K	Instagram 160K	Instagram 11.1K	Instagram 11K	Instagram 9K	Instagram 52K
Snapchat 6.3K	Snapchat 35K	Snapchat 10.5K	Snapchat 15K	Snapchat 5K	Snapchat 20K
YouTube 1.3K	YouTube 8K	YouTube 1K	YouTube 3K	YouTube 1K	YouTube 5K

**Table 4.1: Bloggers Social Media Following**

#### 4.4 Blogging and Marketing

There is a growing concern developing from blog readers that beauty bloggers aren't being honest in their reviews and that marketing is taking over. Beauty companies are always sending bloggers out products to review online. When asked if they get sent free products to market, the bloggers had mixed reactions. Blogger B stated *"I've sent around my details to beauty companies explaining who I am and what I do and telling them about the amount of engagement on my page, it's up to them to send me their products then. I constantly get sent products every day, the postman hates me at this stage!"* Conversely, Blogger A made clear that *"90% of the stuff I post about, I bought myself and if it has been sent to me, I'll always thank the company and state that I've been sent it. I've never marketed a product I don't believe in. Any of my posts are 100% genuine"*

Blogger D clarified that she had been sent products to market but was never paid to do so *"I don't blog to be famous so I'm not going to market products that I don't believe in. I have received products from MAC and Clinique, two of the leading cosmetic companies in the world, but I've also been said crazy things, sanitary towels were the latest!"* Blogger E felt strongly about this topic exclaiming that she has been offered to market products on Instagram but turned them all down. All of the bloggers claimed that they have never accepted payment for marketing a product and that they all gave honest reviews.

#### 4.5 Blogger Credibility

All interviewees agreed that blogger credibility is of utmost importance to every blogger in order for them to have a good reputation. The author found that the

bloggers felt very strongly about being honest to their readers. When asked why they thought their followers trusted their recommendations, Blogger B expressed *“I am a strong believer in speaking your mind about whatever you like and whatever you dislike. I like to tell my followers the pros and cons of a product, my honesty helped me build trust”*. Blogger D gave a similar outlook by pinpointing the point in her career where she gained her followers trust *“it was my review of the Crown brush palette that changed how people looked at my blog. I hated that palette and said as much in the post. It was at the time when a really big blogger was raving about it, so I gathered a bit of attention and people liked what I had to say”*. Blogger F spoke opened up about her difficult childhood to her followers and admitted that she got a lot of support for her honesty throughout her career as a blogger.

Blogger A and Blogger E are both qualified makeup artists and explained that this contributed to gaining their followers trust. Blogger E expressed *“my career as a makeup artist showed my followers that I know what I am talking about. I have studied makeup and I know the science behind it, therefore, they know I am being honest in my reviews and it definitely helped me gain their trust”*.

## **4.6 Focus Group Findings**

### **4.7 Blog Engagement**

The first research objective was to identify how young adult female consumers’ engage with beauty bloggers and with each other on social media platforms. The author presents the findings based on blog followers’ interaction with bloggers and with themselves.

#### **4.7.1 Interaction with bloggers**

The author wanted to determine how young female consumers interacted with beauty bloggers to understand the level of influence that beauty bloggers have on their purchase intentions. All focus groups said they did engage with bloggers on at least one social media platforms daily. One respondent from group two noted that they preferred Facebook for interaction as it was the only platform which contained a bit of

everything “YouTube is great for long term videos, snapchat is great for instant videos and pictures, Instagram is great for pictures alone, but Facebook is the platform that contains it all.” Another respondent in group one noted “Snapchat allows me to see the everyday normal life of the blogger, and for me when I know their personality, I can trust their reviews more. Plus, it’s great for engaging with the blogger on a personal note. For example, I snapped one of my favourite bloggers, Blaithnad Murphy, asking her what tan she was wearing and she instantly snapped me back with an answer”.

#### **4.7.2 Interaction with other blog followers**

Due to the rapid increase in the popularity of blogger engagement, the author wanted to establish if the followers interacted with each other on social media platforms as well as the bloggers themselves. One respondent from group one explained that she would often communicate with other followers under a Facebook post “If I’m on Facebook and I come across a recommendation that I know my friends or my family would find interesting, I tag them under it” A respondent from group three elucidated that she didn’t engage with followers on social media platforms but often did off social media “My friends and I would always talk in our group conversation on Whats App about what the bloggers have been saying that week, asking if we saw their snapchat story and if any of us are going to buy the products their using, there is always one of us who will buy it”.

### **4.8 Trust in Blogging**

The second objective was to evaluate the extent to which young female consumers trust beauty bloggers on social media platforms. The three key themes identified was being “real”, honesty and doubt.

#### **4.8.1 Being “Real”**

The level of influence that beauty bloggers have on their followers is ever-growing with some followers taking their word as gospel. However, this influence didn’t happen overnight. The author was determined to find out why the level of trust placed



in these bloggers is so high. When asked if they trust beauty bloggers, there were mixed messages. One respondent in group two said they only trusted bloggers that were real *“I have been watching beauty bloggers for a long time, and it’s when they start to get attention from beauty companies that you see their true colours. For me, if I see bloggers giving every product on the market a great review, I will be suspicious that they are being asked to say that by the beauty company, it’s important to me to hear the pros and cons of a product”*. Another respondent in the same group agreed adding *“I follow two bloggers, Jeanette Cronin and Gemma Leigh, both of them come onto snapchat in the night time in her pyjamas with no makeup on their faces and will talk about their day. This makes me respect them more because, for me, it shows me that their real people with real lives and real opinions behind all their makeup, hair and fake tan. I trust them more for being themselves”*

#### **4.8.2 Honesty**

A reoccurring theme throughout all three focus groups that the author noticed was their constant reference to honesty. It was clear that the respondents trusted bloggers who were honest to their followers. Two respondents in group one and three mentioned an American beauty blogger, Huda Kattan *“When I see a blogger being honest, it automatically helps me relate to them. For example, an Arab American blogger, Huda Kattan, is a worldwide phenomenon because she blogged about having to shave her face, posting a picture with shaving foam on her chin. This picture went viral and her blog grew massively because lots of women may have heavier hair growth than others and are embarrassed by having to remove it and Huda just threw it out there proud as punch to the World and rocked it! She inspires women around the World to be true to themselves”*.

#### **4.8.2 Doubt**

There comes a point where bloggers become renowned and beauty companies will approach them to market their products. Trust and Honesty contribute greatly to the credibility of the blogger, however the author wanted to comprehend what happens if this reputation is in jeopardy. When the participants were asked do they ever doubt the bloggers they follow, a respondent in group two said *“Well, when I see a blogger*

*recommending a product that got sent to them that isn't usually what they would use, I worry that it's a marketing tool by a beauty company. There's no law against companies approaching bloggers and bloggers lying to us about it. I suppose it comes down to trust again, if they lie about their review of the product saying it's great, and we buy it and it's bad, then it's their reputation and credibility that suffers"* Another respondent agreed *"at the end of the day, the beauty blogger market is saturated and if one of them decide to be untruthful, their followers will leave them and find another one who is honest"*.

#### **4.9 Blogger Recommendations**

The third objective was to explore how beauty bloggers recommendations influence female consumption of beauty brands.

After establishing that beauty bloggers recommendations do influence young female consumers purchasing behaviours, the author wanted to ascertain how they influence the consumption of beauty brands. When asked about the level of influence, one blogger from group two explained *"I pay no attention to paid advertisements anymore, I will always check what a blogger has to say about a product prior to purchase. With the rise of the digital era, people don't choose hotels before reading reviews on them, this is the same thing!"*

This is a major factor in the growing popularity of blogs. Online reviews have taken over the internet for many consumers The days are gone where companies can indulge in false advertisement and get away with it. One respondent from group three claimed *"There are a couple of beauty bloggers whose world I take for gospel, especially if they are a makeup artist themselves. When they tell me not to buy a product from a certain brand, I won't. I am not going to waste my money on a product that I know isn't of good quality"*.

A reoccurring answer throughout the focus groups was that the followers won't be influenced by a blogger who refuses to find the time to answer their follower's questions and acknowledge what they have to say. A respondent from group one said *"blogging is a two-way streak, it's not a paid profession, it's a choice and therefore bloggers should always be willing to help their followers with any queries they might have. If I saw a blogger read my message and ignore me, it would sit well with me at all and their recommendations wouldn't have the influence they once did"*.

#### **4.10 Conclusions**

This chapter has presented the research findings from the interviews and focus groups carried out by the author with respect to the main objectives of the study. By using thematic analysis, the author found numerous key themes behind beauty blogging and the influence that bloggers have on their followers. The findings in this chapter have provided the author with numerous insights which are discussed in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 5:**

## **DISCUSSION**

## **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter aims to discuss the primary research findings presented in the previous chapter. The author used two research techniques, interviews and focus groups, when carrying out her research in order to gather a holistic view of the influence beauty bloggers have on their followers. The author will discuss the findings from the two sources, comparing and contrasting them to the existing literature on this topic.

## **5.2 Blogger Motivations**

Cameron and Anderson (2006) state that the overall purpose of beauty blogging is to create a body of knowledge and to build and maintain a connection with peers. Huang *et al.* (2007) identified five blogging motivations namely to document their life experiences, to provide commentary and opinions, to express deeply felt emotions, to articulate ideas through writing, and to form and maintain community forums. Costa *et al.* (2015) noted that a blog can act as an online profile and can assist bloggers who want to show case their knowledge and experiences. The research findings from this study corresponds with these motivations. One blogger started blogging to document her life experience, she went through a difficult time growing up, having a child at 16 and becoming homeless. She wanted to document her experience on how she turned her life around. Another blogger mentioned she always thought she had good opinions and wanted to “get them out there”. One blogger began blogging to express deeply seated emotions as she battled her way through cancer. Two bloggers which were interviewed both began blogging to form and maintain relationships. They are currently self-employed as makeup artists and mentioned they wanted to use their blogs as an online profile to build a clientele.

Costa *et al.* (2015) suggests that there are financial perks in beauty blogging by highlighting that blogging is a means of generating income once they have a loyal following. The research findings conflicted with the literature reviewed as the bloggers all mentioned they did not get paid for their job. They also made it clear that no money has been exchanged for marketing beauty products either. The most the bloggers ever received was free makeup samples via the post.

### **5.3 Engagement**

This section addresses the first objective which is concerned with identifying the means by which young adult female consumers engage with beauty bloggers and each other on social media platforms. This two-way communication was one of the main themes that was generated from the research.

#### **5.3.1 Reasons for Using Social Media**

Zhang *et al.* (2014) noted that in a decade, social media went from being virtually insignificant to having over one billion active users. The emergence of social media has made it possible for one person to communicate with hundreds or even thousands of other people about companies and the products they provide (Mangold and Faulds, 2008). Whiting and Williams (2003) examined the various reasons why females use social media such as social interaction, information seeking, passing time, expression of opinions and information sharing. The research findings aligned with this literature. The bloggers identified a variety of social media sites for sharing information and expressing their heart-felt opinions on different beauty products. Additionally, the focus groups confirmed that blog followers use social media sites to seek information on a beauty product prior to purchase and to part take in social interaction with beauty bloggers and other blog readers. Both sources highlighted the absolute necessity of using social media platforms to express their opinions.

#### **5.3.2 Social Media Preference**

Smith (2015) identified that Facebook is the largest social network in the World with over 1.5 billion users. Facebook demonstrates the co-existence of various media and web spaces on one singular platform (O' Reilly, 2007). Shane (2014) described how Facebook expanded its blogging potential in 2006 with the launch of the Facebook Notes app, which allowed for longer form content suitable for blog posts. Goins (2012) described it as a breeding ground for bloggers as it allows bloggers and their followers to interact with each other through the "share", "like" and "comment" features. Facebook is the social media platform that has it all, it's a necessity for bloggers (Nardi *et al.* 2010). The findings corresponded with the literature to an extent

as the bloggers agreed that Facebook did contain all the essentials that a blogger needs. It allows them to post pictures, videos and blog posts while allowing their followers to interact with them by commenting on their posts or their profile and it is an important platform which contributes to the success of their blogging careers. The focus groups revealed that all respondents mentioned that they did engage with bloggers on at least one social media platform daily. Facebook was the preferred social media platform for the respondents. They mentioned that it was the only platform that contained everything they needed to engage with the bloggers. They also mentioned that they love the fact they can tag their peers under a Facebook post and they can instantly engage with each other.

Roesner *et al.* (2014) described Snapchat a smartphone application which allowed users to share limited-time photos or videos which “disappear” after a couple of seconds. Snapchats reported revenue in 2014 was 3 million euro and its projected revenue for 2015 was 50 million euro. These figures reflect the rapid growth of the app and explain the love both bloggers and blog readers have for it. Wakefield and Bennett (2015) described Snapchat as being “transient” in nature. The literature undoubtedly agreed with the research findings as the bloggers chose Snapchat as their favourite social media platform. It was mentioned by both bloggers and followers as being the easiest platform for two-way communication. One respondent confirmed that when snapchat took off, everything else followed, this implies that Snapchat is the leading social media platform in beauty blogging. Another interesting point gathered from the focus groups was that the respondents liked to see the everyday life of the blogger as it helped to gain their trust, Snapchat allowed this to exist.

Although the findings correspond with the existing literature, there is limited literature on the use of Snapchat in blogging. It is only more recent literature that identifies this app as a marketing tool. Snapchat was chosen as the preferred social media platform by the bloggers whilst the literature suggests that Facebook is the preference. The overwhelming difference in the two platforms is that Snapchat is more unique because of its “transient” nature. The respondents mentioned that there is an exclusivity to it as if you do not watch the bloggers Snapchat story, it will be gone tomorrow. Silverman

(2014) supports this sentiment stating that Snapchat is unique since it demands that the user engage with the content, because it's such a short-lived piece. The findings also suggested that blog followers interact with each other on social media platforms, such as tagging each other under Facebook posts and discussing a blog review in private social networks such as WhatsApp.

## **5.4 Credibility**

This section addresses the second objective which is concerned with evaluating the extent to which female consumers “trust” beauty bloggers. The key themes identified were trust, honesty and relatability.

### **5.4.1 Trust and Honesty**

Hsu *et al.* (2013) expressed that a reputable blogger values their hard-earned reputation whilst building trust with their followers. Abrams *et al.* (2003) highlighted that trust is a crucial feature in the formation of relationships and that it promotes effective knowledge creation, sharing information and creating credibility. Kaye (2009) suggests that the reason the level of trust is so high in blogging is due to the repeated interaction between bloggers and their followers. The followers become familiar with the bloggers and the opinions they share which leads to the formation of trusting relationships. The primary research in this study confirms that trust is central to successful beauty blogging. The bloggers mentioned in their interviews that they earned their readers trust by being brutally honest with them with their reviews on different beauty products. The focus groups reached the same conclusion by declaring that they trust the bloggers who will give them an honest review on a product they are thinking of purchasing, they want to hear the pros and the cons of the product. It is this honesty that helps to build a trusting relationship. Huda Kattan was a blogger who was identified by some participants in the focus groups for being an honest blogger, she posted a picture of herself shaving her face and this honestly appealed to her follower's hearts and as a result, it helped to gain admiration and earn their trust.

### 5.4.2 Relatability

Current literature reviewed suggests the relatability of the blogger to be a factor in the level of trust their followers place in them. Ohanian (1991) developed two theory models which refer to the effectiveness of the message given by the bloggers.

The first model is the Source Credibility Model, which contends that the effectiveness of a message depends on the perceived level of expertise and trustworthiness in a blogger. Wei and Lu (2012) concluded that a high credibility blogger will be more influential when it comes to consumers' purchasing behaviour. When comparing the research findings to the literature, it is evident from both the interviews and the focus groups, that the bloggers who were makeup artists and studied makeup and beauty would have the expertise required to give an unbiased opinion. The bloggers who studied makeup and beauty stated that it helped them hugely to gain their followers trust and to build a career. The participants of the focus groups admitted that they would trust the opinions given by these bloggers because they have the relevant knowledge and skills behind them.

The second model developed by Ohanian (1991) is the Source Attractiveness Model, which depends on the desirability of the blogger. It focuses on the similarity, likeability and familiarity the followers feel towards them. Kim and Chen (2016) state that the follower should relate to the blogger in some way. Erdogan *et al.* (2001) associates this model with physical attractiveness, stating that the followers will place more trust in the blogger the more attractive they are. The findings from the interviews gathered that the bloggers do what they can to show their followers that they are real and their opinions are true. Some of the bloggers will create a video on Snapchat with no makeup on, showing their followers their true selves while trying to relate to them. The respondents mentioned this in their focus groups and agreed that it is important to feel that real connection with the bloggers. However, the literature contrasts with the findings from the primary research in the sense that followers do not trust a blogger more based on their attractiveness. None of the bloggers mentioned physical attractiveness to be one of the reasons why their followers trust them.



Similarly, none of the respondents mentioned physical attractiveness as a factor in their relationships with the bloggers.

## **5.5 Recommendations**

This section addresses the third objective which is concerned with exploring how beauty bloggers' recommendations influence young adult female's consumption of beauty brands. This is discussed with reference to online reviews and examining blogging as a marketing tool.

### **5.5.1 Online Reviews**

Wei and Lu (2012) declare that the internet has dramatically changed how information reaches the public. Sellers no longer control the distribution of their product information. Online reviews and blogging have taken over. Channel Advisor (2015) concluded that internet users trust online reviews more than traditional media, user-generated content in the form of online customer reviews was found to significantly influence consumer purchasing decisions. This literature seems to correlate with the findings suggested that the respondents in the focus groups will always turn to their trusted bloggers for information on a product they wish to purchase. One respondent mentioned they paid no attention to traditional advertisements any longer because they felt they cannot be trusted to the same extent that bloggers can.

### **5.5.2 Blogging and Marketing**

Solomon *et al.* (2012) declared that understanding consumer behaviour is a fundamental in marketing today. Osman *et al.* (2009) suggest that from a marketing perspective, blogging has been viewed as a new type of eWOM. Hsu *et al.* (2013) elucidated that bloggers' eWOM can be an effective marketing strategy to boost sales and for this reason companies are moving towards sending free samples of their products to bloggers to be publicly reviewed and recommended. The author found the research findings corresponded with the literature considering that all of the bloggers mentioned there was a marketing element in beauty blogging. However, there were

mixed emotions on this topic from the bloggers. Some bloggers admitted to emailing their addresses to beauty companies in order to get free samples of products to review, whilst other bloggers refused all types of marketing. All of the bloggers who were interviewed had to date, never accepted payment in exchange for marketing a beauty brand as it would not be a 'real' review. These findings demonstrate that it is the bloggers individual choice whether or not to use their blog to market products for a beauty company or to use it to give their honest and personal reviews.

### **5.5.3 Doubt**

With the acceleration of marketing techniques used in recent times in beauty blogging, an increase in blog followers' scepticism has arisen. Nicholls (2014) discusses the risks involved in beauty blogging such as damaging their reputation. Social Media can cause risk to a bloggers reputation by creating negative publicity. For example, if a blogger ignores their followers, the word can spread on Social Media rapidly thus damaging their reputation. Nicholls (2014) explains that if the bloggers makes a false recommendation or a wrong comment, it will be seen by their whole following and in turn damage their reputation. Rocamora (2011) highlighted the increase in the levels of beauty blogs on social media platforms. If followers start to doubt the recommendations given to them by bloggers, they can simple unfollow them and find another blogger with honest opinions. The author noted this was the prevailing opinion throughout all of the focus groups. The respondents were worried that if the bloggers start using a product that they don't usually use, that it may be a marketing play. They also stated that if the bloggers gave a false or biased review, they wouldn't trust them anymore and their hard-earned credibility would disintegrate. The bloggers seemed to understand this as they never accepted payment after been offered by beauty companies. They also stressed the importance of being honest and true to themselves in their reviews.

The findings also suggested that two-way communication is a necessity in successful and authentic blogging. Although the literature states that blogs are two-way communication channels (Bernoff and Li, 2008), they do not highlight the potential risks involved if the two-way communication is damaged. The research signalled that

if the followers asked the blogger a question regarding their blog post and the blogger failed to answer, that their relationship with the blogger might thereafter be severely damaged. One respondent mentioned that if a blogger read their question and ignored it, their recommendations wouldn't have the influence or weight it had before.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the primary research findings from the interviews with the bloggers and the focus groups with the blog followers with relation to the overall research objectives in this study. The author presented the findings against the existing literature to gather a rounded insight into the topic of beauty blogging. Reoccurring themes of honesty, trust and doubt were again seen in this chapter. The next chapter will discuss the conclusions and recommendations of the study.

## **Chapter 6:**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECCOMENDATIONS**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this final chapter is to conclude the study by present the key findings arising from the literature review and the primary research findings. The chapter will commence by revisiting the research objectives. The key findings will be summarised under each objective. This chapter will also provide recommendations for further research. Finally, the limitations of this study will be addressed.

#### **6.2 Research Objectives**

The aim of this study was to evaluate the influence Irish beauty bloggers have on their followers. The research objectives of the study are as follows:

- To identify how young adult female consumers engage with beauty bloggers and with each other on social media platforms;
- To evaluate the extent to which female consumers trust beauty bloggers on social media platforms;
- To explore how beauty bloggers recommendations influence female's consumption of beauty brands.

#### **6.3 Young consumers engagement with beauty bloggers**

WOM and eWOM have proved to be the most trustworthy source of product information from the consumer's perspective. Facebook, Snapchat and Youtube were the three Social Networks examined in the literature. These user generated sites are responsible for the expeditious success of beauty blogging. Researchers have found that out of the three social media platforms, Facebook was the most popular because it has more functions than other social media platforms. It allows bloggers to post pictures, videos and blog posts. The research findings showed the blog followers also preferred Facebook for this reason, it allows them to see all aspects of a beauty blog. It enables followers to engage with the bloggers underneath one of their posts while

also letting them “like”, “share” or “comment” on their posts, or tag a friend and start a new conversation with them under a specific post. Snapchat was chosen as the favourite social media platform for bloggers due to its exclusivity. Bloggers found it easier to communicate and engage with their followers on Snapchat. The bloggers revealed that snapchat had heavily contributed to their success. The followers chose Snapchat as their second favourite site for engaging with bloggers because it allowed them to see the real life of the blogger. Being relatable is a huge advantage for any beauty blogger. It was also found that a fundamental in blogging is two-way engagement, bloggers who fail to answer their followers’ questions are likely to fail.

#### **6.4 The extent to which female consumers trust beauty bloggers**

The literature found blogger credibility to be at the centre of beauty blogging. A reputable blogger values their hard-earned reputation and stands behind the recommendation that they give. It is their aim to build trusting relationships with their followers. The literature found the level of trust placed in a blogger to depend on their perceived level of expertise, trustworthiness and honesty. The research findings suggest that the more honest the blogger is in their reviews, the more successful they are. It was also found that followers want to know more about these bloggers. This is where snapchat has helped them to earn their followers trust. Particular bloggers will post videos on Snapchat wearing no makeup and will mention the pros and cons of a product in a review and for that reason, their followers trust their advice. It was found that all of the followers in this study would refer to a trusted bloggers’ review prior to a purchase.

#### **6.5 The influence of blogger recommendations on female consumption**

The literature suggest that companies today cannot control how information about their products reach the consumers’ minds. Traditional advertising has become less effective while blogger recommendations have become extremely popular and a massive factor in whether or not a consumer follows through with a purchase. The research informs that companies are embracing beauty blogging and social media. The level of trust placed in blog recommendations have attracted companies to use these recommendations as a marketing tool. The findings showed that all bloggers

have been approached in some way by a company to recommend their product, whether it be sending them free samples of beauty product by post or writing to them on their social media accounts. The findings clearly showed that if a blogger gave a false review to benefit a company's marketing strategy, the hard earned trust they built would be broken. Blog followers will start to associate these recommendations with false advertisements and doubt will arise thus, pushing them to move onto another reliable blogger.

In conclusion, beauty blogging has become a phenomenon amongst young female consumers. Social media has opened huge opportunities for bloggers to get their posts to reach hundreds and thousands of followers instantly. Reoccurring themes of honesty, trust and doubt have been seen throughout this study when discussing beauty blogs. The success of any blogger is owed to their credibility and reputation.

## **6.6 Limitations**

The author identified a number of limitations in this study. These include:

- A lack of financial resources and time constraints in the primary research. The author would have liked to expand her research internationally to get a more holistic view of beauty bloggers around the World
- The author found that academic journals are not up to date with technology. There was a lapse of time between the journals that are published and the growth of technology, in particular Snapchat. While there was literature available on Facebook, Snapchat is relatively new and the author found it difficult to find up to date literature.

## **6.7 Recommendations for further research**

Further research should analyse certain bloggers appeal to their followers based on the perception of holistic living, focusing on how consumers value their lifestyle, mindfulness and health.

Another area which should be investigated is the importance of two-way communication and engagement in beauty blogging. Some of the respondents of the focus groups mentioned this throughout the study.

Additionally, an examination into the effectiveness of marketing managers using blogging as a marketing tool on social media platforms could be investigated from the companies' perspective.

Finally, this study could be used to examine the influence of beauty bloggers recommendations on young female consumers on an international level.

## **6.8 Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of beauty bloggers on young Irish female consumers. Numerous studies found that females tend to search for more information about a product prior to purchase than men as they are more concerned about the validity and reliability of the review. It is for this reason and the extent of evolution in technology in the last decade that beauty blogging has flourished in recent years. Web 2.0 tools such as virtual communities, social networks and blogs are changing the way businesses operate. Following thorough examination, the study has achieved the research objectives by establishing thematic analysis of why this level of trust is placed in beauty bloggers. These can be summarised under trust, honesty, expertise and credibility. The author concludes that this research provides practical and valuable information regarding bloggers and their followers' engagement on social media platforms and the influence behind their recommendations. This will be particularly useful for beauty companies who want to effectively manage how their product information is perceived by their customers.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A: Reflective Log**

This dissertation was motivated by my love for beauty and makeup and my genuine interest into the rise of the superstar bloggers. In the last year, I have realised the extent of the influence that beauty bloggers have on their followers. I decided to undertake a study to examine how they influence young Irish females and the role that social media plays in this.

I remember starting this academic year and being told to come up with ideas for the title of my dissertation. I began to brainstorm different ideas but I failed to feel excited about any of them. I finally decided on the topic of Celebrity Endorsement. Originally, I wanted to investigate the influence they have on Irish consumers. After speaking to my supervisor, I decided to progress with this topic. I wrote my first draft of a literature review and found it boring, tedious, uneducated and stale. I knew this wasn't going to be the topic for me. I knew it was missing something – passion. I brought it to my supervisor and not surprisingly, she agreed. I won't pretend I wasn't disheartened, I felt as though I was falling behind the rest of my class. I was back to the drawing board and panic began to set in. This experience cost me valuable time and energy and I learned to never go ahead with a task if there is any doubt in my mind that it isn't right for me.

Over the next couple of weeks, I rattled my brain thinking of which topic to choose. I remember watching my Snapchat stories one evening on my phone, I was watching my favourite blogger, Rosanna Davidson. She gave a review on a new bronzer that had hit the market. I decided I was going to buy it, and then it hit me – beauty blogging. I realised the influence that beauty bloggers have on their followers and it is such a recent development in society, it was so current and relevant, it was perfect. That is when I realised I had found my dissertation topic. I brought this idea to my supervisor and she was just as excited as me about the topic. I felt relief, happiness and excitement. I was finally ready to get stuck into this thesis.



As I began to gather existing literature, I found myself getting lost in academic papers. Beauty blogging is a relatively new phenomenon and as a result, there wasn't an abundance of literature available on the topic. I began to worry at the beginning but once I began, I realised there was no need to worry. I felt it, the passion I was hoping I would feel with my previous topic but never did. It became easy and enjoyable. I was excited to find out more. I brought my first draft to my supervisor and she could see the potential in this dissertation, she gave me amazing advice and praised my hard work. I realised her support was both real and necessary.

When choosing my research methods, I was initially going to use questionnaires and focus groups. I was going to focus solely on young Irish female consumers who follow beauty blogs. However, I recognised the potential I could reach if I included actual beauty bloggers in my research also. I decided to chase the most successful beauty bloggers in Ireland and ask them if they would be interested in an interview for my dissertation. They started to agree and my heart was racing. I was going to meet my favourite bloggers and interview them about their blogging careers. I was extremely enthusiastic as I began to organise interview dates. Due to the nature of their lifestyle, I could only meet in person with two of them. I carried out two interviews in person, two over skype and two over the phone. I was touched by some of their motivations behind their blog and I respected them for opening up to me like they did. I am extremely thankful to each and every one of them.

The most challenging part of this study was trying to organise the focus groups. The age group of the females I chose was between 18 and 23 and this meant that a number of them were in college and working. Trying to find a time and date which suited them all was a bit of a nightmare. On two separate occasions, I got last minute cancellations. It was very frustrating at the time. Although this was unavoidable, if I was to do this again I would have set a date further in advance and double checked with all of the respondents in the days leading up to the focus group in order to avoid cancellation.

This dissertation and the process itself have provided me with me valuable skills which I can carry into my future endeavours, both personally and academically. I have learned that when I get knocked down, to never give up. Get back up and try harder. I have overcome the challenges which were presented to me and found solutions to any problems I encountered. Although this dissertation may have tested my patience and frustrated me at times, I would not change it for the world. If it wasn't for these challenges, I wouldn't have written this dissertation. I am proud of myself and my class mates for getting this far and I am extremely grateful to my supervisor who made this all possible. Writing this dissertation has been a journey to remember.

## **Appendix B: Focus Group Questions Guide:**

1. Do you follow beauty blogs?
2. How often would you read/watch them?
3. Who is your favourite beauty blogger and why?
4. Why do you follow beauty bloggers?
5. Do you engage with beauty bloggers on social media sites and how?
  - a. Facebook
  - b. YouTube
  - c. Snapchat
  - d. Instagram
6. Would you engage with other followers on social media about these blogs?
7. Would you like/comment/share the bloggers content?
8. Do you trust every blogger you follow?
9. Do you believe what they are saying? Why do you trust them?
10. Would you see what a blogger has to say about a product prior to purchase?
11. Why do you think beauty blogging is growing in popularity?

12. Do you ever fear that bloggers are being bribed or payed to make fake recommendations?
13. Would an established beauty blogger influence your buying behaviour towards certain brands? Could you give an example?

## **Appendix C: Interview Question Guide**

1. What Is your Name?
2. How old are you?
3. What is your educational background, are you a student or working?
4. How long have you been a beauty blogger?
5. In your opinion, who is your target audience? Would you think the your main fan base would be between 18 and 23?
6. What motivated you to start blogging?
7. Do you have a strong online presence?
8. How do you interact with your followers?
  - a. Snapchat, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram
9. How many people follow you on these sites?
10. How often do you make a blog/vlog post?
11. Is there any differentiation between you and other beauty bloggers? What is the cause of your success in your opinion?
12. How do you interact with beauty companies?

13. Do you get many free samples of beauty products from companies?
14. Have you ever been asked to market beauty products by companies?
15. Why do you think your followers trust you? What makes you a credible source of information?
16. How did you gain this trust?
17. You've earned a trustworthy and respectful reputation as a blogger, how important is your reputation to you?
18. Have you established any long-term goals with this hobby? Where do you see yourself and your blog in the future?
19. Is there anything you dislike about blogging?

## **Appendix D: Focus Group Consent Form**

Dear Respondent,

I want to thank you for your participation in this dissertation. Your participation is wholly appreciated. Before the focus group begins, I would like you to remember that as a participant in this dissertation:

- Your participation in this research is completely voluntary.
- You can decline to answer any question throughout the process.
- You are free to withdraw from the focus group at any time.

The transcripts from the focus groups will be kept entirely confidential and under no circumstances will your name or personal information be included in the report if you do not wish.

I would be grateful if you would sign this form to show that I have read you its contents.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_

(Date) \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix E: Interview Consent Form**

Dear Respondent,

I want to thank you for your participation in this dissertation. Your participation is wholly appreciated. Before the focus group begins, I would like you to remember that as a participant in this dissertation:

- Your participation in this research is completely voluntary.
- You can decline to answer any question throughout the process.
- You are free to withdraw from the focus group at any time.

The transcripts from the focus groups will be kept entirely confidential and under no circumstances will your name or personal information be included in the report if you do not wish.

I would be grateful if you would sign this form to show that I have read you its contents.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_

(Date) \_\_\_\_\_