Are Beauty Bloggers More Influential than Traditional Industry Experts?

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The rise and impact of the blogosphere has rocketed over the past decade while traditional media outlets have seen circulation and readership decline. This has seen increased time spent on influencer relations activities by Public Relations (PR) Professionals and the use of bloggers as influencers within campaigns. Though media relations remain an important PR activity, the rising importance of bloggers poses the question of their value within promotional activity and campaigns. This study offers an exploration of the value of bloggers, compared with journalists as traditional industry experts, by measuring the influence they have on the purchase intentions of female consumers of beauty products between the ages of 18 and 24. This is conducted through phenomenological study of beauty consumer's experiences as well as some insight to the experiences of beauty PR professionals.

Keywords: Blogging, Journalism, Influence, Purchase Intention, Credibility, Beauty.

INTRODUCTION

This research aims to compare the influence of bloggers with journalists on consumer purchase intention (PI) of beauty products. Traditionally, PR focused on relationships with journalists, aiming to influence the inclusion of their clients within publication pages (McNamara 2016). Though PR professionals still typically spend around 70% of their time on media relations with journalists (CIPR 2017), the significant rise of bloggers as influencers (Khan et al. 2016) has led to an increase in time spent on influencer relations to 52% over the past year (CIPR 2017).

Social media channels (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube) have allowed bloggers to provide short and frequent updates to their followers (Kabadayi 2014) with some attracting significant web traffic to their channels (Waddington 2012). With the consumer's focus shifting towards these bloggers and channels, PR practitioners have been forced to recognise their influential power.

Bloggers have come to know their worth and in this day of paid advertising and brand affiliate schemes (Fleckney 2017), many seek to capitalise on their influence

by demanding payment in return for their services (Spencer 2015). This is particularly prevalent in the beauty industry where video blogger Zoe Sugg reportedly makes £50,000 per month from the promotion of beauty brands (Oppenheim 2016).

This raises the question of the importance of including bloggers in PR campaigns (Gray 2016) and the Return on Investment (ROI) they provide as a result. Consequently, this research hopes to provide PR practitioners with further knowledge on the reach and scope of influencers including bloggers and beauty journalists. It aims to give an insight into which source has a bigger impact on consumer PI and why. This will enable Public Relations Professionals (PRPs) to make informed decisions of how much time and money to spend on influencers to use budgets efficiently and gain the coverage they desire.

This research aims to add to the body of knowledge around the topics of blogging, journalism and their impacts on PI. It also aims to fill a gap in academia, offering a comparison of blogging with journalism, discovering which of the two has the most influence on consumer's beauty purchasing behaviours.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Influences and Influencers

Due to this study's focus on influence, it is important to define it and gauge how it will be measured effectively. Whilst many academics seek to measure influence on consumers (McCormick 2016; Navarro and Lopez-Rua 2016; Magno 2017), they do not offer a definition of the term. Influence is often associated with persuasion (Cialdini 1993; Mortensen 2004; Borg 2009; Nahai 2012), suggesting similarities between these terms.

Perloff (2014, p.12) defines persuasion as "a symbolic process" by which a communicator seeks to change other's attitudes and behaviours. Goulston and Ullmen (2013) state that people can see through persuasive techniques and that influence is a more effective way to approach them. Planchard et al. (2016) offer the following interpretation: "Influence is the capacity to have an effect on the character, development, or behaviour of someone or something." This negates the idea that persuasion and influence are similar. Persuasion is a more forceful tool aiming to change behaviours whereas influence is more subtle, reinforcing existing opinions. In the context of this research, influence is defined as "the extent to which the consumer's thoughts, opinions and PI are affected by an influencer." The term influencer will be used interchangeably with blogger/ journalists as those who seek to influence. Influence will be measured within this study by assessing PI as a result of viewing influencer's content.

Khan et al. (2016) discuss the idea of identifying 'influential' bloggers. They acknowledge that the ability to sway public opinion is important to help identify these influential bloggers. The use of the term 'sway' supports the idea that influence has more of an effect on existing thoughts and opinions. Planchard et al. (2016) agree, stating that consumers actively seek out influence rather than the influence

being created by a brand or influencer. This implies that influencers are a source of advice, and help consumers to form an opinion or take action such as purchasing a product.

Khan et al. (2016) recognise the usefulness of bloggers in marketing campaigns. Marketing campaigns aim to generate sales (Fill 2011) which suggests that influence can be measured by the PI of consumers. Influence on consumer behaviours and PI is something which is explored throughout academic literature (McCormick 2016; Navarro and Lopez-Rua 2016; Magno 2017). However, a gap within this existing literature lies within the motivations of the consumer for engaging with these influencers.

Purchase Intention (PI)

Some academics have researched the topic of blogs or endorsers and their impacts on PI (Saxena 2011; Malik and Guptha 2014; Martinez Navarro and Lopez Rua 2016; McCormick 2016; Magno 2017). PI can be defined as, the desire to purchase a product in the future after receiving the required information needed (Saxena 2011). Hsu and Tsou (2011) agree and add that PI can be used as an indication of purchasing behaviour, identifying a positive correlation between blogs and their influence on PI. McCormick (2016) attributed this to the fit of the endorser with the consumer's self-image, while Saxena (2011) quoted norms, values, beliefs and perceived credibility. Hsu and Tsou (2011) attribute PI to:
      1) High involvement with blogs
      2) Positive experiences on blogs
Hsu and Tsou (2011) reference the Consumer Decision-Making (CDM) process model such as that of Blackwell et al. (1995), a complex model considering both internal and external stimulus such as social norms, values and beliefs which may affect the purchasing process.

The 7-step decision making process (Blackwell et al. 1995) is particularly relevant to this study. Bloggers and journalists are sought out by consumers to help with decisions (Planchard et al. 2016), therefore, this is part of the information search section of this model. This will be utilised within this research, particularly to achieve the research aims, as set out in the Introduction.

Credibility

Credibility has appeared frequently in existing literature concerning influencers and PI (Hsu and Tsou 2011, Saxena 2011). Karlsson et al. (2014) explored credibility within journalism. While they concluded that transparency in journalism did not affect credibility, other studies (Hsu and Tsou 2011; Saxena 2011; McCormick 2016; Magno 2017) have found that the credibility of a source had a significant impact on PI.

Malik and Guptha (2014) explore multiple product endorsement by celebrities. Bloggers are continuously promoting various brands on their channels and are sponsored to post about these in a positive way (Capon 2017). Trip and Carlson (1994) found that when a celebrity endorsed more than four products, their

credibility was reduced. This puts bloggers credibility into question and could impact negatively on PI, a topic which has little focus in current literature.

Credibility is defined by McCroskey (1997 cited by Perloff 2014, p.167) as "the attitude toward a source of communication held at any given time by a receiver". Perloff (2014) looks at credibility as a communication variable that communicators seek to gain in order to become more influential to their audience. Perloff (2014) and Saxena (2011) acknowledge that credibility has a variety of characteristics; expertise, trustworthiness and goodwill. This suggests that beauty bloggers and journalists need to have expertise in the field of beauty, be an honest source of information and show care for their consumer's interests to be acknowledged as a credible source. This study aims to build upon this knowledge.

Parasocial Interaction Theory (PSI)

A recurring theme throughout existing literature is that consumers relate to and build relationships with the media personalities that they interact with (Larraufie and Sommer 2015; Lee and Watkins 2016; McCormick 2016). This desire to build relationships with media personalities is explored through PSI theory, particularly throughout Lee and Watkins' work (2016) where the theory is applied to consumers of bloggers on YouTube.

PSI is defined by Giles (2002) as feelings that occur for a personality or character that consumers have never met, but are similar to what is felt in any usual relationship. For example, seeing bloggers as friends and having a desire to meet them (Lee and Watkins 2016). Lee and Watkins (2016) found that, much like credibility, PSI had a number of characteristics enhancing the likelihood of relationships being forged between a consumer and a media personality; perceived realism (PRM), frequency of viewing (FOV) and attractiveness. While Lee and Watkins (2016) have a strong focus on attractiveness, this research project will look to all three of these characteristics and how they apply to the consumer's perceived relationships with influencers.

PSI links with credibility in a number of ways. PRM of a source by a consumer relates to the comparison of the source with oneself, which ultimately increases trustworthiness and therefore, PI (Perloff 2014; McCormick 2016). Lee and Watkins (2016) conclude that PSI has a positive impact on the perceptions of the brands displayed by vloggers and in-turn, a positive effect on PI.

Blogging

Blogging, a word developed from the phrase web logging (Bruno 2001; Wagstaff 2002; Hsu et al. 2013) is often described as a diary published online, by ordinary individuals (Bruno 2001). The emergence of different blogging themes such as high school life, technology and parenting (Bruno 2001) suggests that early blogging was growing in popularity and that people from various backgrounds were sharing their stories over the internet. Blogging was further encouraged by the launch of software such as Open Diary (Wagstaff 2004; Walker-Rettburg 2014) which allowed ordinary people (Wagstaff 2004) to upload their entries to the internet with ease. By October 2014, this software had identified almost 4.2million blogs globally (Rosenbloom

2004). This collective web of bloggers became what is known as the blogosphere (Rosenbloom 2004).

Further technological advances, such as the emergence of social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat) between 2004 and 2011 lead to changes in blogging formats (Svirskis 2017). This shift towards viewing more photo and video content online (Gilbert 2016) meant that bloggers had to adapt to stay relevant. The launch of video sharing site, YouTube, in 2005 (Wiseman 2014) provided opportunities for video blogging or 'vlogging' to large audiences. This became particularly popular with beauty bloggers with over 1,783,935 beauty-related videos uploaded to YouTube accumulating over 43.5billion views in total over the past decade (Pixability 2015). Seizing new opportunities, bloggers began to capitalise on their work via paid advertisements on their channels and affiliate programmes with brands that were willing to pay for bloggers to promote their products (Kang and Park 2009). The most successful beauty blogger to achieve this is Zoe Sugg, a 26-year-old beauty vlogger who goes by the name 'Zoella' and has over 11million YouTube subscribers (Lumsden 2016; YouTube 2017). Zoe now earns a reported £50,000 per month (Lumsden 2016; Oppenheim 2016).

This shift towards online content has affected traditional journalism (Bivens 2008). PR has long focussed on traditional print media outlets and building relationships with appropriate journalists for the purpose of gaining client coverage (McNamara 2016). With the rapid growth of the blogosphere, PR pros have been warned not to "underestimate the power and sway of blogs" (Becker et al. 2012) and are putting more time into interacting with this group of influencers. Wright and Hinson (2008) note that online content by bloggers provide channels for two-way symmetrical communications with the consumers they are reaching out to, as the consumer is able to engage and interact via these channels (Larraufie and Sommer 2015). Wright and Hinson (2008) acknowledge the possibilities that this two-way communication has for the enhancement of Grunig's Excellence Theory for PR practice. Traditional journalism cannot provide this as it is predominantly one-way (Waddington 2012). Consequently, blogging could be seen as being beneficial to PR practice, encouraging two-way consumer engagement with brands and products.
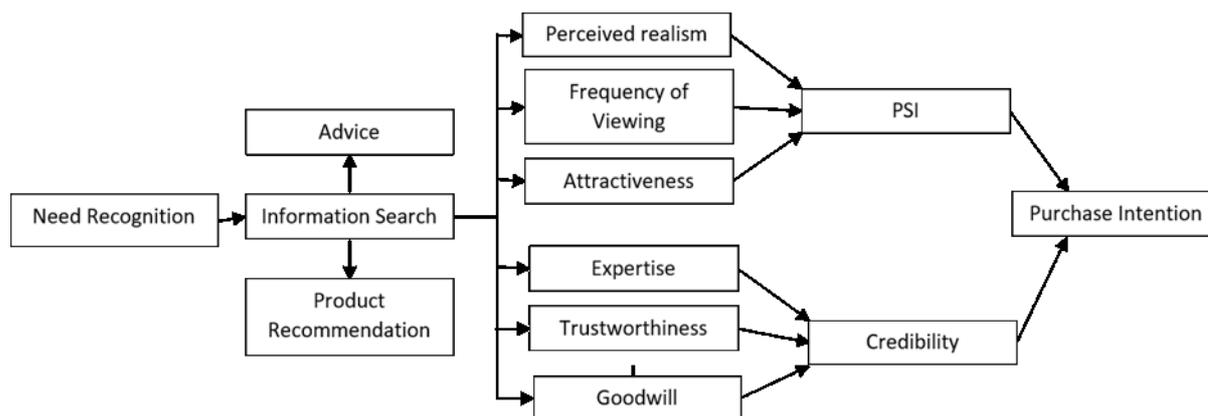
While the popularity of the blogosphere grows, traditional journalism is declining (Fleckney 2017), fewer consumers are purchasing print media, being able to view this content digitally (Wynne 2014). This is impacting on circulation and readership figures with newspaper, The Daily Mail, experiencing a 6% year-on-year decrease (Greenslade 2017). Subsequently, media organisations are using online and social media to maintain relevance and keep up with bloggers (Greenslade 2017). Online usage by traditional media organisations targets the same 18-24 age group who are also the most avid followers of beauty bloggers Mintel (2016). Glamour magazine's UK print readership has an average age of 31 years, whilst 70% of their online readers are between the ages of 18 and 34 (Condé Nast 2017).

Bloggers have become significant to PR practice, most notably in the beauty industry. Recognising their significance, PR professionals have begun working with bloggers in the same way they do with journalists (Waddington 2012). This has boosted bloggers' confidence in their work, seeing themselves as providing journalistic content and leading them to demand anything from £200 - £5,000 per

post (Spencer 2015). While this may guarantee coverage (Waddington 2012), these extra costs pose the question of the ROI of working with bloggers, something which is not currently explored in academic literature.

Conceptual Framework

Considering the identified gaps in current academic literature, the below conceptual framework has been constructed to help fill in these gaps and inform the findings of this research.

This conceptual framework begins with the need recognition (NR) and information search (IS) sections of the Consumer Decision-Making Process (CDMP) (Blackwell et al. 1995) to examine the channels which consumers look to and the types of information that they are searching for. The framework then flows into the FOV these particular channels, PRM of the source and attractiveness of the source to the consumer, all of which are factors of PSI, said to have an impact on PI (Larraufie and Sommer 2015; Lee and Watkins 2016), as well as factors of credibility, said to have similar effects. Combined, PSI and credibility are linked as influences to the consumer's PI, something which is not present in existing literature.

METHODOLOGY

With reference to Saunders et al. (2012), this research project practiced a simple mixed methods strategy combining qualitative research for depth of understanding (Wilson 2003) with quantitative research to generalise findings within a larger audience (Allen et al. 2009). Due to a focus on understanding consumers interpretations of their interactions with and the influences of bloggers and journalists, an interpretivist phenomenological philosophy was used (Saunders et al. 2012).

Qualitative research focuses on 'meaning in context' (Merriam and Tisdell 2015) and gathers data in a flexible way to allow for deeper insights into the area of study (Wilson 2003). This research undertook a qualitative, exploratory approach (Wilson 2003) as this helped to develop a clearer understanding of the concepts involved within this relatively new topic (Blumberg et al. 2005). A semi-structured interview approach (Brennan 2013) encouraged in-depth responses from interviewees

(Denscombe 2014) which gained insights into the attitudes, motivations, behaviours and perceptions of consumers.

Quantitative data was used to gain a generalised understanding of findings from a wider audience (Wilson 2003). Quantitative research involves much larger samples of participants to provide some insight into attitudes, motivations and behaviours (Wilson 2003). In relation to Saunders et al. (2012) research onion, quantitative data is linked to survey strategies. This strategy was adopted and quantitative research was conducted through the use of an online questionnaire.

Sample

Using a convenience sampling approach, the researcher made use of members of the target population already known to them (Proctor 2003), which the literature review identified to be 18-24-year-old females (Mintel 2016; Condé Nast 2017). In total, 8 participants selected for semi-structured interviews, predominantly from student population and those working within the beauty industry. Social media was used to distribute the online questionnaires to the target population within the researcher's social network. This led to multiplicity sampling (Proctor 2003) whereby respondents within the researcher's social network shared the questionnaire with their own networks to recruit further respondents of the desired age/gender. In total, 41 surveys were completed by females aged 18-23 years.

Data Analysis

Semi-structured interviews were analysed using a thematic coding approach as noted by Denscombe (2014). Using the objectives of this research project as an initial indicator of themes, transcriptions of the semi-structured interviews were colour coded where themes arose. The themes within the conceptual framework of this research were explored and colour coded also. Questionnaires were measured numerically with percentages and statistics to analyse the data. Data analysis programmes built into the questionnaire building software presented graphs and charts which made data more visible and clearer for analysis.

Quantitative research surveyed a larger audience to test this against qualitative data and examine whether the results were the same to promote reliability (Collis and Hussey 2014). The quantitative questionnaires may be repeated, testing reliability. For validity, this research project used and adapted existing research questions from current literature based around the topics of consumer behaviours and PI. It also adapted some questions from other thesis with similar research topics. This was due to these questions having already been tested, measuring what the researchers and academics had set out to achieve (Collis and Hussey 2014). The questions within this research were adapted from previously tested questions (Bellsouth 2002; Bohmer 2015; Pope 2015) adding validity to the research and its findings.

DISCUSSION

This section details the findings of the research, integrating this into a discussion drawing upon existing literature. Findings are categorised using the aims for this research project. Discussion will focus primarily around the findings of the semi-structured interviews, looking to the questionnaire to support these. Overall, 100% of participants were female aged between 18 and 24, over 50% were 22yrs, throughout this discussion participants of the interviews will be referred to as P1, P2 etc.

Influencer Channels Used

Bivens (2008) stated a significant shift from viewing traditional print media to viewing content online. In terms of media consumption, 100% of participants discussed a variety of social media channels, emphasising their time spent online. Only 37% of interviewees revealed that they view print newspapers and magazines on a regular basis.

> P2. "I'm on the internet daily so I'm always on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter... I sometimes get cosmopolitan but that's very rare. I'd get that once every 3 months maybe."

Both P3 and P5 noted that they only view newspaper content online, for both the chosen publication was The Daily Mail, but only the showbiz section: P5. "I only really look at the showbiz section, but I never really read through the news." Additionally, 90% of interview participants talked about YouTube and expressed that this was another channel that they looked to daily, supported by 53.7% of questionnaire respondents who viewed the channel more than 3 times per week. On YouTube, bloggers dominate the beauty content with 182,621 independent blogging channels compared with just 215 brands including publications (Pixability 2015). Many bloggers tend to support their video channels with promotional content on their social media feeds (Khan et al. 2016), increasing their followings (Waddington 2012). Supporting this, 100% of interviewees followed bloggers on social media, as did 93% of questionnaire respondents. On average, interview participants followed bloggers on 3 different social media channels while 92% of survey respondents followed bloggers on 2 or more channels. Social media has become a powerful source of communication and it is rare for women in the 18-24 age group not to have a social media presence with almost 90% present on these channels (ComScore 2017). Only P4 followed beauty journalists on social media though this was for work-related purposes.

Traditional print media has become a much less visible channel, reflecting in the decrease in print media circulation across the UK (Mintel 2016; Greenslade 2017). UK publications are increasing their online presence to encourage readership. The Sun newspaper dropped its paid online content to a free service and The Independent swapped print for solely online content (Mintel 2016). Some beauty journalists and publications have increased their visibility by growing their social media channels such as Glamour magazine's beauty director Alessandra Steinherr who has an Instagram following of 142,000 (Instagram 2017) and Cosmopolitan UK who have a following 286,000 on the same channel. This is reflected in the findings of the questionnaire with 58% respondents following beauty journalists on social media. These findings suggest that traditional publications are not creating content that is appealing and encouraging this consumer to view the publications either online or offline. Supporting this, P3 offered:

"No [I don't read print newspapers or magazines] I feel like that's just
because it's a dying thing like my age group don't really read
newspapers and magazines, the only time I read them is when I'm
travelling… because obviously on the plane you don't have access to
the internet."

This suggests that print media is seen as an alternative form of entertainment
when there is a lack of internet connection.

While 100% of interviewees agreed that they looked to bloggers for beauty content,
the channels on which they viewed these differed. YouTube was the most popular
channel as 90% participants discussed this throughout their interviews. However,
it was not always considered the main channel for beauty content visited by each
participant. Short-form videos on Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat were
mentioned by 7/8 interviewees. For example, P1: "The videos are much shorter [on
Instagram] and they're easier to find." P3 further added:

"I follow so many beauty bloggers on Instagram that when I'm on my
explore page it brings up so many more… I can look over so many
things and look at a lot of videos. Whereas with YouTube… I can't be
bothered to watch 20, 10-minute videos."

ComScore (2016) found that people aged between 15 and 35 viewed the most
video content, though they watch less video seconds than older groups. This trend
for short-form video formats combined with the opinions of participants may be
something of great interest for PR professionals to consider. This is an area of online
media that could prove significantly valuable for offering exposure to beauty brands,
giving the findings of this research.

Image-heavy channels such as Instagram and YouTube were more popular than
media which featured a lot of text. Consequently, blog pages had seemingly
decreased in popularity. Only 37% of participants had looked at blog pages:

 P3. "The only person's blog page I look at is Desi Perkins because she
has her own line of sunglasses and she often wears clothing brands
that I like to wear myself."

For beauty advice, image-heavy online media were the preferred platforms
to visit. Blog pages were still visited but served other functions such as fashion
inspiration. This is mirrored within the questionnaire with just 43% of respondents
expressing that they read blog pages on a regular basis, compared with 53.7% who
watch vlogs on YouTube frequently.

P4 believed that bloggers had "neglected their blogs" and attributed this to an
increase in vlogging and use of social media. P4 also mentions that blog pages were
how they came to learn of blogger's YouTube and other social media channels. P4's
thoughts suggest that bloggers have grown aware of the popularity and value of
image-heavy channels over the written blogs, as they are able to engage with larger
followings (Waddington 2012; Fleckney 2017).

Existing literature focusses on the written blog and the different effects that these
have on consumers. The findings of this research combined with those of (Kabadayi
2014; Wiseman 2014; Capon 2017) and Pixability's Beauty on YouTube report
(2015), suggests that bloggers' use of social media channels is dominating the
blogosphere. Blogging is not simply a journal as Bruno (2001) and Wagstaff (2002)

stated but a combination of social media channels and blog pages, though the latter may not be updated as frequently. The most popular channels participants looked to for beauty advice and blogging content were YouTube and Instagram. These sites are dominated by videos and images, showing a preference for this type of content. The effects of bloggers on social media are an area that requires further exploration.

Motivations

100% of interviewees attributed viewing beauty blogging content on social media channels to Ease of Use (EOU). EOU refers to the lack of effort involved (Yang and Wang 2015) in this case, viewing image-heavy content. Participants preferred to view images and videos as they believed it "involved less concentration and time" (P2) than reading through magazine or newspaper articles:

> P2. "I can just sit in bed at night and watch a video...if I have to read it I have to really concentrate on it and I just can't be bothered with that."

> P3 also attributed this EOU to being able to visit YouTube and Instagram on her mobile and the option to search for content that she was interested in:

> P3. "It's just so easy to look on my phone because I constantly have it with me whereas a newspaper or magazine I'd have to buy and it's not necessarily going to tell me everything I want it to."

> P3 expresses the concern that print media may not have content within it that she is interested in and may be a waste of money. The vast content available on social media allows the consumer to search whatever they desire, avoiding content that does not interest them. There is a sense of control involved that is not so present with print media. Video allows the consumer to watch how to use and apply products "in real time" (P6) making it "much easier to see the shade, texture and consistency" (P1) of beauty products and how they are applied as opposed to being "just a 2D image on a page" (P2). This could be linked with EOU as the consumer does not have to imagine what the product would look like and is shown the exact result and usage on screen.

The conceptual framework for this research project (2.6), begins with two stages of the CDM process model (Blackwell et al. 1995), need recognition (NR) and information search (IS). Respondents of the questionnaire attributed 'product recommendations' as the main reason for viewing beauty-related blogging content online with just over 70% providing this answer. This suggests that these consumers, at the NR stage, looked to bloggers to provide them with recommendations, 62% of interviewees agreed,

> P7. "When I run out of things that I use all of the time like highlighter I would go and YouTube videos to find out what would be a good new highlighter to use."

> This NR to replace finished make up leads her to search for information on potential new products for her to buy via blogger product recommendations. This shows motivation for viewing blogging or vlog content and also that bloggers may influence her decision of which product to buy. Regarding the CDM process model, participants expressed that they look to blogging channels to discover new beauty products and trends. This could be a catalyst for beginning the CDM process, as discovering new products may create a need for the consumer to purchase.

Entertainment was another important motivator for viewing blogging channels. Almost 64% of questionnaire respondents selected entertainment as a reason for viewing blogging or vlogging content online with which 5/8 interviewees agreed. NR and IS can explain consumer motivations for viewing blogging channels. Some consumers look to bloggers for information after identifying the need for new beauty products. Others identify this need as a result of viewing blogging channels. EOU was a key factor influencing consumer motivations to view image-heavy online content as it meant that the consumer could gain all the relevant information and entertainment they needed with little effort.

Aspirational Consumers

AC strive to fulfil extrinsic goals such as popularity and social status through the purchase of luxury items (Gupta and Srivastav 2015). This research found that AC were made as a result of viewing beauty blogs or vlogs online and purchasing products that they believed would make them appear more attractive both physically and socially. 100% of interview participants aspired to achieve make up looks created by the bloggers that they watched on a regular basis:

> P1. "In their videos [the makeup] always looks really nice and the way it is applied is good so I think I will go and buy it myself to see if I could look as good."

AC are linked with luxury, high-priced items (Gupta and Srivastav 2015). In the above case, the item was reasonably priced, though when questioned about the importance of price, the participant explained that they would still want to buy the product even if it was more expensive. This demonstrates that this aspirational element, influenced by bloggers, invokes PI.

Some participants expressed a need to buy products which they perceived as popular amongst the blogosphere:

> P3. "Products that are really popular like the Anastasia Beverly Hills Modern Renaissance (ABHMR) eyeshadow palette, I saw lots of [bloggers] using it and was like ahhh I really wanna have that."

The ABHMR palette retails at £41 (Cult Beauty 2017) and is considered a luxury cosmetics item. Though the 18-24 age group are often considered to have low income (Wood 2004), they purchase high-priced beauty items as a result of its perceived popularity amongst beauty bloggers. This suggests that the participant has the intention to purchase popular, high-priced beauty items as a result of viewing products via many influential bloggers. AC within the beauty industry is an area of academia which sparsely exists. It could be of great interest to consumer behaviour studies as it could uncover further insights into consumers who are not immediately associated with luxury items. Overall, beauty bloggers influence and create AC, having a positive impact on consumer PI of premium beauty products.

Credibility

Participants had mixed views on the credibility of bloggers, journalists and how they effected their PI. Reflecting on the characteristics of credibility, 70% of interviewees believed bloggers to be experts in beauty and therefore credible, supported by 43% of questionnaire respondents. However, this expertise was only attributed to larger

bloggers who had previous beauty experience, usually as a make-up artist (P2; P3; P8). Bloggers were not always seen as trustworthy;

> "It just goes back to are they being paid to show this? Is this actually something they believe is good?" (P2)

This response supports that an increased number of paid endorsements negatively effecting a sources credibility (Malik and Gupta 2014). P2 stressed that this made her doubt the trustworthiness of bloggers and though she considered some as experts, the possibility of bloggers being paid in exchange for product promotions, questioned their credibility, 50% of interviewees agreed.

Bloggers were considered more credible than journalists due to their genuine passion for beauty compared to "generic journalism backgrounds" (P8). This supports Borah (2015) who states that consumers find blogs more credible than mainstream media. Further, it could be attributed to consumers decrease in trust of the media (Edelman 2017). In contrast, 30% of interviewees saw journalists as experts, as did 41% of questionnaire respondents, but did not attribute this to their credibility. The credibility of journalism was questioned due to perceived restrictions within media organisations of journalist's true opinions on products compared with bloggers being able to say "exactly what they want" (P4). Again, this is supporting Edelman's (2017) findings which state that people have more trust in individuals (bloggers) than in organisations.

Credibility was considered as a factor which impacted on PI, though not all bloggers were considered credible due to lack of experience and product endorsement. Whilst journalists were seen as experts, they were not considered credible and therefore did not have such a significant impact on PI. 52% of participants responded that they would purchase beauty products on journalist recommendation compared with 83% who would make a purchase recommended by a blogger.

PSI

Bloggers who were deemed most credible by participants were those perceived to be most genuine. This suggests a link between credibility and the PSI characteristic of PRM. PRM relates to the extent of which the consumer perceives the source to be a 'genuine person' like themselves (Lee and Watkins 2016). In terms of PRM, 50% of interviewees attributed an ability to relate to bloggers due to their personalities reflecting that of a friend: "It's almost like you're sat doing your make-up with your friend" (P3). The participant accredits the blogger's chatty persona to appearing as though she has a genuine interest in her followers and is not just being paid to promote product. The participant noted that she is more likely to buy products as a result of this perceived connection. This adds to the research of Lee and Watkins (2016) showing that PRM has a positive impact on PI.

P8 notes that she is "addicted to watching beauty bloggers", she watches them almost every day and that her beauty collection is a reflection of everything she sees via bloggers. P2 also watches YouTube beauty videos every day and discussed products that she had purchased via these bloggers. P5 noted that she had been watching one blogger frequently for almost 5 years and expressed a need to keep up with the bloggers life, this FOV demonstrates a PSI between the participant and

blogger with a need to keep-up this relationship by viewing blogging content. Other participants who did not frequently view blogging channels did not discuss purchased products. Though more research could be done in this area, this shows a link between the characteristic, frequency of viewing within PSI and PI/ purchasing behaviour.

Attractiveness, as explored by Lee and Watkins (2016) and McCormick (2016) was a prominent characteristic of PSI which influenced the way consumers related to bloggers. Attractiveness refers to the extent that the consumer feels that the source is representative of their own self-image (McCormick 2016). Half of interviewees expressed that they related to bloggers who drew similarities with themselves. P3 and P4 expressed a need to look at bloggers with similar looks to themselves in terms of hair and skin tone. Both participants noted that seeing products being used on these bloggers helped them to decide on products which may be most suited to them. P4 regularly bought products endorsed by the bloggers with a similar appearance to herself.

PSI, credibility and AC can interlink to contribute to consumer PI. PRM can affect the trustworthiness of a source due to the consumer perception of the source as genuine or not in terms of who they are and what they are saying. Attractiveness can lead to AC as consumers try to emulate the looks of sources considered similar to themselves with little regard for the price points of products, offering new insight into the effects of these factors on PI.

CONCLUSION

This study has identified consumer perceptions on the influence of beauty bloggers and journalists on PI of beauty products. Differing from existing research, this paper has drawn comparisons between these sources through investigating the channels on which consumers view these sources; the motivations behind looking to these sources; and the impact these have on PI to learn which is most influential on the purchasing behaviours of the 18-24 female age group. This paper uncovers new information on consumer preferences for blogging content in image-heavy and short-form video formats to inform purchase decisions. The themes explored throughout the findings lend themselves to each other, combining elements of the CDM process, credibility and PSI to inform, entertain and encourage consumers to purchase beauty products, adding to existing research in consumer behaviour and presenting valuable insights into the influence of bloggers in PR and marketing campaigns.

Findings explored the channels that consumers look to for beauty advice, resolving that video-blogging and social media hugely outweighed traditional media in popularity. This supports much of existing literature, adding short-form video within blogging content as an area for further exploration within promotional campaigns. Further, this supports industry research into the demise of print media circulation figures as we look toward a more digital future where perceived EOU is key in engaging consumers with promotional content. Furthermore, the research has discovered that consumer motivations for viewing blogging content combined with factors of credibility and PSI produced positive outcomes for PI. Bloggers were

considered more trustworthy than journalists which lent itself to the characteristic of attractiveness in PSI. Therefore, consumers were more likely to look to bloggers for beauty advice and product recommendations. Consumers trusted bloggers who they could relate themselves to, supporting the findings of Edelman (2017) that people are most trusting of others like themselves. This level of trust had a positive correlation with PI.

A significant conclusion of this research is that with the 18-24 female age group, bloggers are dominant within their everyday lives, particularly on social media sites Instagram and YouTube. Consumers hold bloggers in high regard, respecting those with expertise and trusting their opinions, influencing purchasing behaviours. While journalists are still seen as experts by this age group, they are considerably less visible and relatable to them resulting in journalists being less influential on PI. The research aim of this study was successfully achieved as a result of these findings, concluding that the PI of the 18-24 female age group is influenced by bloggers more so than journalists.

This study is limited by its sample size. While online questionnaires were conducted to improve the scale of the sample, 41 respondents is still relatively small and cannot be deemed conclusive of the target population. The use of face-to-face interviews can be subjective as the researcher has some element of control throughout the interview, combined with the participants being known to the researcher which could create bias. Semi-structured interviews make it difficult to achieve consistency as data collected is highly dependent on each specific participant and the context of each interview which could impact negatively on the reliability of the research.

Recommendations have been made throughout this paper for further exploration into the effects of short-form video and image-heavy content on PI; young people as AC and the links between credibility and PSI effecting PI. These areas would benefit academia in consumer behaviour. In terms of PR, this paper demonstrates that blogging is extremely influential on young consumers and this should be taken advantage of in respective campaigns. This research is restricted to a young, female age group and further exploration is recommended to uncover the sources which are most influential on other age groups and males.

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