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The Use Of Blogs As A Marketing Tool In The Fashion Industry

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Abstract

Dissertation title: "The Use Of Blogs As A Marketing Tool In The Fashion Industry"

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On the basis of human relations prevails the communication. With the constant evolution of technology, communication reached different dimensions and was extended to multiple platforms such as Web 2.0. Beyond the traditional word-of-mouth communications, nowadays we are facing an enormous affluence and influence of the electronic word-of-mouth.

Within the electronic word-of-mouth, in this dissertation the main focus leans on fashion blogs as an important communication tool within social media, with its relevance being justified by the evolution and promising relationship between message sender and message receiver. More specifically, the current study evaluates the commercial value that fashion blogs potentially generate for the brands. Additionally, it is discussed the type of influence and credibility acknowledged by readers with regard to the blogs that they follow.

This dissertation includes a literature review chapter that emphasizes theoretical facts already stated about the subject. Additionally, and in order to obtain relevant and conclusive information, was developed a consumer research data collection.

The results show that the Portuguese population is not frequently involved with fashion blogs. However, for those who do, there is a strong tendency to give credibility to fashion bloggers, feel influenced in relation to publications and as a consequence, to purchase fashion items that were advertised on blogs.

Resumo

Título da dissertação: "The Use Of Blogs As A Marketing Tool In The Fashion Industry"

Autora: Mariana Freire

Na base das relações humanas prevalece a comunicação entre indivíduos. Com a constante evolução da tecnologia, também a comunicação conquistou outras dimensões e atingiu múltiplas plataformas como a Web 2.0. Para além da tradicional comunicação boca a boca, deparamo-nos hoje com uma enorme afluência e influência da comunicação boca a boca digital.

Nesta dissertação são destacados os blogs de moda como uma relevante plataforma de comunicação dos media sociais, pela sua evolução e promissora relação entre emissor e receptor de mensagens dentro do tema. É também discutido que tipo de credibilidade e influência os leitores depositam num blogger.

Como principal foco, analisa-se também o valor comercial que poderá resultar quando marcas do ramo da moda se aliam a blogs de moda na prática de estratégias de marketing integradas.

A dissertação inclui um capitulo de revisão literária que realça factos teóricos já proferidos sobre o tema. Adicionalmente, e com o intuito de obter informação relevante e conclusiva, foi desenvolvido uma pesquisa de recolha de dados ao consumidor.

Os resultados mostram que a população Portuguesa não está, na sua maioria, envolvida na leitura de blogs de moda de uma forma assídua e continuada. Contudo, para os que o fazem, existe uma forte tendência para depositar credibilidade no blogger de moda, sentir alguma influência em relação às publicações do mesmo e, como tal, proceder a compras de artigos de moda que foram publicitados em blogs.

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1. INTRODUCTION

On the foundation of human life prevails what makes us a society: communication. Perhaps for this fact, and for its importance, it is one of the oldest concepts in the literature, deserving dedication from many authors who have stated the basis of communication theory like Nyquist (1924), Hartley (1928) and Shannon (1948).

As has been mentioned by Shannon (1948), the communication theory is based on the transmission of a certain message from one point to another. The author also referred three important parts of the communication system: *the information source* that reproduces a message, *the channel* that is the medium used to transmit the message and *the destination* that is the person who receives the message.

The topic that arises this dissertation was a communication channel that is constantly growing and accomplishment important features in terms of relevance and importance among individuals, that is the concept of Electronic Word-of-mouth (hereafter, e-WOM), as a consequence of the use of Web 2.0.

Though, as time goes by, the modern times have revolutionized the communication networks and social media are now responsible for an important share of interactions between information sources and destinations. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) developed a classification of the social media in six distinct groups such as *collaborative projects* (e.g., Wikipedia), *blogs*, *social networking sites* like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, *content communities* (e.g. YouTube), *virtual social worlds* and *virtual game worlds*. The current dissertation focus on blogs, which are becoming increasingly relevant among individuals.

According to Technorati (2011), one of the most prestigious websites that control and measure the blogosphere, in 2010 there were more than 112 million blogs around the world. Forecasting discloses that a new blog is created every 7.4 seconds (Technorati, 2011). This trend reflects that 23% of total Internet usage time is devoted to blogs (Dream systems media). In the blogosphere, 34% of bloggers affirm posting about products and brand reviews (Technorati, 2011) and near one third of bloggers reveal that they have already been approached by a brand to write about or review products on their blog (Technorati, 2011), with the validation of 37% of marketers that said that nowadays, blogs are the most valuable type of content marketing (Content Plus, 2013). This fact reveals a pattern between brands and fashion blogs that will be explored along this dissertation.

In the context of fashion, the topic gains special relevance, with blogs frequently characterized as new marketing strategy with potential to attract potential consumers (Schertler et al. 2014). As Renata Certo-Ware defined, in a post of her personal blog, bloggers are considered a crucial segment of the fashion ecosystem. They have a complex task, since they have to perform multiple roles such as writers, photographers and critics in fashion. Additionally, the author affirms that bloggers, as a group, have not only the power to generate consumer interest but also the capability to drive sales (Certo-Ware 2013).

This subject leads us to interconnect the social media, and blogs in particular, with marketing theories such as Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) since they are currently used as a platform for brands to communicate with consumers. IMC relies in a consistent brand communication transmitted through different marketing channels (Schultz 1992). There is a prominent reality of fashion brands to ally themselves with fashion blogs, which are considered trustworthy and able to captivate their audience, to provide sponsorship posts. The main goal will be to make unobtrusive advertising in a way that it seems spontaneous by the blogger, who advises the use of a certain brand in exchange for contractual values. It is known that individuals tend to follow the references and indications of bloggers, but this will be an effective marketing strategy for brands?

Furthermore, the credibility of blogs was also evaluated for its influence; there is to say that according to standard communication models, senders that are perceived as credible and trustworthy by the receiver will deliver a message that may have a relatively significant impact on the destination (Friedman and Friedman 1979). Which support the idea that bloggers are a fundamental factor in the marketing strategies as they provide considered reliable information, source through brand messages that can be channeled to the consumer (Schertler et al. 2014).

All in all, since brands and communication are two broad topics and a shortcoming in the literature was found, the theme regarding fashion blogs and its relevance for fashion brands was elected to be pursued along this dissertation in order to verify its effectiveness as a marketing tool in the Portuguese market.

1.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

According to the theme above, arises the interest of exploring the following research questions:

RQ1: Which resources consumers use to get advices when considering the purchase of fashion related items? Are blogs a priority?

RQ2: Can fashion blogs be used as a marketing tool with positive outcomes for fashion brands?

RQ3: Are fashion blogs considered a credible marketing tool when considering the purchase of fashion related products?

To address these objectives, a secondary and a primary research were completed and presented ahead.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 WORD-OF-MOUTH

The connection between peers is based on human relations, in the way they communicate and interact. This ancient theme results in a deeper investigation in the business area to define how people can influence others through their experiences and feedbacks. In 1967 the first formal definition has come: Word-of-mouth (hereafter, WOM) is described as oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, concerning a brand, product, or a service (Arndt 1967). Additionally, a recent definition was applied to the marketing field and defined WOM as "a process of sharing opinions and information about specific products between customers" (Jalilvand et al. 2011, p. 43). Later in time, Keller (2007) stated that WOM "is the most important and effective communication channel" and also concluded in the same article that positive WOM was a capable force of influencing the purchase intentions. It is considered the oldest, but above all, the most effective way to share opinions and feelings about products and services. (Goyette *et al*. 2010; Wetzer *et al*. 2007).

Furthermore, some authors explored the extreme relevance of communication in the modern times and connected WOM with integrated marketing communication strategies. Kozinets *et al* (2010) that studied the WOM marketing specified the significance of the intentional influence of brands in consumer-to-consumer communications since personal communication, between consumers, are considered the most powerful tool of influence and persuasion that has been increasing over time. (Kozinets *et al.* 2010).

The analyses of WOM require a distinction between the sources of communication. We can talk about personal sources that include family, friends and close relatives; and impersonal sources coming from social media vehicles whether they are online or offline. (Brown and Reingen 1987; Duhan *et al*. 1997; Sénécal *et al.* 2005). The impersonal sources gain a deliberated strength, mostly in the twenty-first century, originating a few new concepts and ideas that correlate WOM and the digital world.

2.2 ELETRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH

Nowadays, customers are faced with numerous enlightening advantages and difficulties assigned to the web. Therefore, it was imperative that the concept of WOM evolves into e-WOM (Bataineh 2015). This notion portrayed is relatively recent and the authors describe it as *"any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet."* (Hennig-Thurau et al, 2004, p. 38). Bataineh (2015) explains the utility of this concept that allows customers to express, in different channels, their reviews, comments and opinions regarding products and services; like web forums, blogs, social network or websites.

Assessing the theme, Dellaroca (2003) stated some specific benefits and threats that came along with e-WOM: (i) The fact that internet has low cost and unlimited access associated, makes that exchange of information to be an uncontrolled process that in a large scale might cause different dynamics in the market; (ii) generally speaking, the constant evolution of technology allows an enhanced control over format and sort of communication; (iii) in cyberspace, users hiding behind a computer, providing some anonymity that encourages messages out of context and sometimes with ambiguous meaning and interpretation.

It is also important to mention the probability of the e-WOM becoming viral, something that reached unreasonable proportions and toured the world. Viral marketing is described as "the promotion of a company or its products and services through a persuasive message designed to spread, typically online, from person to person" (Marsden 2006, p.1).

2.2.1 CONSUMERS' MOTIVATION TO ENGAGE IN E-WOM COMMUNICATION

Henning-Thurau *et al.* (2004), identified a set of primary reasons that led consumers to express their opinions in online platforms such as: social benefits, economic motivations, concern for others and self-enhancement.

Concern for others comprises an honest desire to help someone making a wise purchase decision. Self-enhancement is described as the sense of power, superiority and privilege over information that encourages individuals to express some reviews in online platforms so others can value. (Engel, Blackwell and Miniard 1993). Research has shown a particular interest from consumers to expose their experiences as buyers. Approximately one-third of

the cyberspace users has evaluated products or and show special interest and dedication to provide product assessments (Riegner 2007).

On the other hand, since it was mentioned the reasons that led people to publish on blogs, it is also compulsory to understand the motivations that lead individuals to pursue information in such platforms.

Kaye (2005) exposes six motivations why Internet users connect with blogs: Information seeking, convenience, personal fulfillment, political surveillance, social surveillance and necessity of affiliation are the major incentives that led users to search for a webpage among the blogosphere. According to the author, the relevance of these motivations arises from social needs that individuals need to see fulfilled. The inevitability of searching in blogs for information about recent subjects and gathering information to use in discussion with the pairs and compare it with traditional media are valid arguments given by Kaye (2005). The fulfillment of emotional needs such as entertainment, relaxation, excitement, involvement and having the opportunity to express personal viewpoints are also considered to support the major motivations that led blog readers to engage in this activity (Kaye 2005).

After proving the relevance of WOM and e-WOM in the marketing communications, Hennig-Thurau *et al.* (2004) reinforced the idea of e-WOM as a topic that requires more attention from marketers being perceived, for many authors, as a necessary element of the marketing mix (e.g., Shu-Chuan and Yoojung 2011; Yeh and Choi 2011). The more marketing professionals understand the reasons that led consumers to engage in e-WOM, the better they can monitor and manage the potential impact of e-WOM in purchase decisions (Goldsmith and Horowitz 2006).

2.3 BLOGS

There are two different ways to differentiate online media: as a asynchronous or synchronous channel. The asynchronous channels are defined by a different time signature between writers and readers accessing information, where blogs and virtual communities are included. On the other hand, chat rooms and instant messaging are synchronous since they are characterized by an instantaneous interaction between two individuals through the web. (Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan 2008).

According to Dennis (2014), blog is an "online journal where an individual, group, or corporation presents a record of activities, thoughts, or beliefs. Some blogs operate mainly as news filters, collecting various online sources and add short comments and Internet links. In addition, many blogs provide a forum that allows that visitors leaving comments, and interact with the publisher. The blogosphere is the online universe of blogs."

Technically speaking, weblogs are websites nurture by a single person or a group, that is constituted by posts typically listed in reverse chronological date. (Krishnamurthy 2002; Herringet *et al.* 2004). They are commonly created to stand as a personal journal, working as an enterprise or just to reproduce product observations and reviews (Kolari *et al.* 2006).

Dave Winer created the first blog developed in the same format as we can see most of blogs nowadays, in 1996 (Herring *et al.* 2004). Therefore, we are considering a topic that belongs to a relatively recent past.
The Technorati's State of the Blogosphere 2011 report revealed demographic features about bloggers worldwide, the proportion between male and female bloggers are evenly distributed; the majority of bloggers are married, with ages between 24 and 44; United States and Europe hold the most significant numbers of blogs registered and, 37% of blog owners declare that their primary income comes from blogging which means that nowadays, blogging seems to becoming a profitable activity and a reasonable source of income.

Nardi *et al.* (2004) defend that bloggers have an innate aspiration to portray some events happening in their lives, express their ideas, share their opinions, and on top of that, they want to feel that they contribute to help the community. The same authors, after an in-depth research, also documented five motivations to create a blog and they are based on assumptions like: blogging to document life events, blogging as a commentary, blogging as a catharsis, blogging as a muse and blogging as a community forum. Hence, we can describe blogging as a mix of purposes between selfishness and altruism, due to a balanced combination of needs between exposing personal accomplishments and desire to help and inform others (Nardi et al. 2004).

2.4 FASHION BLOGS

The fashion industry is commonly known for their remarkable product variety, volatile demand and a brief product life cycle that results in a complex supply chain. Towards these risk factors, an effective brand communication strategy can dictate the success or failure of those (Şen 2008).

Nowadays, our society lives from appearances where it is important to feel good, but more important than that, have a good-looking. Clothes are no longer a primary need and are now subject of vanity and characterization of social status (Cheng 2015). The fashion industry is spread all over the world and it is able to reach astronomical values. In 2012, the global fashion market was valued at US$1.7 trillion and is estimated that employs approximately 75 million people (Fashion United Statistics). So, that said, what is the importance of fashion blogs in the purchasing decision?

The fashion blogs are a progressively influential platform, firstly because they have a regular pattern of posts, through which bloggers express their tastes, preferences and opinions freely. As fashion leaders, specialized blogs have the power to set trends where blog readers can obtain fashion and beauty inspiration and eventually recommendations for purchase decisions (Kim and Jin 2006). In fact, as reported by the Technorati's State of the Blogosphere 2011 Report, 38% of interviewees say that blogs usually refer brands that they love or hate. In the same study, 42% of the blog readers express a high level of likelihood to purchase a brand or a product that was published in a fashion blog. There are evidences in the literature that confirm the positive influence of e-WOM in sales, in different sectors such as, for example, tourism (Litvin *et al.* 2005) and library (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006). The main focus of this thesis is to explore and verify the influence of e-WOM in the fashion field.

According to Kulmala *et al.* (2013), the fashion blogs are a relevant method of user-generated content that required attention from the fashion industry, in particular to invest in fashion blogs as a communication-marketing tool. The same study revealed that, a fashion blog marketing technique to be effective and credible, should fall under the blogger's personal style. This topic leads to reinforce again the terms of organic and amplified e-WOM adjusted to the fashion blogs subject, and mentioned by the same author. Both approaches have similar outcomes in the consumer. Organic e-WOM is expected to become from real and spontaneous purchases suitable to the bloggers' personal style. On the other hand, at

amplified e-WOM, the blogger is expected to have a financial incentive behind their post coming from brands or retailers that have a specific target to reach, which should match with the bloggers main audience. (Kulmala, Mesiranta and Tuominen 2013). According to Kilger and Romer (2007) higher levels of engagement may lead to higher purchase likelihood, suggesting that engagement is a driver of purchase intentions.

Despite the advance research, the literature does not portrait the relationship between e-WOM, blogs specifically, and the fashion industry. The scarcities of studies that relate these topics characterize the research gap and have influenced the choice of the first research question.

RQ1: Which resources consumers use when considering the purchase of fashion related items? Are blogs a priority?

2.4.1 THE USE OF FASHION BLOGS AS MARKETING TOOL

The phenomenon of e-WOM by intermediate of blogs can take two different dimensions; it can work as consumer to consumer (C2C) or business to consumer (B2C) when the blog acknowledges the presence and influence of a brand in their content. When the information is shared with a genuine purpose, it can be called organic e-WOM, since it was a reflexion of blogger experiences and opinions; it is an example of C2C communication. On the other hand, when the information reaches the blogger by marketers' encouragements, it is called amplified e-WOM. In this way, blogging can become a profitable business if the fashion industry begins to realize the breadth of opportunities and the degree of influence that a blogger can have towards the consumers and use as a technique of B2C communication. (Kulmala, Mesiranta and Tuominen 2013).

The lack of previous studies and the interest that this topic may have for marketers, raises the opportunity for the second research question:

RQ2: Can fashion blogs be used as a marketing tool with positive outcomes for fashion brands?

2.5 BLOGS' CREDIBILITY

Regardless the few studies that evaluate credibility in the context of blogs' credibility is commonly conceptualized into three different elements: source credibility, message credibility and media credibility.

This topic is usually discussed since some authors do not recognize any definition for it (e.g. Hovland and Weiss 1951; Borah 2013). Nevertheless, Perloff (2010) stated that credibility "is an audience member's perception of the communicator's qualities".

The **source credibility** has been searched by their degree of expertise and trustworthiness that provide credible information (Armstrong and Nelson 2005; Flanagin and Metzger 2003; McCroskey and Richmond, 1996; Burgoon and Hale 1984). A depth study conducted by Hovland and Weiss (1951) classified this source of credibility as "trustworthy" or "untrustworthy" to identify the attitudes of the audience towards the communicator. The authors stated that messages from "untrustworthy" sources are easily discarded and identified as low credibility. However, the study also stated that, in the long term, the individuals tend to dissociate the message from the source. Meaning that, over time, the message can be kept but the credibility of the source itself is forgotten and an "untrustworthy" source may be recognized. To frame this topic in the overall theme, the source refers to the blogger itself as the message sender. Burgoon and Hale (1984) using traditional measures of source credibility to measure the blogger credibility and uses a scale of 6 items: Trustworthy, expert, reliable, intelligent, professional and experienced. In a study conducted by Yang, Kang and Johnson (2010) were used these metrics to approach the effects of blogger credibility on audience engagement and not been found any relevant correlation between both.

Appelman and Sundar (2015), in a recent study stated the definition of **message credibility** as an individual's judgment of the veracity of the content of communication. The central element of studies around the subject is the individual perceptions about message credibility that each person can make, will affect their own judgments. It is proved that individuals that are exposed to the same message can judge its credibility in different ways leading to different judgments of the message content (Hovland and Weiss 1951). There are some elements that affect the perception of message credibility, such as writing quality, fairness and professional expertise. A message from a professional who is familiar with the matter, and is perceived for their expertise, tends to be more credible. Though, the authors that lean

about the subject exposed show the three indicators that best reflect message credibility: accuracy, authenticity and believability. (Appelman and Sundar 2015).

Speaking about **media credibility**, the term was defined in a consistent way by Chung and Stefanone (2012) as a perceived quality based on multiple factors, including trustworthiness and expertise. Or defined previously by other authors as the perceived level of credibility that users have about a specific media channel, such as newspapers, television, Internet, or blogs (Sundar and Nass 2001). Since there are different channels of information, the measurements of media credibility differ as well. The traditional elements to measure media credibility may be identified differently depending on the author. Sundar (1999) suggests that media credibility is related with insights fairness, objectivity, accuracy, and believability. However, it does not take into account factors that could affect judgments of online media, so, as a result, researchers have created specific measures to apply to online media credibility, the main topic of this thesis (Appelman and Sundar 2015). To deal with online media credibility, three main topics for discussion were taken into consideration as essential: online credibility (Chung and Stefanone 2012), blog credibility (Kang and Yang 2011) and web credibility (Dochterman and Stamp 2010). For the purposes of this study, only blog credibility will be developed.

Kang and Yang (2011) conducted a study about blog credibility and has documented that blog credibility is a bi-dimensional statement that depends on blogger credibility and blog content credibility. The authority, their influence level, and reliability are factors used for measuring the blogger credibility. The accuracy and focus are indicated as key indicators of the blog content credibility. In summary, the authors stated that authenticity; timeliness and popularity are key success factors to establish if there is credibility in a blog. This statement reinforced by Hovland and Weiss that, decades before have proven that neither the way of how the message is received nor the way it is processed are affected by the trustworthiness of the source of information (1951).

The topic surrounding this issue demonstrates the importance of proposing the last research question:

RQ3: Are fashion blogs considered a credible marketing tool when considering the purchase of fashion related products?

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This thesis was based on primary and secondary data to answer and support the proposed Research Questions.

The secondary data have proved to be useful to support the Research Questions based on the existing literature. The main research for data was prepared through journals, articles, books and academic papers.

The primary research has two different stages: qualitative and quantitative data.

The qualitative data have been collected through seven in-depth interviews performed to women that are interested in fashion and also blog users. The main objective was to gather preliminary information to support and provide useful insights for the construction of quantitative research. Each interview took around thirty minutes and was conducted in Portuguese since it was the native language of all the participants. Firstly, it was necessary to understand the behaviors of the participants towards fashion in general and how they act in the purchase process. In a second phase, interviewees were asked about their personal experience with social media and how it relates to the fashion world. The second objective was to explore the theme of fashion blogs and, in specific, their credibility and influence in purchasing intention. The interview was recorded and transcribed.

The interview guide can be found in Appendix 1 (Interview guide) as well as the information collected that is reviewed in Appendix 2 (Information collected in interview).

Regarding the quantitative research, an online survey was conducted through Qualtrics and distributed electronically. Identical that of interview, the survey was conducted in Portuguese once that target of this study is the Portuguese population. The participation was voluntary and without any restrictions concerning the demographic characteristics of the population. Overall, 151 valid responses have been collected and the further analysis of the results has conducted through the statistical software SPSS.

The survey can be found for consultation in Appendix 3 (Survey). In the table below the questions used in the survey are organized and presented according to the corresponding research question (Figure 1).

RQ 1: Which resources consumers use to get advices when considering the purchase of fashion related items? Are blogs a priority?	RQ 2: Can fashion blogs be used as a marketing tool with positive outcomes for fashion brands?	RQ 3: Are fashion blogs considered a credible marketing tool when considering the purchase of fashion related products?
Question 2	Question 6	Question 10
Question 3	Question 7	Question 11
Question 4	Question 8	Question 12
Question 5	Question 9	Question 13
	Question 17	Question 14
	Question 18	Question 15
	Question 19	Question 16
		Question 20
		Question 21

Figure 1: Research questions with corresponding questions from the survey

4. RESULTS ANALYSIS

4.1 RESULTS FROM QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

To complete a qualitative research, seven in-depth interviews were conducted in women aged between 18 and 35 years old. Despite that the interviews having been selected based on convenience, there was an effort to involve distinct profiles as presented in Figure 2:

Participant Code	Age	Occupation
A	30	HR Manager
B	35	Teacher
C	33	Marketing Manager
D	22	Student
E	19	Artist
F	28	Teacher
G	24	Waitress

Figure 2: In-depth interviews' profile

All participants were selected because have an interested in fashion. With different levels of enthusiasm, but all of them turn out to be concerned about being beautiful, good-looking and aware of new trends.

In the majority of the cases, the purchase process was described as being triggered in most cases by online platforms such as by online catalogues, social networking sites or blogs, and also by television, magazines and even by groups' advice. It was mentioned a few times that online shopping should become a choice especially when the items are not available in physical stores. Otherwise, women stated that prove clothes is an extremely important feature with high priority in the purchase process, which represents a disadvantage of online shopping.

As we would expect, all participants reported using the Internet in a daily basis. Social networking sites, blogs and content communities like YouTube proved to be the most frequently used, mainly for entertainment. When asked to relate social media and fashion, all the participants seemed to agree, saying that the main motivation is to take inspiration, advice and ideas of fashion related items. The social media were pointed as a current advertising vehicle with diverse fashion options to explore.

Following the interview, the topic of blogging was discussed in depth. All interviewees answered affirmatively to the question "Do you read blogs?". The mostly reading blog types are related to fashion, lifestyle and food. The motivations that lead readers to choose a blog are mainly the content and the way of writing of the authors that must be appealing and attractive. It is also important to refer that the majority of the interviewees reflected an emotional connection with the blogger and for some it was referred as a "friend" since following a blog on a daily basis reveals the idea of proximity between reader and writer. The more difficult answer to obtain from the participants have been the cons of the blogs which currently follow. Some interviewees have failed to give an answer to this question, though, those that responded, simply reported that nothing bothers them and, in case of bothered, they claimed that stop follow the blog.

During the interview, the purchasing decision model was taken into account in to understand in which phases of the model blogs could be influential elements. The consumer decision process is described in five steps: Need recognition, information search, evaluation, purchase and post-purchase (Engel, Blackwell and Kollat 1968). The interview results have shown that fashion blogs can influence consumers in the first three elements of the model. The blogosphere is used to look for inspiration and fashion ideas that trigger a need recognition that in the majority of the times can be translated as the awakening for a fashion item that individuals saw on a blogger and want it for them. The interviewers also stated that blogs are a credible source of information and evaluation of fashion related items.

Extending the theme of blog credibility, when asked which are the main factors that determine the choice of a blog, credibility was not referred as a primary factor. However, when asked directly about blog credibility, said that it is important issue, but is something that is acquired over time and not a reason to choose a blog.

The main factors identified as engines to choose a blog are the frequency of posting, the author, the blog content and the blog aesthetics. According to the conceptual framework of blog credibility mentioned above, the participants identified the message credibility as the most important factor, although source credibility has also been mentioned.

When it comes to the influence of blogging in the consumers' purchasing intention, the opinions are aligned. Only one participant said it wasn't influenced by blogs at the time of purchasing. The remaining interviewees claim, in conscience, that are influenced by fashion trends posted by bloggers and, half of them stated that have made at least one purchase based

on an advised taken on a fashion blog. The fashion bloggers are seen as experts in the field and some post that make about the way they dress, the stores that recommend and the brands that appreciate are taken as a role model for the readers.

To understand how the participants understand the influence of brands in a fashion blog, two dimensions were presented. In a first stage, it was presented a post representative of amplified e-WOM (Appendix 1). Not all the participants understood the meaning behind the quote stated by the blogger at the end of the post as "Post written with [brand name]". The ones who understood that the blogger was paid by a brand to do the post said that it is an accepted subject since it represents a source of income for the blogger and a communication vehicle for the brand.

In a second stage, was presented to the participants a post made in a fashion blog purely based in the bloggers' opinion about a brand, representing the organic e-WOM. All the interviewees said that this one is more credible when compared with the previous one since it looks more genuine and the probability of a sincere opinion are higher and more reliable.

4.2 RESULTS FROM QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

4.2.1 SURVEY PURPOSE

The second stage of the research included a survey. The survey intended to cover each topic approached in this study such as e-WOM, online behaviours towards the fashion industry, the blogosphere, blog credibility and purchase intention concerning blog communication. Since the survey target was the Portuguese population, it was presented in Portuguese in a way to make it easier to understand and to avoid subjective misunderstandings. The survey can be found in Appendix 3, properly translated.

The survey was distributed via social networks with a voluntary participation. It was online for a period of one week and reached 197 responses with a dropout rate of 23%, which leaves a total of 151 completed responses. During the analysis, a confidence interval of 5% was considered in every statistical test.

4.2.2 SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

The demographic analysis of the survey revealed a majority of female participation (60%) compared with male (40%), which was considered reasonable since women are the main target for fashion blogs and for the fashion topic in general (Figure 3).
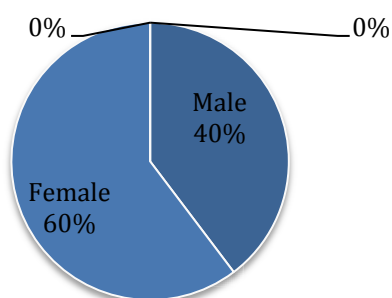
Figure 3: Survey participants by gender

The age segmentation was concentrated in the young population and shown that 10% of the interviewees were less than 18 years old, the most significant branch of the interviewees was between 18 and 24 years old with 46%, 12% were between 25 and 29 years old, followed by ranges of 30-34 and 35-39 that represented a less significant percentage of approximately 8% each, finally, interviewees over 39 years old represent 16% of the sample (Exhibit 4.1).

Concerning marital status, 58% of the interviewees were single, 22% married, 20% were in a relationship and only 1% was widowed (Exhibit 4.2).

Lastly, information about interviewees' occupation was considered and revealed that 53% were students, 34% were workers, 2% were unemployed, 5% were retired and 7% were student workers (Exhibit 4.3).

No more demographic variables were measured since these are considered the most relevant for the topic.

4.2.3 FASHION INSIGHTS

The survey was made to cover all the topics discussed in this study. That said, regarding to fashion, 60% of interviewees consider themselves between "Somewhat interested" and "Very interested" in fashion. Of those, 60%, the majority are females (47%) demonstrating a superior attention to fashion, contrasting with males who place themselves in a position of "Neutral" or "Not very interested". In the survey, there were no records of women who claim have "Not at all interested" in fashion (Figure 4).

|	Not at all interested	Not very interested	Neutral	Somewhat interested	Very Interested
■ Female	0%	3%	10%	29%	18%
■ Male	2%	10%	15%	8%	5%
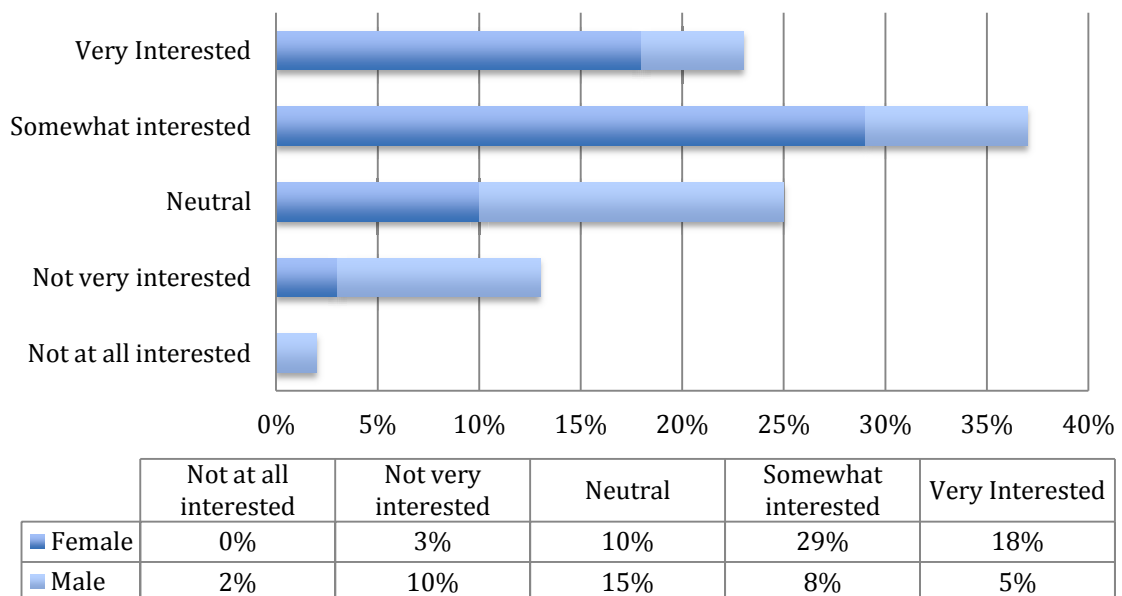
Figure 4: Fashion interests

The survey analysis registered a certain trend regarding the fashion subject relative to gender. Males engaged in a position of low interest and low involvement for fashion, while females assumed to be concerned and actively involved with it.

Three questions were made to verify the consumer decision process regarding fashion items. Concerning the consumer decision process when we talk about a fashion item, the attitudes are equally distributed and not conclusive. There is a predominance of answers that shows a certain agreement with the importance of being aware of the newest trends in the fashion world (Exhibit 4.4). In the other hand, there are individuals who believe in the importance of searching for information before purchase a fashion item, however; there are others that believe in the opposite in inconclusive proportions (Exhibit 4.5). The majority of females agree with the importance of getting information online at the time before the purchasing (Exhibit 4.6).

In order to approach the methods that individuals mainly use when seeking for fashion advice, they have been asked to classify in a five point Likert scale, according to the frequency of usage, the following elements: friends and family, blogs, social media networks, brands' websites, catalogues, magazines and newspapers, TV and YouTube (Figure 5).
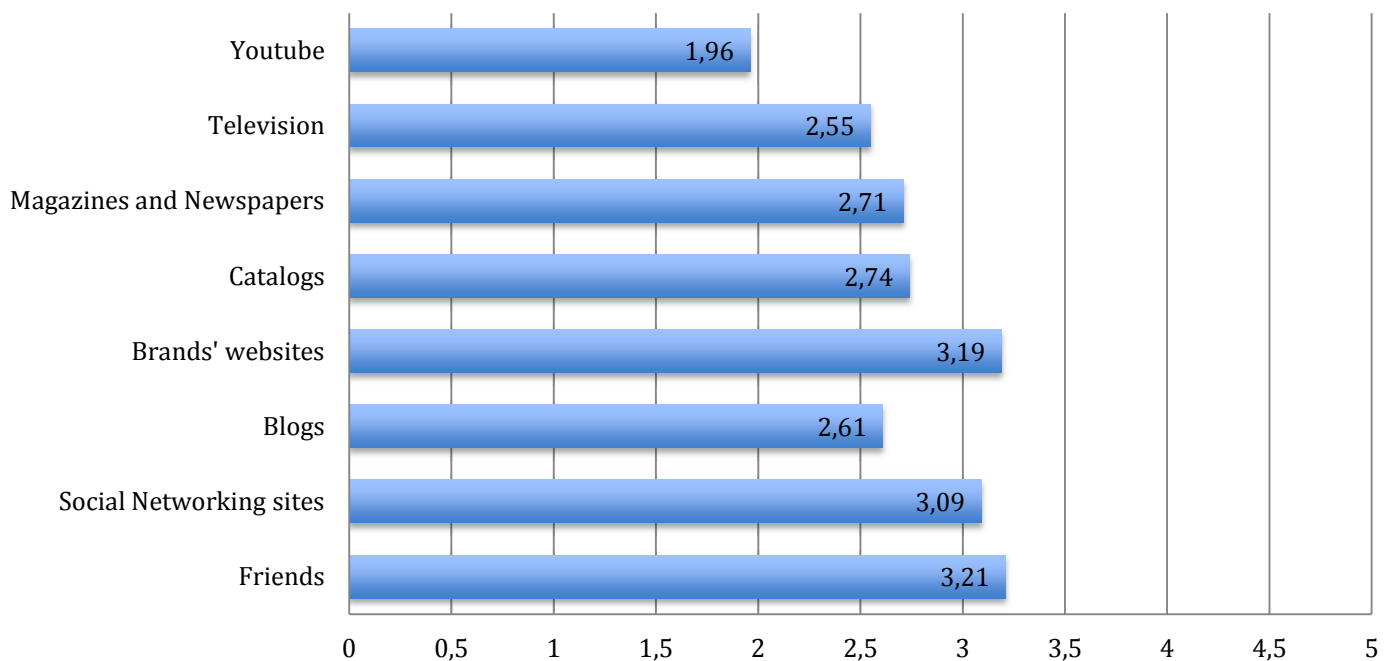
Figure 5: Means used to be aware and ask for fashion advises

The descriptive analysis revealed that brands' websites and friends' opinions are the most used approach to search for fashion information and ideas. The frequency analysis exposed

that 40% of the sample argue that never used blogs as a source of fashion information. It was taken into consideration whether the means used and gender could be related in a significant way. For that reason, a Chi-square test was completed and revealed a significant relationship between gender and methods used to be aware of new fashion trends like social networking sites, blogs, brands' websites and YouTube with the p-values such as 0,031, 0,01, 0,004 and 0,023 respectively (Exhibit 4.7).

4.2.4 SOCIAL MEDIA INSIGHTS

The richness of this study lies on the fact that it explores marketing and communication techniques in a specific branch of social media. Therefore, it is crucial to ascertain the degree of utilization of each social media groups according to the classification of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), through a 5-point Likert scale of frequency measurement. A descriptive analysis was made and concluded that social networking sites are the most used, classified as "used every day". Followed by content communities, collaborative projects and finally, at the bottom of the social media usage, the blogs are with the lowest mean of utilization (2,83) (Exhibit 4.8). Virtual social worlds and virtual game worlds are not included in the survey since their meaning revealed to be irrelevant to the topic in study.

4.2.5 BLOG INSIGHTS

The majority of interviewees affirm that read blogs less than once a month (22%); only 14% affirm that read blogs on a daily basis and are mainly the women develop this pattern. For 18% of the sample (27 individuals), which are the one that answer that never read blogs, the survey was over, whereupon decrease the sample size to 124 elements (Figure 6).
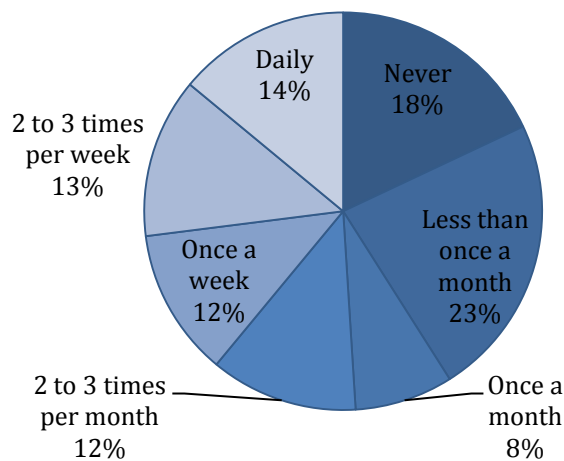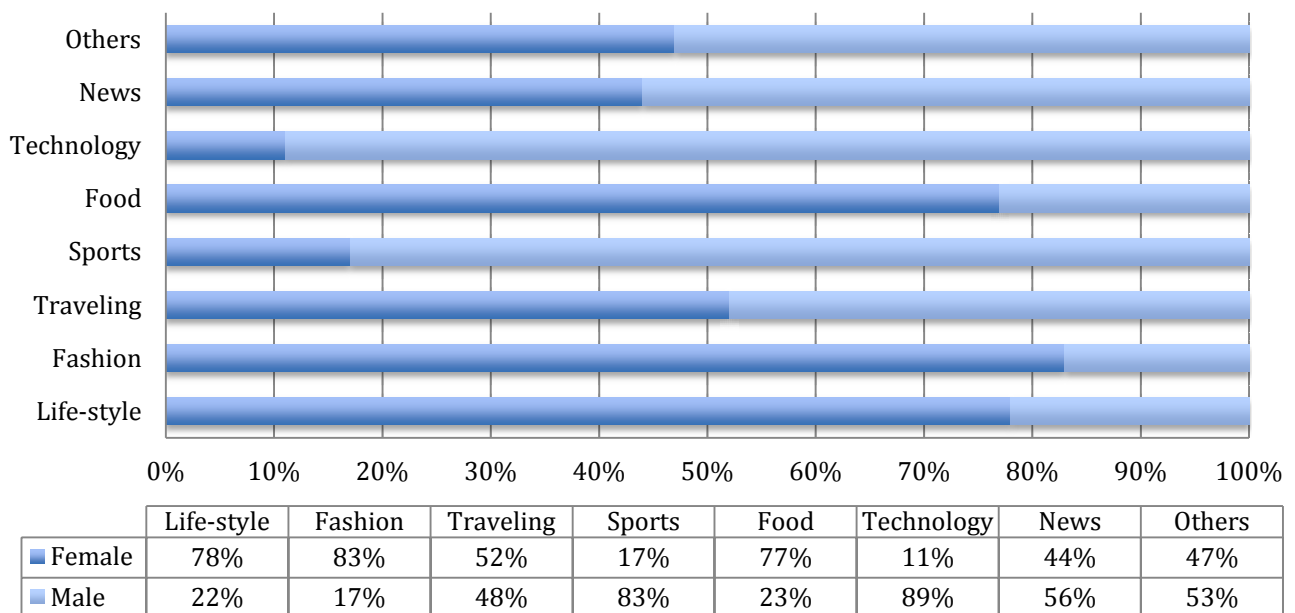

Figure 6: Blog usage

A Chi-square test was run to compare the observed data, by comparing the number of times that interviewees read blogs and demographic information. The relation between usual blog reader and demographic features are not considered statistically significant. However, the profile of a regular blog reader can be described as a woman, worker, married aged between 30 and 34 (Exhibit 4.9).

The participants were asked which types of blogs who prefer, were able select up to three options and the results were as follows: blogs with topics such as lifestyle and fashion were selected as the most popular, each one selected by nearly 20% of the participants (Exhibit 4.10). The individuals who engage in the reading of these two types of blogs are mainly women, with a representation of almost 80%. Among all types of blogs, fashion blogs are those who registered avid readers since, between the individuals who reported reading fashion blogs, 39% do it on a daily basis (Figure 7).

Blog types by gender

	Life-style	Fashion	Traveling	Sports	Food	Technology	News	Others
■ Female	78%	83%	52%	17%	77%	11%	44%	47%
■ Male	22%	17%	48%	83%	23%	89%	56%	53%

Figure 7: Blog types by gender

When asked to rank some features, according to their priority, which are the most important when selecting a blog to read, the interviewees classified as "essential" the type of posts, the credibility of the blogger and blog credibility as the strongest and the most relevant factors (Exhibit 4.12).

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After the interviewees' behaviour towards the blogs in general, were asked to deepen the topic of fashion blogs in specific. At this point of the research, the sample has 124 interviewees; the ones who answer that they never read blogs are not considered from now on. Among the participants, 15% allege that read fashion blogs in a daily basis, constituted by 10% of females and 5% of males; and 11% read at least twice per week. In contrast, 26% claims that never read fashion blogs and the majority are males (20%). For those 26% of the sample (32 participants), who answered negatively to this question, the survey was over and will not be considered for further analysis. From now on, the sample has 92 elements. Said that, it is now possible to draw the profile of fashion blog readers, which revealed to be equivalent to the profile previously drawn to the general blog readers (Exhibit 4.13).

Compared with what was done previously, a Chi-square test was computed to associate data like frequency with the fashion blogs usage and demographic features. Only the statistical significance of fashion blogs usage and gender was proved. These variables are not independent and with a p-value of 0,001 that is lower than the significance value of $\alpha=0,05$ (Exhibit 4.14).

4.2.6 BLOGS' CREDIBILITY INSIGHTS

The following set of questions was made to report the blog credibility through source credibility (blogger), message credibility (posts) and media credibility (the blog). To assess the way readers, decode bloggers, were asked to recall their favourite fashion blog and evaluate, on a Likert scale with five points, that blogger according to a list of attributes. On top of the list, blog readers classify their favourite blogger as passionate for blogging and well informed about the newest trends (Exhibit 4.15). Still about their favorite fashion blog, participants were asked again to rank certain attributes, this time relative to the blog content. This time, the most important aspects to take in consideration when evaluating a blog content are its credibility and their aptitude to be appropriate (Exhibit 4.16). Finally, in order to measure blog credibility, were requested the participants to rank a list of information vehicles according to their credibility to disseminating fashion insights. Constructively, blogs are considered the second greatest way to collect information about fashion, just behind of brands' websites that are considered the most credible source of fashion knowledge (Figure 8).
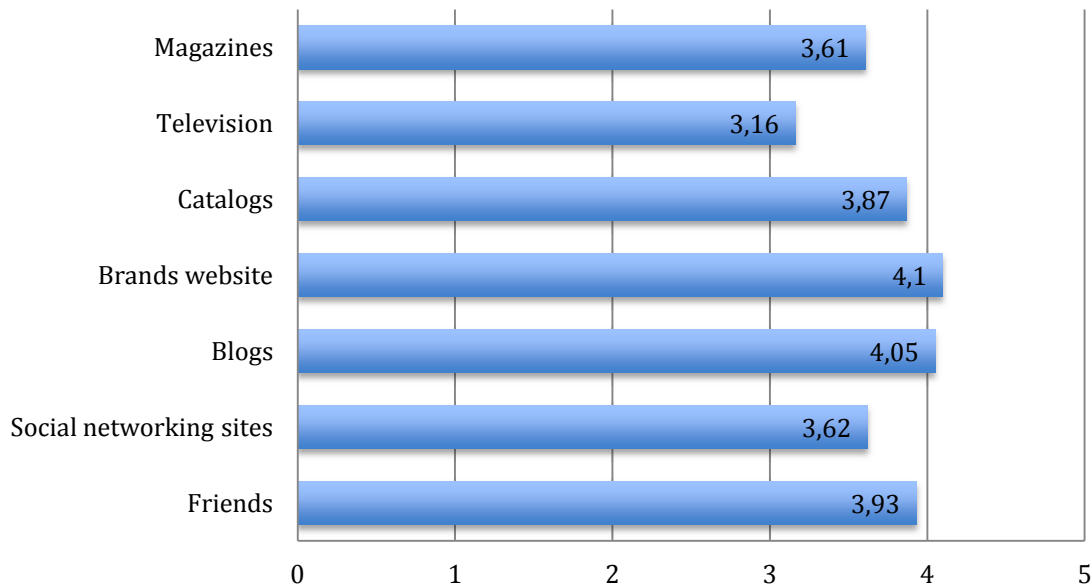
Figure 8: Average classification about credibility of fashion information methods

To develop the theme of message credibility and organic versus amplified e-WOM (Kulmala et al. 2013), the technique settled by Appelman and Sundar, (2015) was applied, since it provides a usable metric for gauging credibility of messages for use in academic research. The technique was divided into two different stages explained ahead. The authors defend that message credibility can be measured asking participants to read a post selected randomly from a blog and simply enquire in what extend the adjectives describe the content they just read. The adjectives used were those suggested by Appelman and Sundar (2015): Accurate, authentic and credible. The scale used correspond to a 5 point Likert scale where 1 corresponds to "describes very poorly" and 5 to "describes very well", it was possible to conclude that all the three adjectives were classified above the mean because all of them had a mean between 3 and 4 points. This was named "first stage". Nevertheless, accuracy seems to be the adjective that best describes the post presented with the highest average value of 3,71 (Exhibit 4.17).

The post presented in the survey (Appendix 3) had a particular detail; it was an example of amplified e-WOM, since it contained the following sentence: "Post written with brand X". Brand X was the code used to cover up the true brand name since this could lead to some analysis limitations if it was revealed. Interviewees were asked if they were aware of the meaning of the sentence written at the end of the post that was classified it as an amplified e-WOM method and 77% replied affirmatively (Exhibit 4.18). Even though the majority of the sample seems to be aware of the fact that the post presented was cooperation between the

blogger and the brand that involved remuneration, the concept was explained to all participants so there are no misunderstandings, as you can see in Appendix 3.

After the clarification of the source of the post presented, there was an intention to test if the perception of message credibility changed. The objective was to test if organic e-WOM and amplified e-WOM influence fashion blogs 'credibility. Therefore, ahead in the survey, the exact same post was presented again and to participants was requested to perform the same adjectives' classification (accurate, authentic and credible), it was called the "second stage". The observed results indicate that credibility notion changed since the adjective classification dropped to means that oscillate between 2 and 3 points. Accurately, continues to be the adjective that best contributes to describe the post (average of 3,27). However, the participants seemed to believe that the post become more authentic when they were aware of the meaning of the sentence "Post written with Brand X" since the average classification rose from the bottom of the classification to assume second place in the second stage of this analysis. (Exhibit 4.19). Since this topic is a crucial subject for this dissertation, a deeper statistical analysis was also performed, like paired sample t tests that will analyze if there are statistical differences between the adjectives' classification before and after the footnote were clarified (question 14 and question 21 of the survey, Appendix 3). Both in the "first stage" and in "second stage", the sample was divided among the individuals who claimed to know what the footnote "Post written with Brand X" meant, hereafter named Sample 1, and those who did not know it, hereafter named Sample 2. The hypothesis were stated as followed, with $\alpha=0,05$:

H0: $S1 = S2$

H1: $S1 \neq S2$

Subsequently a paired sample t test was applied to each group individually to test H0 and concluded there are differences between Sample 1 and Sample 2. For Sample 1, the p-values registered are higher than 0,05 meaning that we do not reject H0 (Exhibit 4.20). For Sample 2, we reject the null hypothesis since the p-value is minor that 0,05 denoting significant differences between the means in the "first stage" and "second stage". In this way, we can say that after the explanation of the footnote, not only the individuals' opinion changed, but also the way they classified the post (Exhibit 4.21).

4.2.7 PURCHASE INTENTION INSIGHTS

In order to understand if advertising made at blogs have practical implications in the commercial activity of the brands, an assessment was made to ascertain all the purchases that have been made by the influence of blogs.

The participants was requested for assessing the degree of agreement, with a 5 point Likert scale where 1 corresponds to "strongly disagree" and 5 to "strongly agree", with a series of statements that reported the experience of advertising on blogs. The conclusions dictating that most individuals are aware and agree which is paid advertising on blogs; the fashion blogs are an effective and suitable advertising platform for brands; and agree that the blogs that read regularly had the presence of paid advertising. Nevertheless, the interviewees also declare that, although there are paid posts, they still will look for the items in the stores (Exhibit 4.22). The analysis indicates that 66% of interviewees already bought at least one fashion item that was advertised on a fashion blog. Moreover, 19% claim that it happens "frequently" (Figure 9).

	Never	Once	More than once	Frequently
Female	26%	15%	20%	12%
Male	8%	7%	7%	7%
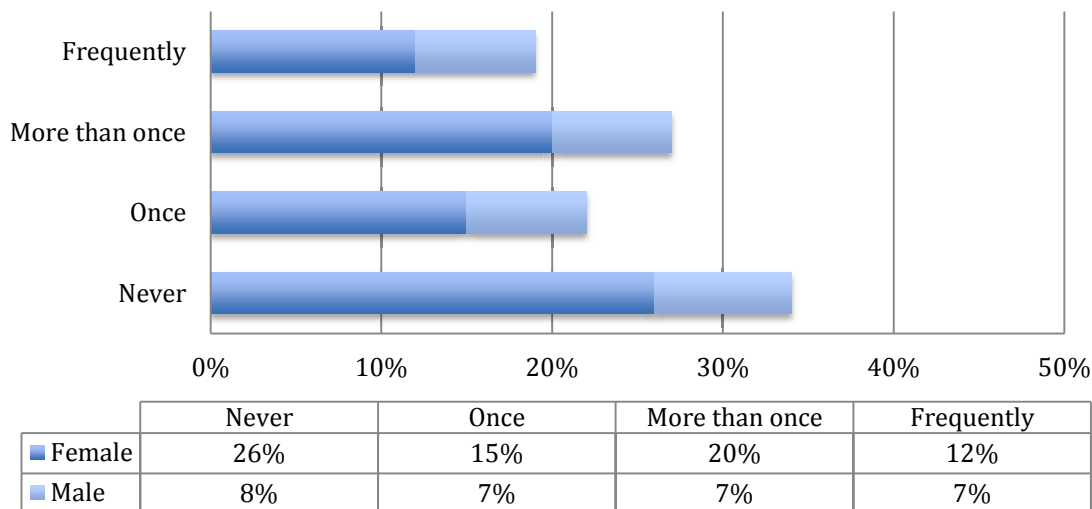
Figure 9: Purchasing behaviors about items advertised in fashion blogs

About the purchases' characteristics, 30% alleged that the purchase was made recently and 44% stated that remember about the situation of the purchase. Thus, 49% have said that stayed completely satisfied with the purchase, only 42% declares that it was a deliberate purchase and 43% assume that are willing to repeat the purchase (Exhibit 4.23).

5. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter intends to address the main conclusions of the research previously made and answer the proposed research questions.

The first question raised the following concern: **Which resources consumers use to get advices when considering the purchase of fashion related items? Are blogs a priority?**

The groups are the most widely used approach for getting advice at the time before the purchase. This phenomenon reinforces the idea of Keller (2007) that WOM is the most effective communication channel. The spontaneous necessity that friends and family have to share their own experiences turned them into an effective and credible source of advice.

However, it is not only through face-to-face relationships that communication flows. Brands' websites and social networking sites like Facebook and Instagram were also pointed as useful vehicles of information at the time which precedes to the purchase of a fashion item. The generality of fashion brands has a website where customers may see the collections and items available for sale, be aware of the prices and current promotions, engage in special offers or even buy products online. These websites are considered very believable as long as it gives information about a specific brand that tries her best to be as transparent as possible to captivate their customers and lead them to make effective purchases. The use of fashion blogs, as a useful platform to be aware of the newest trends in the fashion world, was positioned in sixth place, one of the least used, presenting some reluctance to use and believe in this platform of social media.

Regarding social networking sites, are used as a consequence of groups relationship since close relatives compose the majority of the social media content. It is a clearly representative of e-WOM that can contain groups' advices but it is also a platform of brand communication since many brands have a strong presence in social media.

In brief, both human and electronic interactions have presence and relevance at the time before the purchase of a fashion product. Although the priority stays in WOM communication, the online resources are also seen as crucial in that process but not as primacy, answering to the first part of the research question. Therefore, blogs are not included on top of the list of priorities to seek for advices in the fashion industry, which answered negatively to the second part of the first research question.

The following research question was stated as: **Can fashion blogs be used as a marketing tool with positive outcomes for fashion brands?**

There are two distinct factors exposed in this research. Among the sample there are a few individuals that follow fashion blogs regularly and for that reason, the results show little interest in that type of blogs. Consequently, the percentages of the sample that indicate real purchases that happened as a consequence of blog influence are relatively low.

However, if the analysis is conducted from individuals who identify themselves as fashion blog readers, the conclusion takes other proportions. They are able to recognize the importance of blogs as fashion influencers and also reported a consistent and satisfactory level of purchases on items indicated by bloggers. This fact represents positive commercial outcomes for fashion brands even though these results only reflect a small part of the population that actively engage in the blogosphere.

In brief, there are just a few individuals who read fashion blogs in a regular basis and, for them, the effects of blog's influence and consequently the effects on the purchasing process of items advertised in blogs are relatively low. However, for those how consider themselves as consistent readers of fashion blogs, there are significant implications on their purchasing process, meaning that they are the evidence that advertising on blogs are an effective communication tool for brands for this specific target: regular readers of fashion blogs.

The third research question addresses the theme of blog credibility: **Are fashion blogs considered a credible marketing tool when considering the purchase of fashion related products?**

Alongside the frequency of utilization, brands' websites were considered the most credible source of information when we talk about fashion. Their credibility is built according the brands' reputation that can create a sense of reliability in the consumer. Despite the fact that blogs are positioned at the bottom of this ranking of usage, surprisingly they are considered the second most credible platform to talk about fashion and style. All in all, fashion blogs are considered a credible source of information, yet they are not one of the most used platforms to search for that purpose. Apparently, fashion bloggers are seen as someone expert in the subject that is able to transmit credibility and trustworthiness, providing to this type of social media a significant recognitions.

Therefore, the answer to this research question is affirmative. The main conclusion that we can take from this topic is the fact that blogs are seen as a credible source of information. However, the magnitudes of Portuguese population that actively engage in this type of social media are still very low, which can be reflected in a diminutive usage.

5.1 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This thesis was a long process that crossed over some challenges and limitations.

Over the first phase, the literature review, since the topic of e-WOM is very current and unconstrained, it proved to be too diverse and sometimes contradictory. The information overload can be an obstacle in the selecting of what is really relevant and emphasise the importance of a decision making about the topics that exploited.

With respect to the research methodology, the survey was collected during a short period of time that gave rise to a small sample size. This situation triggered a series of difficulties in data analysis; such as sample limitations due to their composition mostly constituted by females and individuals aged 18 to 24. The sample in review proved not being assiduous followers of blogs that for the purpose of the study was an analysis limitation. The small sample size has not allowed the implementation of significant statistical tests like ANOVA, since some classes had fewer and irrelevant answers.

To reach a more in-depth analysis, other topics could also have been approach and other techniques could be used. This study was planned to comprehend the analysis about the perspective of bloggers about the subject. However, the bloggers who have been contacted reveal not be interest in participating, therefore only the consumer side was studied. For future researches about the topic, it is true that this thesis could be enriched if it contained the prospects of the consumer, of blogger and of brands that advertise in it.

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This interview aimed to cover five essential subjects referred along this study like general interest for fashion, the relationship with social media platforms, blog perceptions and usage, blog credibility insights and purchase intention relative to products exposed in blogs. The interviews were conducted in Portuguese since it was the mother tongue of all the interviewed, in an informal environment. The guidelines presented below were the main driver however, as a casual interview, occasionally other questions arose as a result of the respondent's answers.

1. Introduction and brief explanation of the purpose of the interview.

I. General interest for fashion

2. Participant was asked to classify her interest for fashion and general perceptions about the topic.
3. What are the main sources of information that you resort when you want to know more about fashion news?
4. The interviewed was asked to talk about their purchasing process, how it is triggered and how it is processed.

II. Relationship with social media platforms

5. In your daily routine, how often do you use Internet and what are your main purposes?
6. To simplify the contextualization with the literature and to facilitate the recognition of social media platforms, the table described by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) with the classification of social media was shown to the participant that was asked to classify them by preference and order of usage.

Collaborative projects	Blogs	Social networking sites
WIKIPEDIA The Free Encyclopedia	Blogger	
Content communities	**Virtual social networks**	**Virtual game worlds**
YouTube	Second Life	World of Warcraft

7. The next question has the objective to make an association between social media and fashion. Are they complements? How are they used?

III: Blog usage

8. Do you have a personal blog? If yes: for how long? What type of blog it is? What are your motivations?
9. Do you read blogs?
10. What kind of blogs do you read? How often do you read it?
11. Selecting your favorite blog, what are the positive and negative aspects that you identify?
12. Name all the fashion blogs that you can recall. Do you read some of these? What are the positive and negative aspects that you identify?

IV: Blog credibility

13. In your opinion, which are the most important factors that led you to choose and enjoy a specific blog? If necessary, the interviewer may provide some options like: popularity, the blogger, the frequency of the post, the content, or credibility.
14. What features contribute to make a credible blog? Again, if necessary, the interviewer may provide some options like the bloggers' professionalism, the number of readers, the positioning among other blogs or the posts' authenticity.

15. In this stage of the interview, the interviewer will show a post from a blog, that will remain unidentified, that contain information about a brand, which also will remain unidentified and coded as Brand X. This post is a representation of amplified e-WOM since it includes the following sentence at the bottom of the post: "Post written with Brand X". Then, the participant is asked to read and analyze the post and express the feelings the post transmit and what they like and what they dislike about it.

16. Are you aware of the meaning of the sentence: "Post written with Brand X"?

17. Subsequently, is shown another post from a blog that will remain unidentified, with some references to a store named as Store Y to remain unidentified. However, this time, the post is merely composed by the bloggers' opinion, representing organic e-WOM. Again, the interviewed was asked to analyze and comment the post.

Ai ai Loja do Demo

Tanta coisa que tenho lá comprado, senhores...
Quem os manda ter tanta coisa gira?
E quem me manda a mim não resistir e estar sempre a passar por lá?
Este é o efeito secundário mais tramado de se perder muito peso.
Estes queridos são a última aquisição. Ou uma das últimas, vá.
Alguém que me pusesse uma pulseira electrónica no tornozelo que apitasse descontroladamente sempre que lá passasse à beira era o melhor! Catano.

Loja Y, no Passeio do Adamastor - zona sul do Parque das Nações

18. Do you think that a post that is identified as a commercial post, that represents economical benefits between the brand and the blogger, is less credible than a spontaneous post? What do you think about this topic?

V. Purchase decisions taken under the influence of a fashion blog

19. Do you ever bought a fashion item that has been seen published in a blog?
20. If yes, describe that purchase. How regularly this happen? Do you bought it online or in store? What made you bought it?

The following tables describe the results taken from the interview presented in **APPENDIX 1**. They intend to summarize the most important aspects highlighted during the interview that was made to seven women with ages between 19 and 35. The tables below intended to be organized in the same order as the questions of the interview and they are identified accordingly.

Table 1. Participants' profile

Participant Code	Age	Occupation
A	30	HR Manager
B	35	Teacher
C	33	Marketing Manager
D	22	Student
E	19	Artist
F	28	Teacher
G	24	Waitress

Table 2. Interest for fashion

Participant Code	Question 2 (Fashion Interest)	Question 3 (Sources of fashion information)	Question 4 (Purchasing process)
A	Very interested, always aware of the new trends.	Blogs, stores, magazines, and online catalogues	Do some previous research in blogs or catalogues and then search for some items in store. Sometimes ask some opinions to her best friend.
B	Like to be updated; Very interested in fashion.	Friends, blogs, television and magazines.	Describe herself as an impulsive shopper. Buy many products online.
C	Interested	Stores, blogs and television.	Walk around the stores and buy what she likes before try it.
D	Moderated interest.	Internet and online catalogues.	Typically sees on the Internet and then go to stores to buy what she likes. But does not buy fashion products very often.
E	Very interested.	Magazines and blogs.	Shop around the stores but wait until the prices get lower in promotions to buy it. Do some online shopping with same brands that does not exist in Portugal.
F	Very interested.	Magazines, Internet and online catalogues.	In the majority of the times, the purchasing is done online at the brands' websites.
G	Very interested.	Magazines and social media.	See online and then go to stores to try it and probably buy it.

Table 3: Internet usage

Participant Code	Question 5 **(Internet usage)**	Question 6 **(Social media types frequently used)**	Question 7 **(The value of social media in fashion)**
A	Uses Internet daily.	Social networking sites and blogs.	For fashion inspiration through blogs or advertising.
B	Uses Internet daily.	Social networking sites, collaborative projects, content communities and blogs.	To take some ideas for fashion outfits.
C	Uses Internet daily.	Social networking sites and blogs.	To be aware of the new trends.
D	Uses Internet daily.	Social networking sites, content communities, collaborative projects.	To check others outfits just for curiosity.
E	Uses Internet daily.	Social networking sites and blogs.	To see what others are using.
F	Uses Internet daily.	Social networking sites, blogs, content communities.	For fashion inspiration.
G	Uses Internet daily.	Social networking sites, content communities.	To collect ideas and inspiration abut fashion.

Table 4: Blogs

Participant Code	Question 8 **(Do you have a personal blog?)**	Question 9 **(Do you read blogs?)**	Question 10 **(What type of blogs do you read?)**	Question 11 **(Distinctive facts about your favorite blog.)**
A	No.	Yes.	Life style, fashion and crafts.	The content and the blogger
B	Yes. To share personal experiences.	Yes.	Fashion, life style and sports.	Regularity of posts, diversity of themes.
C	No.	Yes.	Fashion, food and information.	The type of products that appear in the blog.
D	No.	Yes.	Travel, food and life style.	Appealing photos.
E	Yes. To share her artistic work.	Yes.	Fashion and artistic.	Provide fashion ideas and inspiration.
F	No.	Yes.	Life style and religion.	Post directional for the female target.
G	No.	Yes.	Food and fashion.	The content.

Table 5: Blogs' credibility

Participant Code	Question 13 (Determinant features for choosing a blog)	Question 14 (What makes a credible blog?)
A	Regularity of posts and friends' recommendations.	The blogger and the content.
B	Blog aesthetics and self-identification.	The content.
C	Sincerity and credibility	The content.
D	The content.	The content.
E	Regularity of posts and the content.	The content.
F	The content.	The content.
G	The blogger.	The blogger.

Table 6: Organic and amplified WOM

Participant Code	Question 15 (Thoughts about Post 1)	Question 16 (Do you know what the footnote means?)	Question 17 (Thoughts about Post 2)	Question 18 (Amplified WOM loose credibility?)
A	Positive. Paid advertisement don't take out credibility,	Yes.	Positive. Appreciate the sincerity	No, it is an advertising method like many others.
B	Positive. Agrees with the transparency of the blogger,	Yes.	Negative. Do not like the type of language use.	No, it is acceptable. A natural way of business.
C	Positive.	Yes.	Do not have a specific opinion about it.	Indifferent.
D	Do not have a specific opinion about it.	No.	Do not have a specific opinion about it.	Indifferent.
E	Negative. Do not approve the sponsorship with Brand X.	Yes.	Positive. Like the informal writing,	Yes, I doubt about an honest opinion.
F	Positive.	No.	Positive.	No, appreciate the transparency of the blogger.
G	Positive.	Yes.	Positive.	No, it is a common practice nowadays.

Table 7: Purchase intention

Participant Code	Question 19 (Do you ever buy some product advertised in a blog?)	Question 20 (Describe the purchase)
A	Yes.	It happens frequently.
B	Yes.	It happened once or twice by impulse.
C	No.	Not interested.
D	No.	Do not like the kind of products that fashion bloggers advertise.
E	Yes.	It happens frequently.
F	Yes.	It happened in promotions.
G	Yes.	Many times. It is easier to know what is trendy.

Below is provided the translation of the online survey, supported by Qualtrics, that sustained the quantitative research

Introduction: Dear participant, my name is Mariana Freire and I am currently finishing my Master degree in Business Administration at the Catholic Lisbon School of Business and Economics. This survey will be useful for the completion of my thesis and so thank you for your participation. This project intends to collect information about the influence of fashion blogs on consumers.

The survey will take about 10 minutes and your answers will be anonymous. There are no right or wrong answers, just answer truthfully.

Sincerely
Mariana Freire

Q1. This questionnaire is envisioned only to Portuguese. Please confirm your nationality:

O Portuguese

Q2. How do you rate your interest in fashion?

O Not at all interested
O Not very interested
O Neutral
O Somewhat interested
O Very interested

Q3. Indicate the degree of agreement with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree
For me it is important to be aware of new trends in the fashion world	O	O	O	O	O
I need to have recommendations about a fashion item before the purchase	O	O	O	O	O
Before buying a fashion product, I look for information online	O	O	O	O	O

Q4. Rank the following means according to the frequency of usage to be informed about the new trends in the fashion world.

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Very often	Always
Friends	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Instagram...)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Blogs	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Brand Website	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Catalogues	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Magazines	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Television	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
YouTube	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

Q5. Indicate how often do you use each of the following social media groups:

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Very often	Always
Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tumblr...)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Blogs	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Content communities (ex: Youtube...)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia, Prezi...)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

Q6. How often do you use blogs?

❍ Never
❍ Less than once a month
❍ Once a month
❍ 2 to 3 times per month
❍ Once a week
❍ 2 to 3 times per week
❍ Daily

If Never Is Selected, Then Skip To Q22:

Q7. What type of blogs do you read? (Select until three options)

❑ Life-style
❑ Fashion
❑ Travelling
❑ Sports
❑ Food
❑ Informative
❑ Technological
❑ Other _____

Q8. Rate the relevance of the following elements when selecting and participate in a blog?

	Not a priority	Low priority	Medium priority	High priority	Essential
Type of posts	○	○	○	○	○
The blogger	○	○	○	○	○
Assiduity of posts	○	○	○	○	○
The aesthetics of the blog	○	○	○	○	○
Quantity of followers	○	○	○	○	○
Sponsorship	○	○	○	○	○
Popularity	○	○	○	○	○
The type of language used	○	○	○	○	○
Blog credibility	○	○	○	○	○
Blogger credibility	○	○	○	○	○

Q9. How often do you read fashion blogs?

○ Never
○ Less than once a month
○ Once a month
○ 2 to 3 times per month
○ Once a week
○ 2 to 3 times per week
○ Daily
If Never Is Selected, Then Skip To Q22:

Q10. Now think about your favorite fashion blog. Rate the author of this blog for the following attributes:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree
Informed	○	○	○	○	○
Influent	○	○	○	○	○
Passionate	○	○	○	○	○
Transparent	○	○	○	○	○
Reliable	○	○	○	○	○
Popular	○	○	○	○	○
Credible	○	○	○	○	○

Q11. Still about your favorite fashion blog, rate the blog content for the following attributes:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree
Authentic	○	○	○	○	○
Discerning	○	○	○	○	○
Informative	○	○	○	○	○
Consistent	○	○	○	○	○
Detailed	○	○	○	○	○
Objective	○	○	○	○	○
Appropriate	○	○	○	○	○
Accurate	○	○	○	○	○
Credible	○	○	○	○	○

Q12. Assess the credibility of each one of these means towards the capability to give fashion recommendations.

	Not credible at all	Not credible	Neutral	Credible	Very credible
Friends	○	○	○	○	○
Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Instagram...)	○	○	○	○	○
Blogs	○	○	○	○	○
Brands website	○	○	○	○	○
Catalogues	○	○	○	○	○
Television	○	○	○	○	○
Magazines	○	○	○	○	○

Q13. Carefully review the figure below, which is a post from a fashion blog. Some elements of the post, such as the author and the brand that it advises will not be revealed in order to do not influence you.

sugestões

Já por aqui falei variadíssimas vezes da MARCA X   que me aquece o coração e na qual me vou desgraçando aos bocadinhos. Estive a babar para cima da nova coleção (taquicardia, taquicardia) e resolvi compor uns looks para vocês,   se inspirarem. Basicamente, têm aqui a papinha toda feita, conjuntos para todos os estilos:

Post escrito em parceria com a MARCA X

Q14. Rate the post you have just read, according to the following parameters:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree
Accurate	○	○	○	○	○
Authentic	○	○	○	○	○
Credible	○	○	○	○	○

Q15. Do you know what it means the footnote in the post you just read: "Post written with Brand X"?

○ No
○ Yes

Q16. The footnote in the previous post, "Post written with Brand X" means that the publication was carried out after a commercial negotiation between the brand and the blogger. The blogger received remuneration from brand to write the post.

Q17. Answer to the following statements according to the degree of agreement with them:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree
The fashion blogs that I read have some brand references.	○	○	○	○	○
I am aware that some blogs are paid to advertise fashion brands.	○	○	○	○	○
Blogs are a good source of communication for fashion brands.	○	○	○	○	○
Blogs influence my intention to purchase fashion items.	○	○	○	○	○
When I see a fashion article in a blog, and it is in my best interest, I look for the item in the stores.	○	○	○	○	○
When I see a fashion article in a blog, and it is in my best interest, I look for it online.	○	○	○	○	○

Q18. Have you ever bought any fashion item that has seen advertising in a blog?

○ Never
○ It happened once
○ It happened more than once
○ It happens frequently

If Never Is Selected, Then Skip To Q20:

Q19. Evaluate the purchasing process of a fashion item that has already been acquired by having seen it advertised on a blog.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree
I was satisfied	○	○	○	○	○
I remember the situation	○	○	○	○	○
I would buy it again	○	○	○	○	○
It was recently	○	○	○	○	○
It was an impulsive acquisition	○	○	○	○	○

Q20. Review again the post below.

sugestões

Já por aqui falei variadíssimas vezes da MARCA X que me aquece o coração e na qual me vou desgraçando aos bocadinhos. Estive a babar para cima da nova coleção (taquicardia, taquicardia) e resolvi compor uns looks para vocês, se inspirarem. Basicamente, têm aqui a papinha toda feita, conjuntos para todos os estilos:

Post escrito em parceria com a MARCA X

Q21. Rate the post you have just read, according to the following parameters:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree
Accurate	○	○	○	○	○
Authentic	○	○	○	○	○
Credible	○	○	○	○	○

Q22. Gender:

○ Female
○ Male

Q23. Age

○ < 18
○ 18-24
○ 25-29
○ 30-34
○ 35-39
○ > 39

Q24. Marital status

○ Single
○ Married
○ In a relationship
○ Widowed

Q25. Occupation

○ Student
○ Worker
○ Unemployed
○ Other _____

Thank you for your participation!

In this appendix there are all the relevant exhibits about Chapter 4 – Results analysis.

Demographics – Sample size 151:

EXHIBIT 4.1: AGE
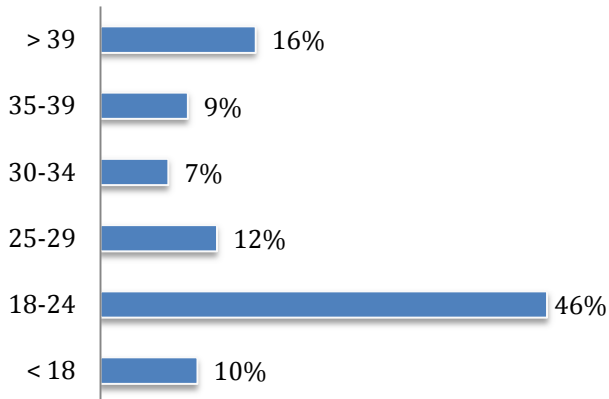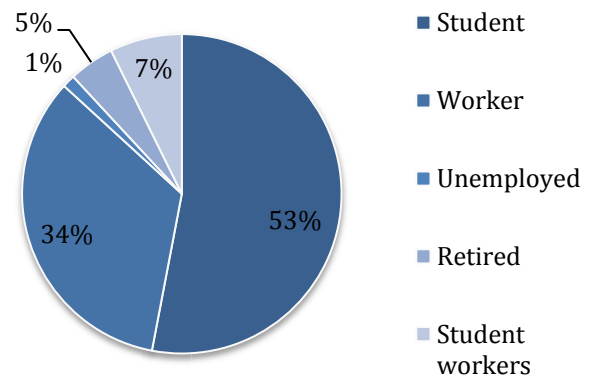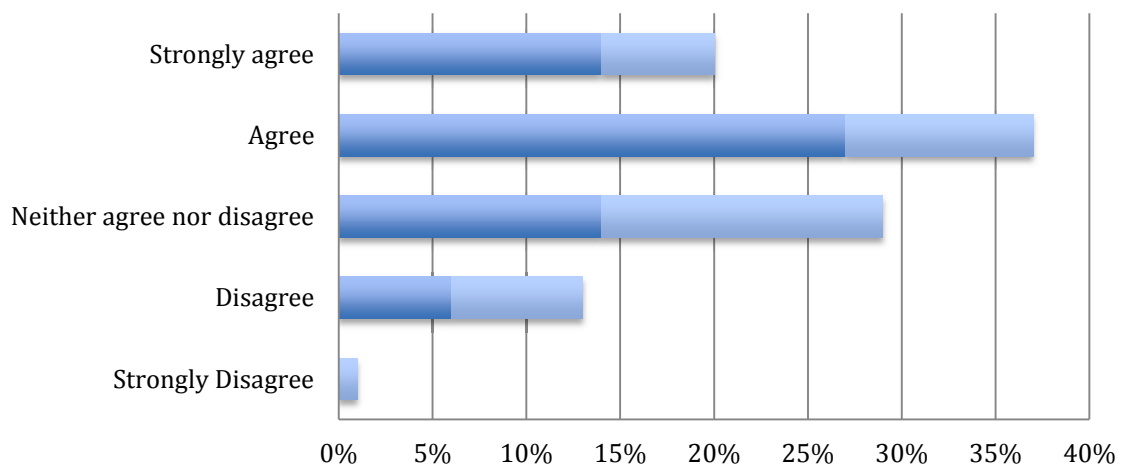

EXHIBIT 4.2: MARITAL STATUS
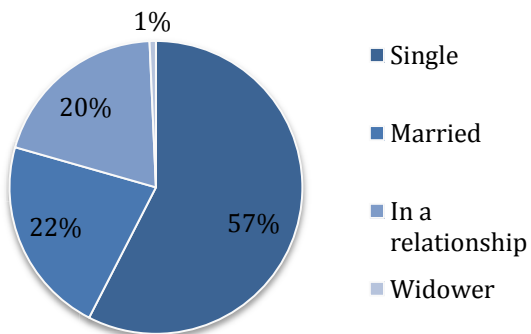
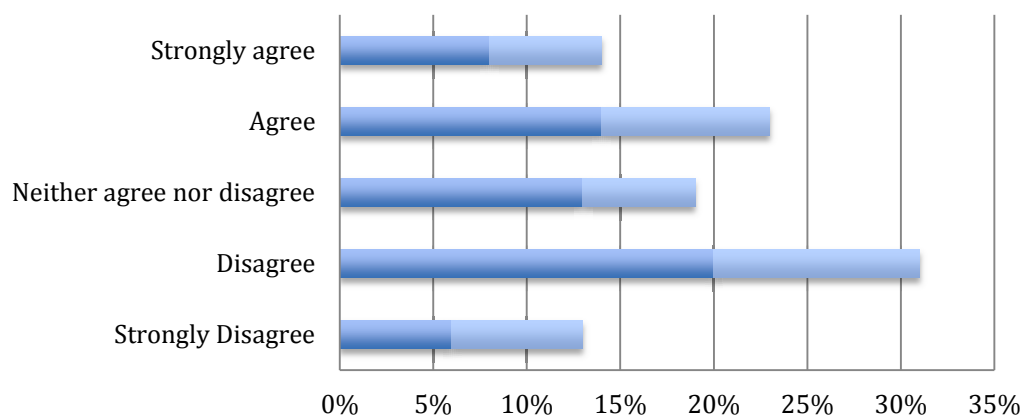**EXHIBIT 4.3**: OCCUPATION

Fashion insights – Sample size 151:

	Value	df	Asym. Sig. (2 sided)
Pearson Chi-square	11,615	4	0,020

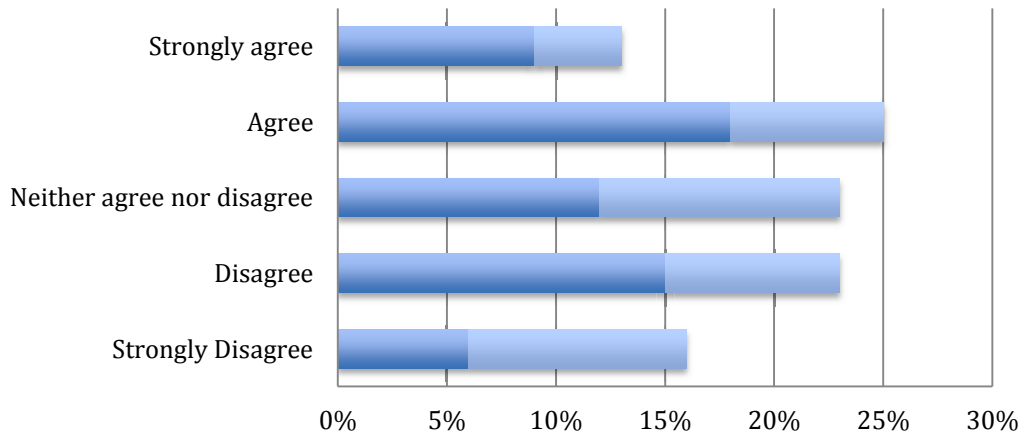|	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Female	0%	6%	14%	27%	14%
Male	1%	7%	15%	10%	6%

EXHIBIT 4.5: "I NEED TO HAVE RECOMMENDATIONS ABOUT A PRODUCT BEFORE BUYING IT"

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Female	6%	20%	13%	14%	8%
Male	7%	11%	6%	9%	6%

	Value	df	Asym. Sig. (2 sided)
Pearson Chi-square	9,490	4	0,050

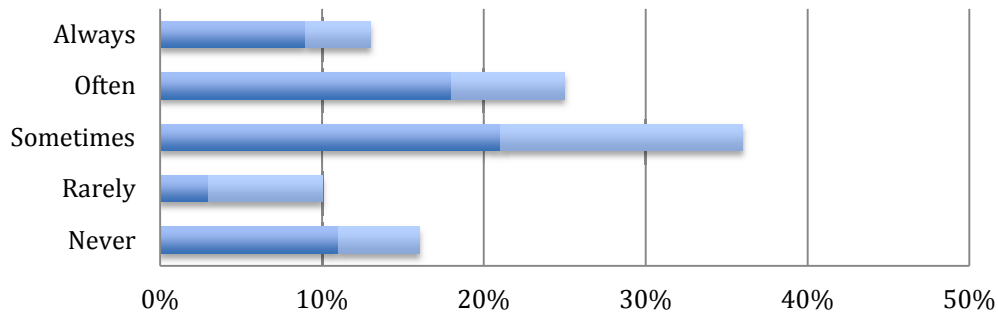|	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Female	6%	15%	12%	18%	9%
Male	10%	8%	11%	7%	4%

EXHIBIT 4.7: MEANS USED TO BE AWARE AND ASK FOR ADVISES ABOUT FASHION
(DESCRIPTIVE AND FREQUENCY ANALYSIS; CHI-SQUARE TEST).

Friends
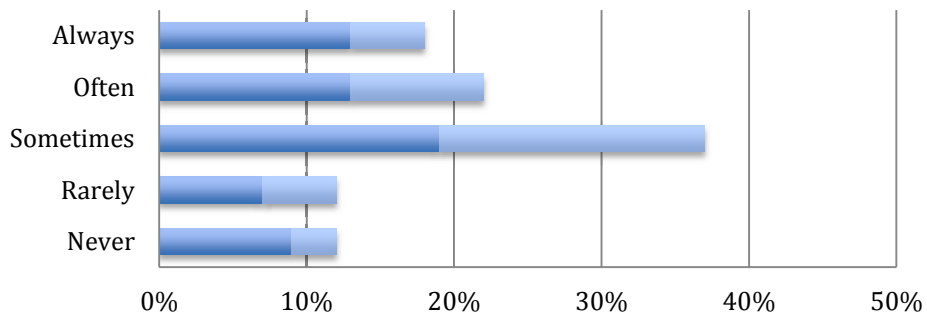
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Female	9%	7%	19%	13%	13%
Male	3%	5%	18%	9%	5%

Social networking sites

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
■ Female	11%	3%	21%	18%	9%
■ Male	5%	7%	15%	7%	4%

Social Networking sites and Gender	Value	df	Asym. Sig. (2 sided)
Pearson Chi-square	10,627	4	0,031

Blogs
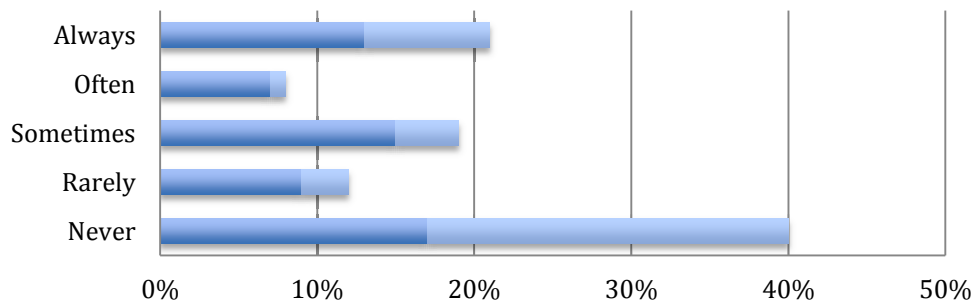
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
■ Female	17%	9%	15%	7%	13%
■ Male	23%	3%	4%	1%	8%

Blogs and Gender	Value	df	Asym. Sig. (2 sided)
Pearson Chi-square	18,038	4	0,001

Brands websites
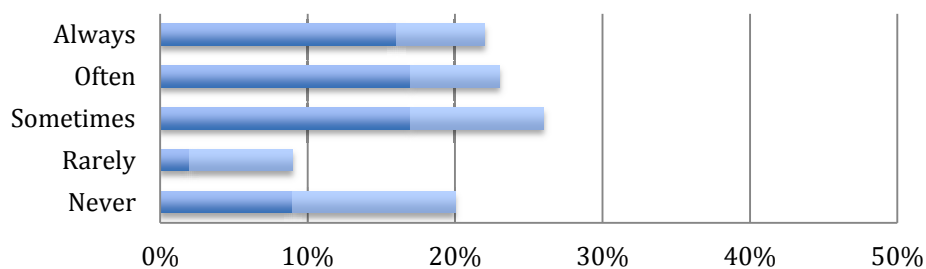
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
■ Female	9%	2%	17%	17%	16%
■ Male	11%	7%	9%	6%	6%

Brands websites and Gender	Value	df	Asym. Sig. (2 sided)
Pearson Chi-square	15,174	4	0,004

Catalogs
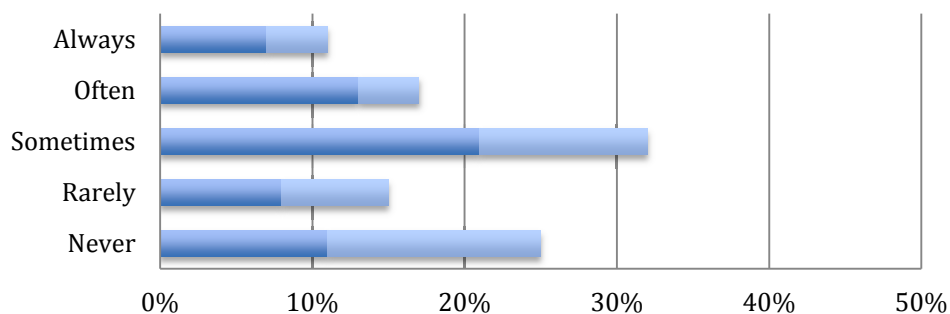
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
■ Female	11%	8%	21%	13%	7%
■ Male	14%	7%	11%	4%	4%

Magazines and newspapers
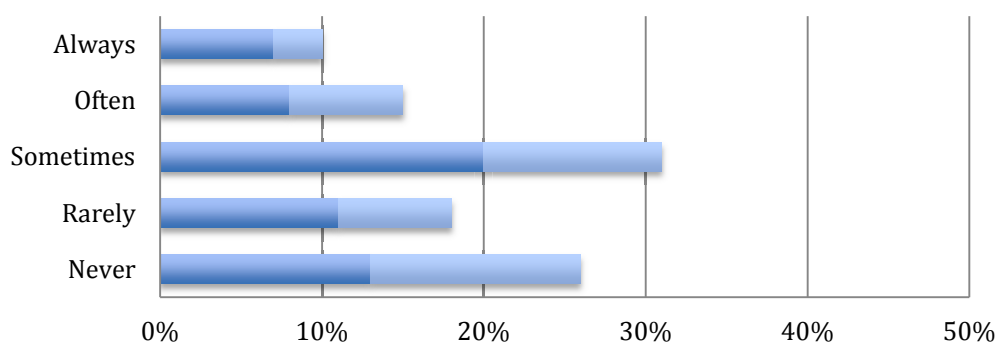
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
■ Female	13%	11%	20%	8%	7%
■ Male	13%	7%	11%	7%	3%

Television
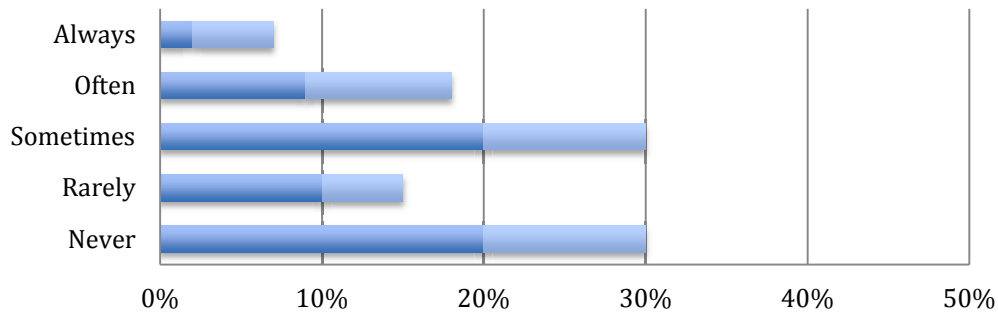
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
■ Female	20%	10%	20%	9%	2%
■ Male	10%	5%	10%	9%	5%

YouTube
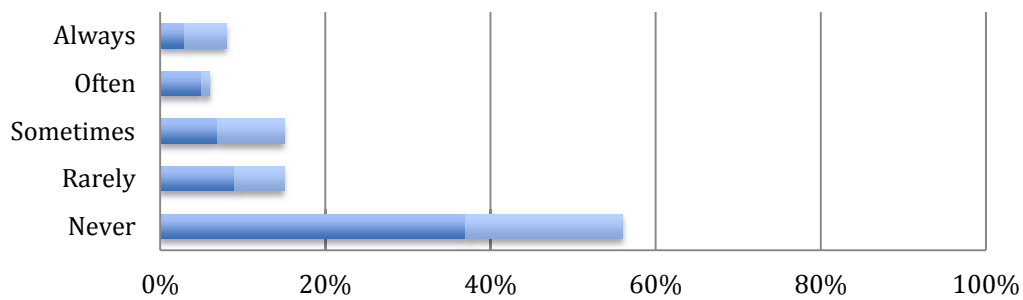
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
■ Female	37%	9%	7%	5%	3%
■ Male	19%	6%	8%	1%	5%

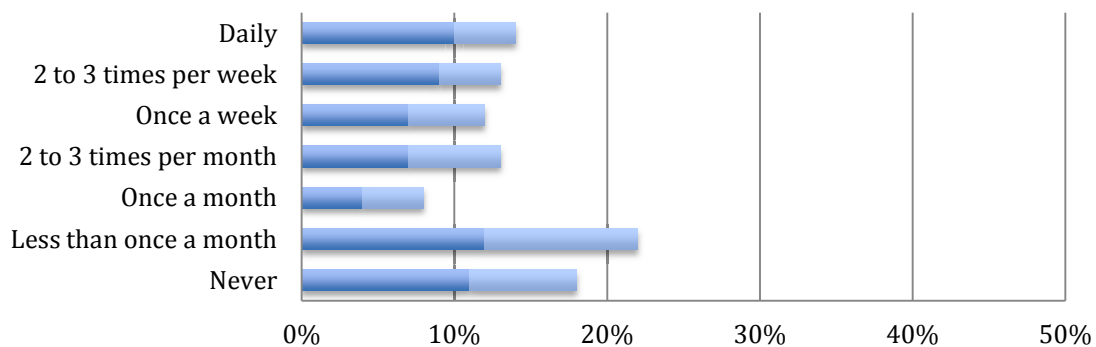| YouTube and Gender	Value	df	Asym. Sig. (2 sided)
Pearson Chi-square	11,349	4	0,023

Social media insights – Sample size 151:

EXHIBIT 4.8: FREQUENCY USAGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA
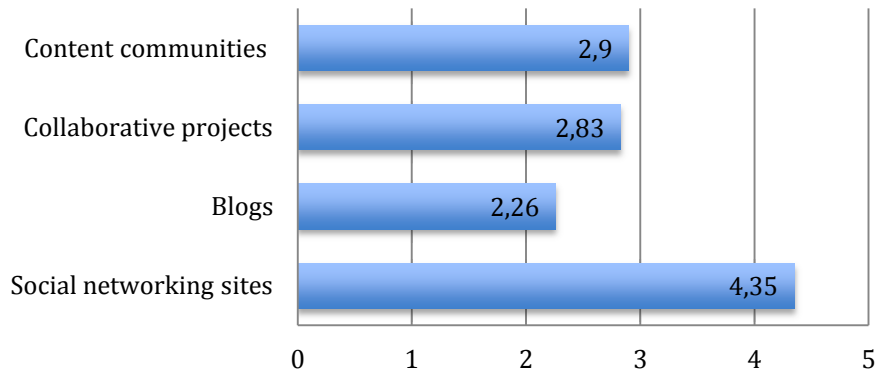
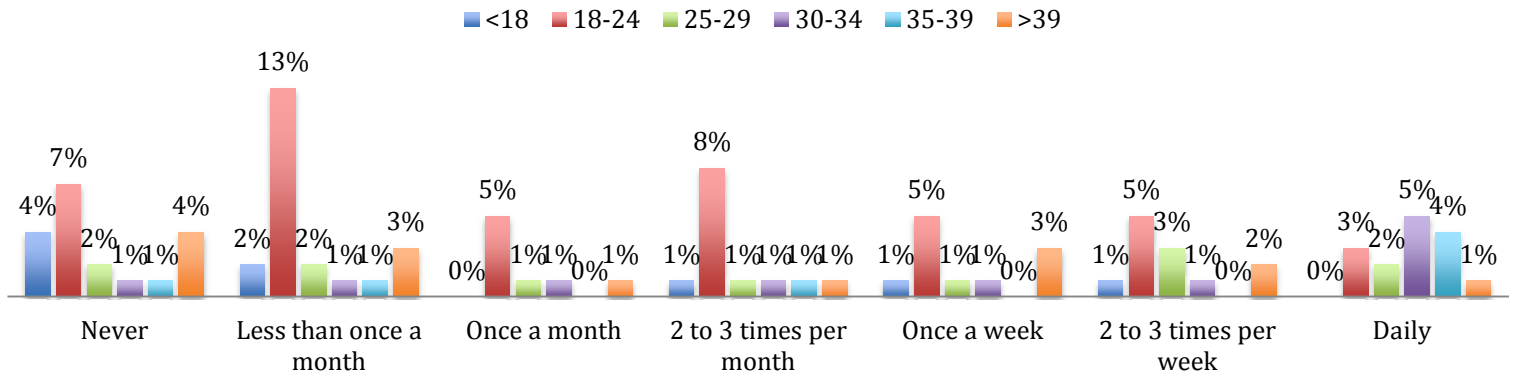## Blogs insights – Sample size 124:

EXHIBIT 4.9: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF BLOG USERS

Blog users by gender

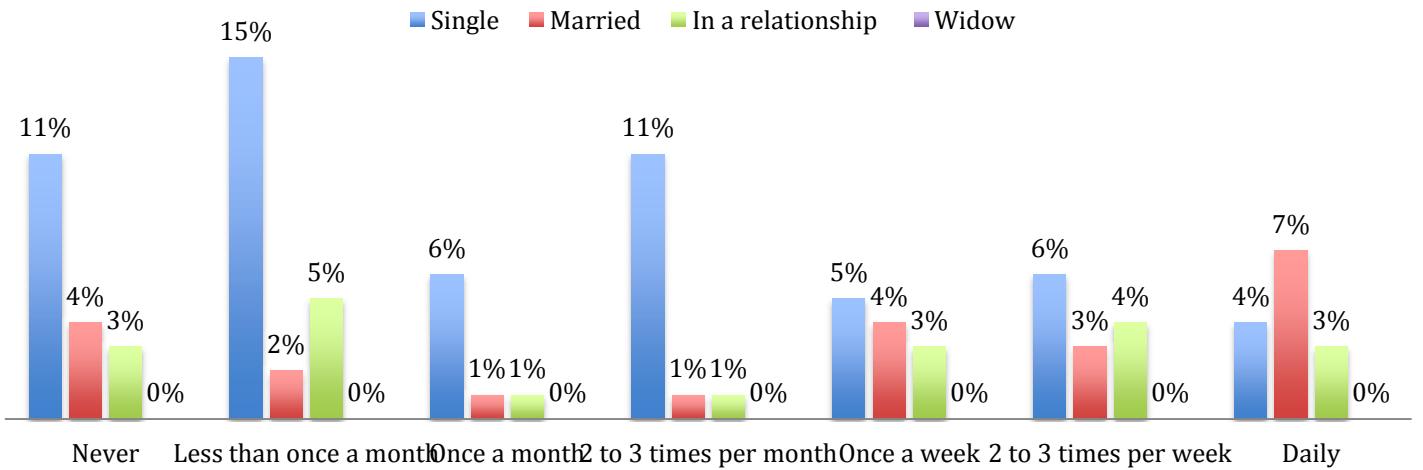|	Never	Less than once a month	Once a month	2 to 3 times per month	Once a week	2 to 3 times per week	Daily
■ Female	11%	12%	4%	7%	7%	9%	10%
■ Male	7%	10%	4%	6%	5%	4%	4%

Blog users by age

Never: 4%, 7%, 2%, 1%, 1%, 4%
Less than once a month: 2%, 13%, 2%, 1%, 1%, 3%
Once a month: 0%, 5%, 1%, 1%, 0%, 1%
2 to 3 times per month: 1%, 8%, 1%, 1%, 1%, 1%
Once a week: 1%, 5%, 1%, 1%, 0%, 3%
2 to 3 times per week: 1%, 5%, 3%, 1%, 0%, 2%
Daily: 0%, 3%, 2%, 5%, 4%, 1%

Blog users by marital status

Never: 11%, 4%, 3%, 0%
Less than once a month: 15%, 2%, 5%, 0%
Once a month: 6%, 1%, 1%, 0%
2 to 3 times per month: 11%, 1%, 1%, 0%
Once a week: 5%, 4%, 3%, 0%
2 to 3 times per week: 6%, 3%, 4%, 0%
Daily: 4%, 7%, 3%, 0%

Blog users by occupation

Never: 10%, 6%, 0%, 2%
Less than once a month: 15%, 5%, 0%, 3%
Once a month: 5%, 2%, 1%, 1%
2 to 3 times per month: 10%, 3%, 1%, 0%
Once a week: 5%, 5%, 0%, 1%
2 to 3 times per week: 6%, 3%, 0%, 3%
Daily: 3%, 9%, 0%, 1%
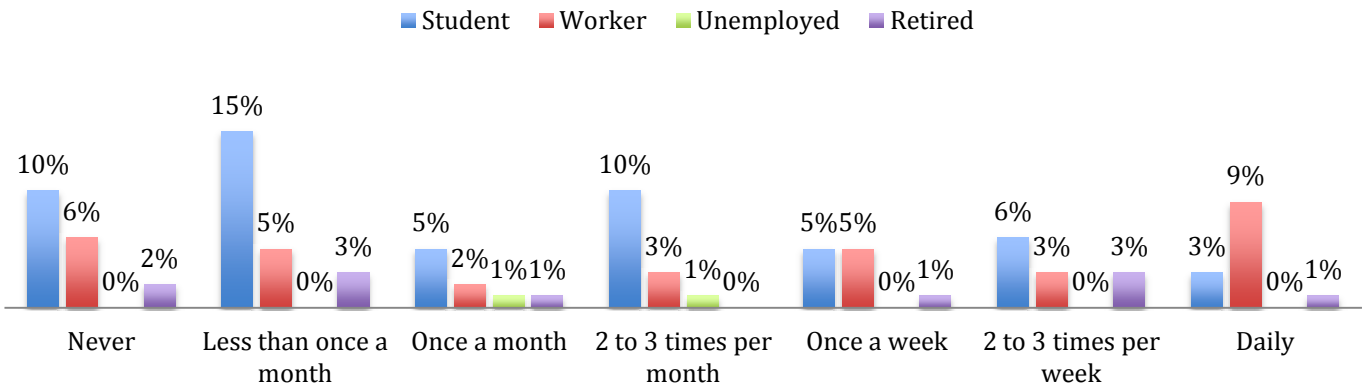
EXHIBIT 4.10: TYPES OF BLOGS
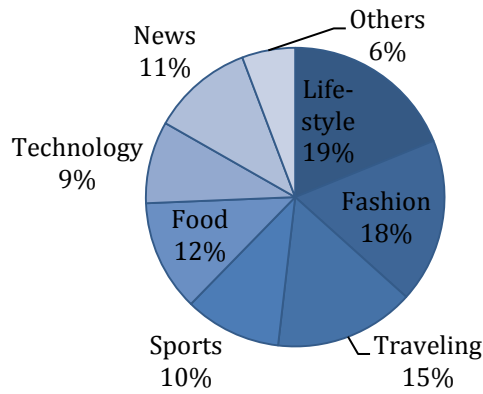
EXHIBIT 4.11: TYPES OF BLOGS BY USAGE
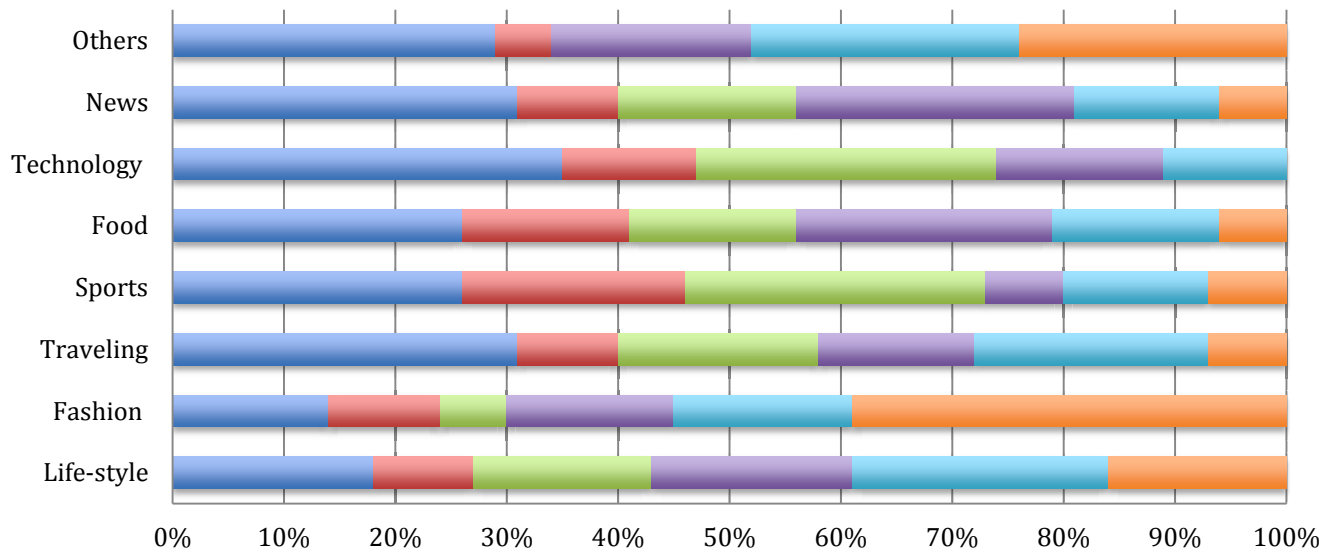
	Life-style	Fashion	Traveling	Sports	Food	Technology	News	Others
Less than once a month	18%	14%	31%	26%	26%	35%	31%	29%
Once a month	9%	10%	9%	20%	15%	12%	9%	5%
2 to 3 times per month	16%	6%	18%	27%	15%	27%	16%	0%
nce a week	18%	15%	14%	7%	23%	15%	25%	18%
2 to 3 times per week	23%	16%	21%	13%	15%	11%	13%	24%
Daily	16%	39%	7%	7%	6%	0%	6%	24%

	Type of posts	The blogger	Assiduity of posts	Aesthetics of the blog	Quantity of followers	Sponsorship	Popularity	Type of language used	Blog credibility	Blogger credibility
Not a priority	0%	1%	3%	0%	11%	18%	12%	2%	0%	1%
Low priority	0%	5%	5%	4%	13%	15%	13%	2%	3%	3%
Medium priority	5%	17%	19%	25%	31%	22%	24%	17%	9%	12%
High priority	21%	33%	36%	36%	19%	16%	20%	32%	32%	29%
Essential	56%	27%	19%	18%	9%	11%	14%	30%	38%	38%
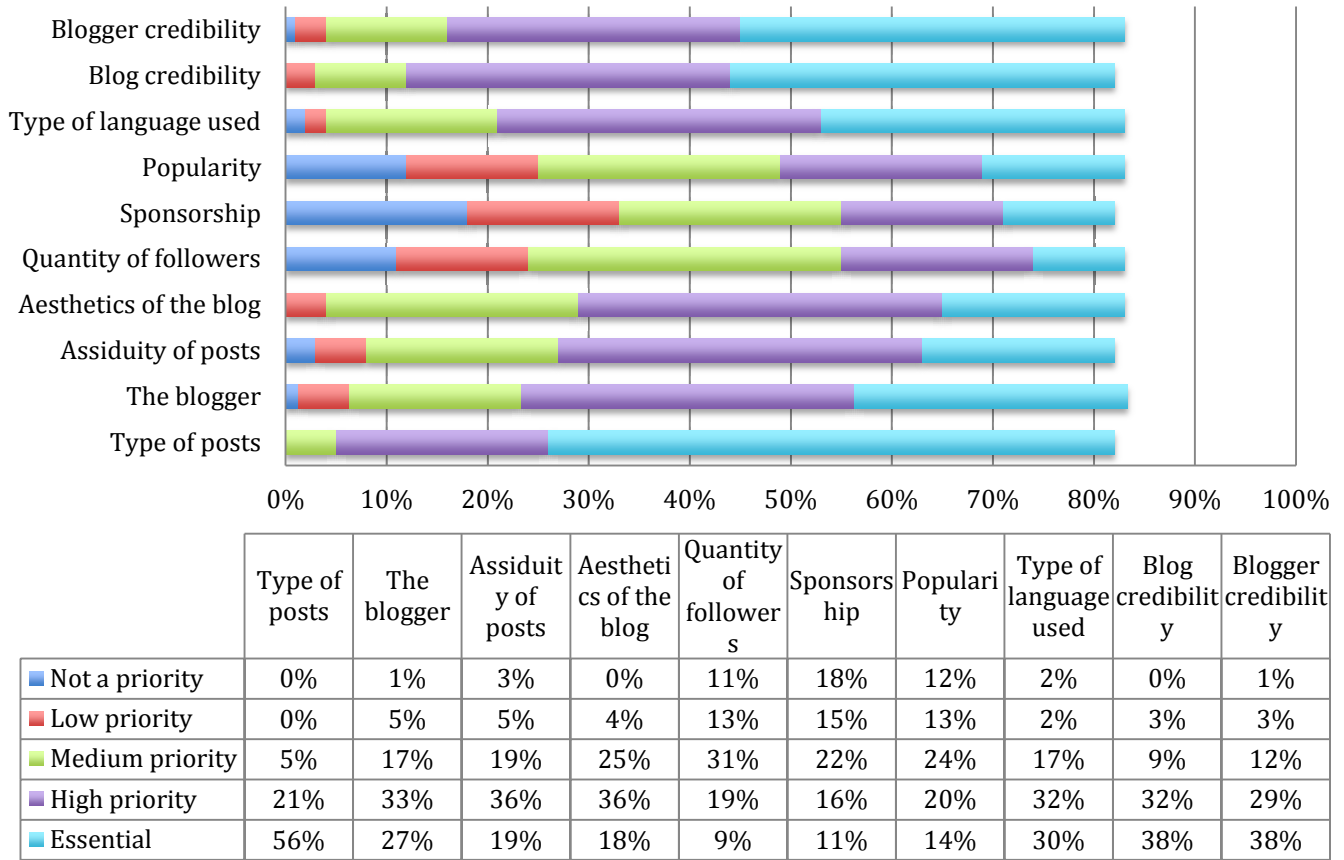
Fashion Blogs insights – Sample size 92:

Fashion blogs' users by marital status

60
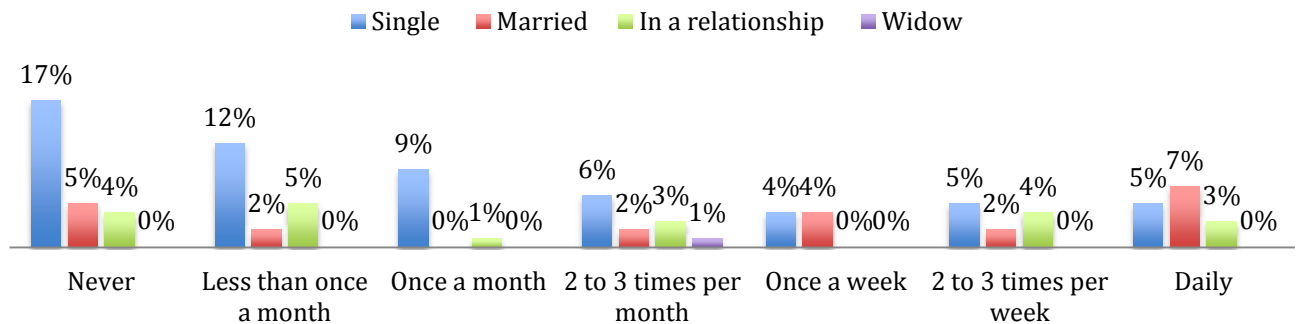
Fashion blogs' users by occupation

■ Student ■ Worker ■ Unemployed ■ Retired
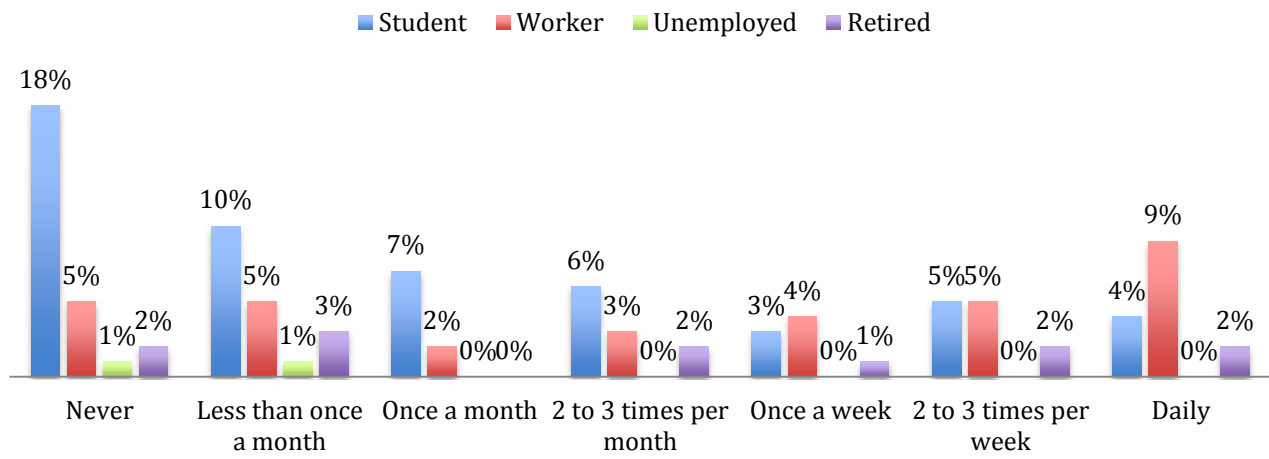
EXHIBIT 4.14: CHI-SQUARE TEST: FASHION BLOGS' USERS AND GENDER

Fashion blogs vs gender	Value	df	Asym. Sig. (2 sided)
Pearson Chi-square	28,149	6	0,001

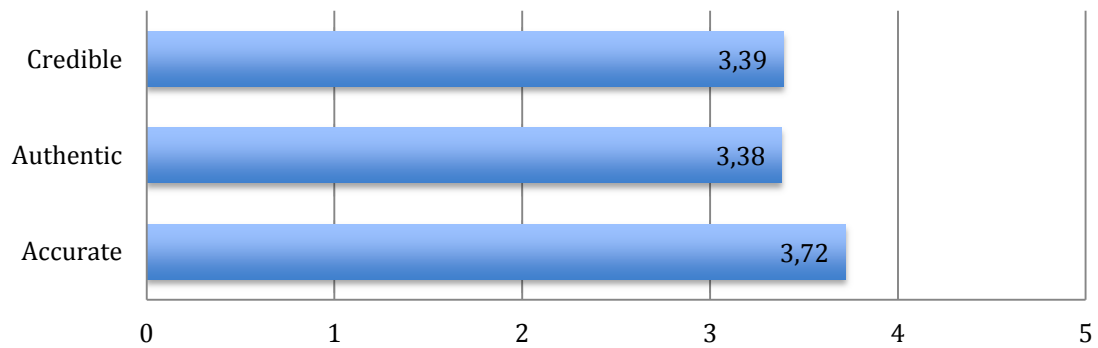## Blog credibility insights – Sample size 92:

EXHIBIT 4.15 CLASSIFICATION OF THE ATTRIBUTES THAT BEST DESCRIBE FASHION BLOGGERS
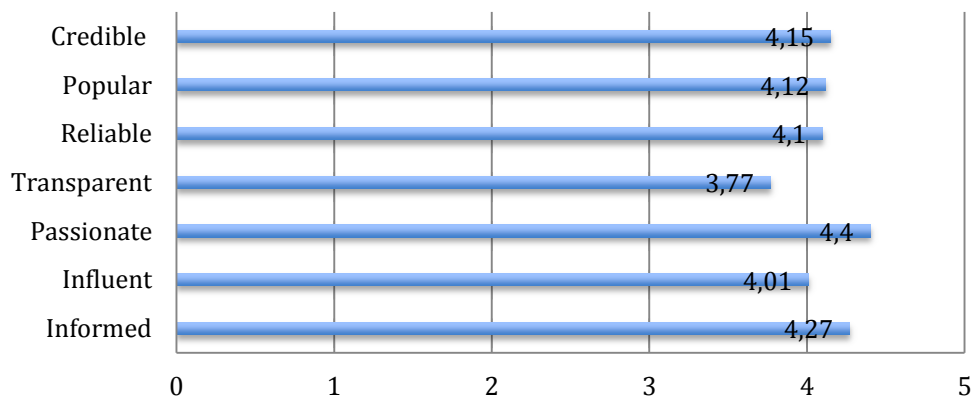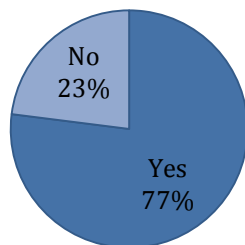
EXHIBIT 4.16: CLASSIFICATION OF THE ATTRIBUTES THAT BEST DESCRIBE FASHION BLOGS' CONTENT
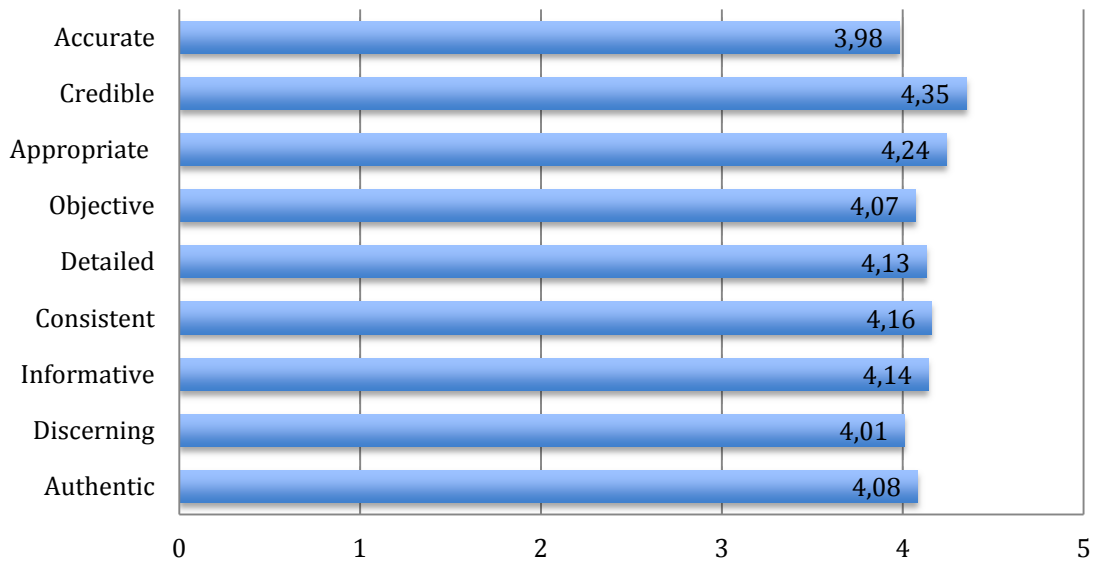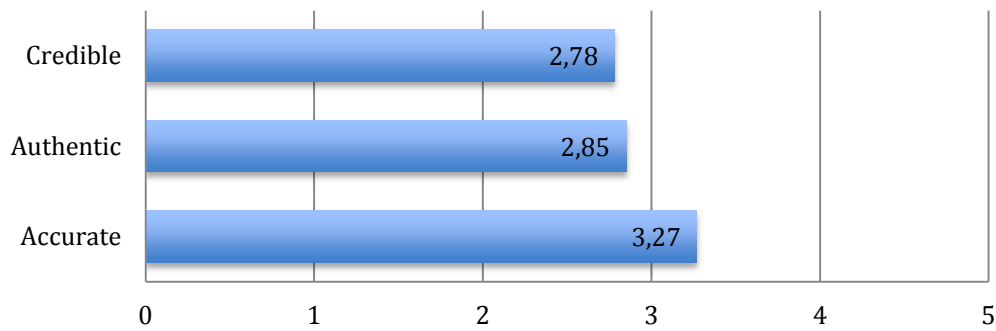

EXHIBIT 4.17: CLASSIFICATION OF THE POST PRESENTED (FIRST STAGE)

EXHIBIT 4.18: AWARENESS OF THE SENTENCE "POST WRITTEN WITH *BRAND X*"

EXHIBIT 4.19: CLASSIFICATION OF THE POST PRESENTED (SECOND STAGE)

EXHIBIT 4.20: PAIRED SAMPLE T TEST FOR SAMPLE 1

ACCURATE	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
First stage vs second stage	0,38095	1,24403	0,27147	1,403	20	0,176

AUTHENTIC	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
First stage vs second stage	0,57143	1,20712	0,26342	2,169	20	0,142

CREDIBLE	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
First stage vs second stage	0,47619	1,32737	0,28966	1,644	20	0,116

EXHIBIT 4.21: PAIRED SAMPLE T TEST FOR SAMPLE 2

ACCURATE	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
First stage vs second stage	0,46479	1,28542	0,15255	3,047	70	0,003

AUTHENTIC	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
First stage vs second stage	0,50704	1,31880	0,15651	3,240	70	0,002

CREDIBLE	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
First stage vs Second stage	0,64789	1,27726	0,15158	4,274	70	0,001

Purchase intention insights – Sample size 92

When I see some products posted on blogs, I will look for it online	3,92
When I see some products posted on blogs, I will look for it	3,59
I feel influenced by blogs	3,55
Blogs are a good vehicle for brands' communcation	4,5
I am aware that some posts are paid by brands	4,64
The fashion blogs that I read, talk about some brands	4,32

It was not an impulsive acquisition	43%
It was recently	30%
I would buy it again	43%
I remember the situation	44%
I was satisfied	49%