

# CONSTRUCTING CONSUMER FEMININITIES

## A Study of Young Female Bloggers' Portrayal of Consumption in Fashion Blogs

Master's thesis

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Tutkijat ovat jo pitkään kiinnittäneet huomiota siihen, kuinka nuorille naisille suunnatut aikakauslehdet esittävät naiset ensisijaisesti kuluttajina ja rohkaisevat heitä rakentamaan naiseuttaan kuluttamisen varaan. Nykyään aikakauslehtien lisäksi toimivat blogit, joissa nuoret naiset itse rakentavat identiteettiään kuluttamalla ja jakavat käsityksiään ja arvojaan muiden blogien kirjoittajien ja lukijoiden kanssa.</p> <p>Tätä valtavaa määrää nuoria naisia koskettavaa ilmiötä ei kuitenkaan juuri ole tutkittu, ja tähän tarpeeseen tutkimukseni koettaakin vastata. Sen pyrkimyksenä on selvittää, kuinka nuoret naiset kuvaavat kuluttamista muotiblogeissaan ja millaisia merkityksiä he antavat kuluttamiselle, kuten myös tuoda esiin bloggaajien keinot luoda kulutuskulttuurin normatiivisuutta.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen aineistona toimii seitsemästä eri muotiblogista valittuja blogikirjoituksia, kustakin 18 kappaletta. Analysoin aineistoani koodaamalla sen kategorioihin aineistosta esiin nousseiden teemojen ja diskurssien perusteella, käyttäen apunani grounded theoryn menetelmiä.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen tärkein havainto oli, että identiteetin rakentaminen on pääasiallinen motiivi kulutusvalintojen tekemiselle. Bloggaajat pyrkivät kukin rakentamaan omaa naiseuttaan itselleen sopivalla, persoonallisella tavalla ja kulutusvalinnoillaan erottumaan joukosta. Koettiin, että kuluttaminen toimi itseilmaisukanavana ja sen avulla pystyi myös parantamaan itseluottamustaan. Toisaalta kuluttamalla haluttiin myös kuulua joukkoon ja täyttää hyväksytyyn naiseuden muotti. Lisäksi kulutukselle ja kulutushyödykkeille annettiin paljon arvoa, sillä ne nähtiin esimerkiksi stressinlaukaisijoina sekä symboleina muille, fyysistä esinettä tärkeämmille asioille. Tyypillistä oli myös rakkauden tunteiden ilmaisu kuluttamista ja kulutushyödykkeitä kohtaan. Kuitenkin myös jonkin verran kritiikkiä nykyajan kulutuskeskeistä kulttuuria kohtaan esitettiin, sillä sen koettiin olevan pinnallista ja erkaannuttavan ihmisen asioista, joilla koettiin olevan kuluttamista syvempi merkitys. Usein kulutuskriittiset lausunnot liittyivät ekologiseen muotiin, mikä oli monille myös keino luoda identiteettiä. Enimmäkseen bloggaajat eivät kuitenkaan kyseenalaistaneet kulutuskulttuuria tai identiteetin rakentamista kulutuksen varaan.</p>	
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

“A mix of DIY, food, and most prominently, fashion, LA-based Emily Schuman’s sincere and friendly approach to fashion blogging has made her the idol of women across the country. Last year, Schuman - - signed a deal with Estee Lauder. She also published her first book in August 2012—“

This description of Lauren Sherman in *Fashionista* (Jan 23<sup>rd</sup> 2013), one of the world’s most successful fashion blogs, is a good indication of the significance of fashion blogging. Emily Schuman, who runs the famous fashion blog “Cupcakes and Cashmere”, was ranked third on the list of most influential personal style bloggers of the moment by *Fashionista*. According to Nathalie Oates of *The Huffington Post* (2013), Emily’s blog had an average of 120 000 visitors a day in May 2013, and she has made several important business deals, earning her a considerable amount of money.

Emily Schuman and her blog are, of course, just one example of the significance of fashion blogging today. There are several estimates on the number of fashion blogs out there in the blogging world and the popularity of blogging continues to increase. For example, one of the most popular blogging platforms, *Tumblr* ([www.tumblr.com/about](http://www.tumblr.com/about), 2014), alone states that it hosted over two million blogs in September 2014. *Wordpress* ([en.wordpress.com/stats/](http://en.wordpress.com/stats/), 2014), another popular service, on the other hand, claims that over 409 million people view more than 15.8 billion of their pages each month. These estimates tell that blogging and following blogs is a significant part of everyday life for a huge number of people.

In the sea of these millions of blogs, the fashion blog has clearly become a popular genre of its own, influencing people around the world, but young women, in particular. As many, such as Härkönen (2011: 69-79), discuss, fashion blogging has become something to be taken seriously, as it increasingly expands the bloggers' career opportunities and the most successful bloggers have even been able to collect fortunes by blogging. Fashion blogging has been professionalized, and it now forms its own genre alongside with traditional fashion journalism. In addition, many fashion websites and online magazines use fashion bloggers as their contributors and in their websites link a number of bloggers working under them. Many fashion blogs are professionalized to the extent that they do not have individual bloggers behind them but instead a group of specialists and editors. On the other hand, these days it is easy for anybody to create a

blog, and blogging has thus become a hobby for millions and millions. They blog in their free time and often concentrate on their personal life and style, and their readership can be considerably smaller. In other words, there are various different types of fashion blogs, but what is clear is that they play an important role in the media culture and more specifically, many young women's life today.

The world of fashion used to revolve around notable fashion houses and their spring and autumn collections. However, the spread of fashion blogging has meant that these days people are more and more affected by fashion influences from their peers and the media (Rocamora, 2012: 96-97). Blogs have created an arena for people to share their styles, display their identity and share it with others, and blogs from their own part play to the fast distribution of fashion influences around the world. Fashion and style blogs, in particular, work on a very material level, displaying images of desirable and trendy outfits, ideal homes or other consumer goods. There are also numerous blog posts where especially more successful and professionalized bloggers discuss material benefits that they achieve by demonstrating products and co-operating with companies, which may contribute to the strong focus of many blogs on consuming and displaying consumer goods. However, even less popular bloggers appear to have adopted the same pattern and often seem to build their identity and the blog's content on consuming.

In spite of the apparent appeal that fashion blogs have, on the one hand, on the other hand their strong emphasis on consuming may really strike as disconcerting. In addition to my own initial observations, others, such as Härkönen (2011), have also noticed and taken an interest in how strongly young women construct their identities based on consumption in fashion blogs. Writers of these blogs are mostly my peers, young women, who write about their everyday life and matters attached to it. As many scholars discuss, on social media people often show a polished and carefully selected image of themselves (e.g. Aboujaoude, 2011: 20). Bloggers also often choose not to reveal details of their personal lives, which plays to the construction of an ideal e-persona: Instead of discussing their personal lives, bloggers often concentrate on introducing carefully considered styles and homes that give the impression that the bloggers lead a flawless, successful life, are interesting personalities and do not have the same problems that other people do. Perhaps this decision to hide the personal consequently leads to blogging happening on a superficial level and concentrating on material goods.

Whichever the reason, my observation is that this emphasis on consuming as an important part of a young woman's life and as playing a significant role in constructing one's identity is presented as a norm in the world of fashion and lifestyle blogging.

Similarly, others (for example, Chaney, 2002: 20-22) have investigated the phenomenon of people constructing their identity with the help of consumerism. Chaney (2002: 65-66) also notes that consuming has been seen as a predominantly feminine action. This may stem from the rise of post-industrialization mass consumption and consumer culture, which heavily concentrated consuming into the home, the traditional sphere of the housewife (Chaney, 2002: 20). In addition, Talbot (2010) has discussed the phenomenon of women constructing their femininity and seeking "female group membership" by consuming. The field of fashion blogging is clearly dominated by female bloggers, but there are also men who blog about fashion and hence cannot be excluded when we talk about consumption and identity construction. However, observations by previous research as well as my own preliminary observations point to the particular significance that fashion blogging seems to have for young women.

Building one's identity on the basis of consumption is generally seen as a norm and this appears to remain unquestioned among young female bloggers. Similar features often seem to characterize many blogs, which may have the effect that ideas and depictions of consuming become normative among blog readers and writers. In addition, as Senft (2013: 347), for example, explains, bloggers have become "micro-celebrities", individuals who brand themselves on channels of social media and become admirable for their online fans. Fashion bloggers who have acquired this position have influence over their readers and are effective contributors of norms and ideas. Ideas on consumption are often directly stated, but many of them may also be hidden behind a surface-level reading of a blog post. I suggest that the bloggers themselves may even be unaware of the kinds of values and norms that they spread by writing about consumption in a certain way. It is therefore very important to pay attention to the prominent discourses in fashion blogging, because only by recognizing them we make it possible to investigate them critically. For these reasons, in this thesis I aim to study the ways in which young female fashion and lifestyle bloggers depict consuming in their blogs.

My specific aims are to reveal what kinds of meanings, attitudes and values fashion bloggers attach to consuming, as well as to give light to the possible norms regulating it. In order to reach these aims I will critically analyze the content and discourses of seven fashion blogs of my selection and draw conclusions based on my findings. I will use the guidelines of Grounded Theory, as introduced by Strauss and Corbin (1998). This includes making categorizations on the frequently reoccurring ideas and discourses that I detect in blog posts and analyzing them. I will try to detect what these topics and discourses indicate about the meanings, values and attitudes that the bloggers attach to consuming. A more specific description of the data I am studying and the methods I am using can be found in chapter 3. I will start off by introducing the key concepts of my study and giving light to research previously conducted on the field.

## 2 BLOGS AND CONSUMER CULTURE

In this chapter I will provide the reader of this thesis with an understanding of my research interest and discuss what has been discovered about it in previous research, but will also explain why this study is relevant by adding to existing knowledge. I will first introduce the mechanics and significance of blogging, particularly fashion blogging, as a phenomenon in the social media. I will then move on to explain what kind of research has been conducted on consumption and consumer culture. My special focus here is on fashion consumption and women as consumers, those being in the center of my study.

### 2.1 Blogs as social media

The concept of social media has arisen fairly recently, but nevertheless this phenomenon is already something that seems to play a significant part in the daily life of many of us, particularly in the western world. Lietsala and Sirkkunen (2008:13) define social media as “a term that is used to describe web services that receive most of the content from their users or that aggregate the content from other sites and feeds”. Social media is built on social networks and everybody can produce content, although people usually see themselves as participants, not as producers. Lietsala and Sirkkunen (2008:13-19) also explain that a significant aspect of social media is the role of individuals which has changed from being a passive audience to that of interacting agents and active creators of media content. Marwick (2013: 7) similarly describes social media as something that enables wider “cultural participation, where creativity and control are disseminated throughout the population rather than concentrated in the hands of a few large corporations.”

The term social media, alongside with other terms with similar meaning, such as Web 2.0, became known around the year 2005. Before this, there were sites in existence that would these days be called “social media”, such as blogs, IRC and other discussion forums, but the term itself was not yet in use. Lietsala and Sirkkunen also list *Wikipedia*, *Facebook*, *Youtube* and *LinkedIn* as some of the most typical examples of social media. Marwick (2013:6-7) points out that the significance of social media has changed since its birth and “self-representation techniques like micro-celebrity, self-quantification and self-promotion” have become more important.

Blogs were one of the first forms of social media, having started their conquest in the late 1990s before the term social media had even been heard of (Kilpi, 2006: 11). Since then, blogging as a phenomenon has developed and become tremendously popular, which can be seen from the vast number of bloggers and blog readers of some of the most popular blogging platforms, as introduced earlier. Walker Rettberg (2008) notes that it is impossible to estimate the number of blogs there are today. One reason for this is that there is no single body that keeps an account of blogs, but instead they are scattered under different blogging platforms. Additionally, there are numerous inactive blogs and also a large number of spam blogs. However, around the period of 2003-2004 the number of blogs was doubling every few months and was estimated to be over 70 million in April 2007 (Walker Rettberg, 2008), and around 181 million at the end of 2011 ("Buzz in the Blogosphere" (2012)).

Kilpi (2006:11) elaborates on the birth of blogging as a genre, explaining how online diaries started to appear in the 1990s. According to him, however, the term "blog" was first coined a few years later when John Barger, an American forefather of blogging, searched for interesting online services and brought their links together on his own website called "Robot Wisdom". He also included a short commentary on each web service. Barger came up with the term weblog, which was a combination of the words "web" and "log". Later on, in 1999, Peter Merholz played with the term in his own website, adding a space to create the sentence "we blog", which resulted in the birth of the concept "blog" (Kilpi, 2006:11). Walker Rettberg (2008:25-27) explains that blogs have experienced an evolution from sites that mainly used to give brief introductions of links to other websites to the more personal and narrative blogs that we know today.

As Walker Rettberg (2008: 5) explains, there are many online services that host blogs for free, and, when starting a new blog, a blogger can choose any of them. There are some famous international blogging sites, such as *Blogger.com* and *Wordpress.com*, but smaller and local platforms have also emerged increasingly. Blogs consist of "posts"; separate, short pieces of blog content that are dated and appear in a linear order. A post has a headline and it can include text, visual images or video. Walker Rettberg (2008:19) also lists other typical aspects of a blog, such as timestamps, the blogroll and the "about" page where the blogger gives information about him/herself and the blog. As she further explains, it is typical of blogs that posts are organized in a linear order

and the most recent post appears on the top of the page. Previous posts are archived and can usually be viewed anytime later on.

Personal diaries have often been considered precursors of modern blogs (e.g. Kline, 2005: xiii) and blogs have thus been described as online diaries. Lietsala and Sirkkunen (2008: 31) explain that blogs usually have an identified voice of an individual writer, but point out that they may also be maintained by a group of writers. In addition, as Kilpi (2006:5) argues, one of the key characteristics of blogs is their interactivenss, whereas traditional diaries tend to be private and only meaningful for their writers. Kilpi (2006:17) introduces the term “blogosphere”, which refers to the social, interactive nature of the blogging world, describing it a community that all blogs form together: Most blogs are connected to others through links. By linking to other blogs bloggers show which blogs they are in favor of, which works as a way of creating identity and locating oneself in the blogosphere. In addition, blog readers can comment on each post in the blog and read each other’s comments. Bloggers often reply to inquiries made by their readers or take part in the conversation inspired by the posts. This way blogs do not just work alone and separate in the blogging world but are in contact with their readers and other bloggers.

Walker Rettberg (2008:9-20) explains that blogs can be divided into different genres or sub-genres, and introduces a system for the classification of blogs into three main categories: personal or diary-like blogs, filter blogs and topic-driven blogs. Walker Rettberg (2008:11) explains that the difference between a filter blog and a personal blog is that personal blogs concentrate on the life of the blogger, whereas filter blogs “record on the bloggers experiences and finds on the web.” Topic-driven blogs, in turn, are focused on a specific theme, which could be anything from cooking to museum vehicles. As Kilpi (2008:1) notes, blogs can also be upheld by corporate companies and some people even have it in their job description to blog for their company. Categorizing blogs according to their ownership to personal and organizational blogs is, thus, another option for a classification of blog types. In addition, new ways of blogging have arisen in recent years and created new possible genres. These include, for example, video blogs and microblogs, such as Twitter, which allow people to publish and exchange short updates (Passant et al. 2008:1-2). Walker Rettberg, however, points out that not all blogs can be categorized in any specific genre, and many blogs also cross

genre boundaries.

Granovetter (1973, as quoted by W. Rettberg 2008: 59-61) created the idea that weak ties between individuals are more important than strong ones for the spread of information and ideas. He argued that people who already know each other well share information and cannot be mutually useful in offering each other new information, whereas people who only share weak ties have different knowledge and are often more useful in this sense. This has the effect that weak ties link different social groups and mediate social norms between people more effectively than strong ties; these days people are often affected by media influences and find new information from wide networks, typically online, instead of forming closed, uniform subcultures with people closest to them.

Walker Rettberg (2008:60) explains how Granovetter's idea of the importance of weak ties is applicable to fashion blogging: Fashion bloggers show images of fashionable outfits, comment on them and share trends. Blogs usually link to other blogs, which makes the entire sphere of fashion blogs a huge network that passes on shared conventions of fashion blogging, information and trends. This, in turn, has at least two normative outcomes: it creates a certain unity between fashion blogs in their style and outlook. It also makes fashions global, not just local phenomena between close groups of friends. (Walker Rettberg, 2008: 59-61)

Blogs are a good representation of the way in which social media is these days changing the dynamics of media production and consumption, and this change has been a significant interest among scholars (such as Bruns, 2008). Writers of magazine or online articles, of course, can usually be traced, but this does not change the impersonal nature of most article writing. In blogs, however, bloggers write to each other, without usually hiding their identity. They have become active creators of media content and they also actively comment on each other's blogs and receive feedback on their own contributions. To describe this aspect of blogging, Bruns (2008:2) introduces the concept of *produsage*, linking the terms production and usage. He explains that content creation on the internet has become more fluid because of the lack of an "all-controlling, coordinating hierarchy", and, instead, content is created by large communities. By this he means the nature of numerous web communities in whose

creation and alteration everybody can participate. In his opinion, calling content creation by communities “production” is misleading because the term is attached to industrial production, which has a particular consumption-provoking outcome as a goal (Bruns, 2008:1-2).

## **2.2 Fashion blogging and identity construction**

As Bruns (2008:69-70) discusses, blogs are a good example of this user-based content creation, or produsage. In fashion blogging this is a very prominent phenomenon: As Härkönen (2011:78), for example, explains, fashion bloggers are becoming “real time fashion journalists”. Where before young women used to seek beauty advice in magazines, TV shows and other traditional media, they now often turn to bloggers. This shows how blogs have replaced, or at least work alongside with more traditional sources of fashion influence. This shift in dynamics has brought more power to girls to create their own media content and discuss issues they and their peers are most interested in. Rocamora (2012), for example, addresses the changes that fashion blogging has brought about in contrast to traditional fashion media. According to her, fashion blogs have brought more power over fashion to individuals that never had an institutional affiliation with fashion to start with, and many of the most popular fashion influences are young fashion bloggers, some in their teens or even younger (Rocamora, 2012: 99-100). She also claims that where before fashion used to change on a regular cycle of spring and autumn collections, it is now transient and becomes outdated much more rapidly because of the influence of fashion bloggers who often blog on a daily basis (Rocamora, 2012: 96-97).

Among the multitude of types of blogs in the blogosphere, the fashion blog has become a distinctive genre of its own. As Kuvaja and Taljavaara (2010: 16) suggest, it is not simple to define a fashion blog. They point out that many bloggers prefer to call their blogs style blogs. I personally wonder whether this may be due to fashion being seen as superficial and rapidly changing in contrast to style being something more lasting and serious. On the other hand, many blogs that deal with fashion also focus on other aspects of life, which can make labelling them fashion blogs seem too limiting. In these cases the term “lifestyle blog” is often used to describe blogging on many kinds of, often material elements that construct the blogger's identity and way of life (Kuvaja and

Taljavaara, 2010: 16, 36). Defining fashion blog is also difficult because of the great variation they have as far as their particular interests in the field of fashion and style are concerned. Rydström (2007: 8-9), for example, elaborates on the diversity of fashion bloggers: some concentrate on purchasing fashion items, others on making or modifying them themselves. Some bloggers take an interest in expensive luxury products, others in second-hand shopping, and yet others just show photographs of people with interesting styles, for example. Fashion bloggers may also report on and include pictures of runway shows by famous fashion designers and comment on celebrities' outfit choices or they may take pictures of themselves presenting their personal style.

An important function of fashion blogging for the blogger is the possibility for self-expression it creates. As Lietsala and Sirkkunen (2008: 32) point out, for many bloggers blogs are “bursts of individuals on the way to personal growth”, a way of reflecting oneself to others and constructing identity. Walker Rettberg (2008:120) similarly discusses the issue of self-exploration in blogs, claiming that blogging offers a way of creating a desired reflection of oneself, showing only the ideal and veiling some less hoped-for aspects. Aboujaoude (2011) similarly talks about how individuals use online communities to create identities. These portrayed images are often highly polished and show the individuals in an overly positive light.

Previous research conducted in the field of fashion blogging in relation to consumption has strongly concentrated on analyzing the marketing benefits that blogs as a new type of media can offer. The study of blogging in relation to consuming therefore mostly serves the purpose of economists and the business world. Halvorsen et al. (2013), for example, studied the ways in which bloggers can influence consumer behavior for marketing benefits and found that most fashion blog readers admitted to their consumer choice being directly influenced by something that they had seen in a blog. In addition, Griffith (2011) discussed how brands cooperate with popular fashion bloggers to advertise their products. Bloggers may simply portray themselves wearing the brand's products, and many famous bloggers have also designed and given their name to a product. Another example is a brand that used a blogger as a model in their editorial photoshoot. According to Griffith (2011), brands benefit from the personal, “low-pressure” approach to customers that working with fashion bloggers offers. These findings clearly reflect the leverage that fashion blogs and bloggers have on individuals'

consumer behavior. In recent years there has also been a great amount of this type of research, which clearly indicates the topicality of the field of research.

Discursive and sociocultural points of view, however, have not been as popular among scholars, but have recently gained some interest. Identity construction has been a particularly prominent theme when it comes to sociocultural research on fashion blogging. Chittenden (2009), for example, studied the ways in which teen female identity is constructed in fashion blogs. She concluded that the processes of writing, reading and commenting on blogs allow teenage girls to engage in complex expressions of identity. Fashion blogging offers a way to construct confidence and interact with “like-minded others” for those that have “poor social capital” in their offline environments. Titton (2015) similarly emphasizes fashion blogs as a media where bloggers brand themselves and enact a “fashionable persona”. There is very little research conducted on my specific interest, the sociocultural portrayal of consumption in fashion blogs. However, I will introduce some examples later on in section 2.4, where I focus on research on consumer culture in different media.

### **2.3 Consuming as lifestyle**

In order to reveal how consuming is portrayed in blogs we need to first define what is meant by consuming. The *Oxford dictionary of English* (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/>) describes it simply as buying, or alternatively uses the words “use up” and “destroy” in relation to resources and fire. These connotations do not show consuming in a particularly positive light. The *Oxford dictionary* definition also emphasizes the aspect of buying, which, of course, has become central in the modern market economy, but which many specialists do not see as the main focus of consuming. Dunn (2008:1-2), for example, states that consumption has often been seen as a range of human practices, such as “shopping, buying, acquiring, using, possessing, displaying, maintaining, collecting and wasting” but also emotional processes of “desiring, daydreaming and fantasizing”. Traditionally, the objects of consumption have been goods and services, but Dunn states that these days information and images are in the center of consumption. The spread of information technology has also changed the way in which commodities are designed to entertain and sell. Ilmonen (2007:15) also suggests that consumption is not only limited to the moment of consuming choices and

purchases, in the way it has often been viewed. Instead, actual consuming begins when the product has been purchased and is taken into use. According to Ilmonen (2007:294-295), we have to adopt products, or create *me-ness* with every purchase we make. Consumption is, thus, a multidimensional process that reaches far beyond the moment of purchasing a product, despite buying being in the center of the common use of the word. Dunn (2008:1-2) also explains that consumption can be viewed from different research perspectives: where economics used to dominate the field, more recently cultural disciplines such as anthropology, history and sociology have taken the lead in consumption research.

Lury (2011:11) elaborates on the difference between the study of consumption and consumer culture: the study of consumption is interested in consumption practices and consumer behavior, whereas the study of consumer culture is more concerned with the “significance and character of the values, norms and meanings produced by such practices” (Lury 2011:11). Social class, economic status and identity construction are some of the meanings often attached to and portrayed by consumption.

As Lury (2011:9) points out, although people have always been involved in consumption, it has fairly recently become a key component in the construction of identity. Mackay (1997:2) explains that the term “consumer” spread in the 20<sup>th</sup> century because of the rapid rise of mass consumption, advertising and marketing. Mackay (1997:2) elaborates on how the negative associations of consuming have these days been, if not replaced by, at least coexist with more positive ones. The pleasure that consuming brings about and the role of consumers as the running force of the economy and society are emphasized. Mackay (1997:2) sums up a common sociological view on consuming that emphasizes its identity constructive factors:” We become what we consume”.

As Ilmonen (2007:20-21) discusses, people started to become absorbed in consumer culture in the post industrialization era at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and consequently sociologists also started to take interest in it. Some sociologists regarded commercialism and consumption as a sign of the degradation of the society, whereas some saw it simply as one component in the rise of capitalism. (Ilmonen, 2007: 19-21). MacKay (1997: 4) introduces Thorstein Veblen as a forefather of modern research on consumption. Veblen

was interested in the consumption practices of the *nouveau riche* in the USA at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In his main work, *The Theory of Leisure Class* (1899), Veblen presents his view on how consuming was used to gain and maintain social status by displaying one's taste and financial ability to purchase goods without actual need or function for them. MacKay (1997:4) claims this to be the first account of *conspicuous consumption*, a term that was later allowed widespread attention.

According to Halkier, Katz-Gerro and Martens (2011:4), in the 1990s research in the field of consumption sociology concentrated heavily on analyzing the symbolic meanings of consumption, such as those that relate to its identity constructive functions. In addition, as Lury (2011:11) and others discuss, identity construction has been seen as a significant part of all consumption. As Halkier et al. (2011), however, explain, gradually more practical and mundane aspects started to be viewed as significant in addition to the symbolic value of consumption. The enjoyment that consumer goods brought to people and the practical uses of them were recognized as important facets of consumerism. However, many more recent scholars continue to emphasize the role of identity construction in consumption. Chaney (2002:77), for example, explains that people have started to treat material goods as “symbolic markers”, perceiving them more and more as connected to self-representation. Consumption as means of identity construction is, in fact, most relevant in relation to the present study, too, most importantly because of my focus on fashion and style, which have always been used to make a certain impression on others.

Lifestyle, in turn, is a term closely linked to consumption. Chaney (2002: 75-76), for example, discusses lifestyles as taste classified by social categorization. Lifestyle is a way of expressing taste through consumption, classified objects and practices, giving them culturally signified meanings. Solomon and Rabolt (2009: 293-294, cited in Hukkanen and Junttila, 2012: 12) similarly explain that lifestyle is a term used to describe an individual's models of behavior and way of spending time and money. Consumers choose products and services on the basis of the lifestyle that they are seeking to represent. Lifestyle is thus a way of constructing identity and determining what one wants to or does not want to be, carried out through consumption, most importantly.

Sociologists have traditionally addressed fashion as an important consuming practice. As Mehita (2012:3) explains, style and an aesthetic lifestyle used to be something that was exclusively attached to the upper classes. When mass consumption started to spread, the aesthetic and identity constructive factors of purchasing products spread across class boundaries and soon applied to all groups in the society, regardless of social status. Simultaneously with the rise of mass consumption also mass media and advertising business developed. These two fields developed as a result of each other's growth: advertising started to create images of lifestyle that people suddenly felt the need to pursue, which led to more purchasing of fashionable consumer goods. Reversely, the increasing production of goods also resulted in consumer images spreading in the media and the rise of advertising business. (Mehita, 2012:4)

According to Ilmonen (2007:21), the most important name in the sociology of consumption and one of the first scholars to address the increased role of fashion was George Simmel, who wrote his work "Philosophie der Mode", the philosophy of fashion, in 1905. He argued that consumption plays a significant role in the embodiment of urban city life and emphasized the central position of fashion that people have given it in the modern world (Ilmonen, 2007:21). Simmel (1986) was among the first to claim that it is typical of the upper class to try to separate itself from lower social classes by involving itself in conspicuous consumption, a point of view later adopted by many (e.g. Mehita, as discussed earlier). Upper classes purchase expensive luxury products in order to enhance their own status. The popularity of these products then gradually comes down from the top to the bottom, i.e. the middle and working classes adopt these consuming patterns set up by the upper class. The upper class therefore has to abandon these products and come up with new fashions in order to maintain their social status. This way fashion becomes something that some people command and others are still in the process of pursuing (Simmel, 1986: 38). When too many people have adopted a certain fashion, its divisional aspect disappears and the fashion gradually vanishes. One of the defining facets of fashion is that it needs to spread in order to become fashion. However, this spread also leads to its inevitable disappearance, which creates the greatest contradiction of fashion.

According to Simmel (1986: 31-37) fashions exist for two reasons: On the one hand, people feel the need for a sense of belonging and uniformity. On the other hand, people

also want to be individualistic and stand out from others. This need of people to both belong and to stand out means that a fashionable person keeps within the generally accepted framework: does not fall from it, but instead rises up from it. According to Simmel, fashions do not exist in the same sense among peoples that do not feel a strong need for renewing oneself and separating oneself from others. Reversely, Simmel reports that in Florence around 1930 men used to dress in a way that was entirely different from other men, without any desire for affinity, which consequently meant that no fashion arose. (Simmel, 1986: 31-37).

Simmel claims that following and participating in fashions is most typical of individuals that lack inner independence, but who also need to be afforded attention, and a special status in order to feed their self-esteem. These individuals also take trends to extremes and become what Simmel refers to as fashion clowns, seemingly leading the way but in reality being led. He argues that women tend to be particularly susceptible to fashion influences because they have historically had to adjust to what is appropriate and accepted more than men. In Simmel's view fashion has offered women a way of following generally accepted patterns while at the same time showing individuality. (Simmel, 1986: 45-52).

Many of the more contemporary scholars, such as Chaney (2002:78) replicate the ideas set out by Simmel of fashions separating those who recognize the prestigious object from those who do not. Like Simmel, they agree that trends end up becoming their own destruction after achieving a widespread popularity and consequently losing their differentiating power. In this sense, Simmel's ideas gave an impetus to the study of consumerism and are still relevant today despite the change of social structures since the theory first saw the daylight (Ilmonen, 2007:21). Chaney and other contemporaries, however, do not emphasize the importance of social class as the main force behind consuming, but instead acknowledge that status may these days often be shaped by other forms of cultural capital, and "otherwise socially marginalized or excluded groups may be able to usurp the role of symbolic innovators and sources of prestige" (Chaney, 2002: 77-79). Chaney points out that keeping track of trends is seen as particularly relevant in our late modern society because the cycle of fashion is so rapid and is constantly accelerating.

Chaney (2002: 66, 79-80) also suggests other more positive views on fashion. He argues that people are aware of the arbitrariness of fashion and the judgments made on the basis of it. Instead of disdaining this element of fashion, people can contrarily celebrate it, taking a stance on fashion that is playful and ironic. Chaney (2002:66) also acknowledges that consumer culture has resulted in appearance and representation often becoming very prominent in the lives of women, in particular. He admits that this may be seen as oppressive, as women are expected to keep up their appearance and commodified lifestyle, but argues that instead of being a constraint, consumer culture offers women a possibility for creativity and self-representation. By these assertions Chaney does not mean to deny the standardizing power of fashion, but, instead, sees it as fashion's core function alongside with individualization and as offering new ways of creating social identity. In addition, according to Chaney (2002:81), fashions have increasingly ceased to manifest themselves as patterns that come from authoritative institutions in the world's fashion capitals like Paris, and instead their "local meanings of a diversity of styles" have become more important. Chaney (2002:81-82) lists media sources as important channels for adopting fashion influences alongside local networks. Blogs, being a key format in the contemporary mediascape, play a particularly prominent role in this.

Davis (1992:10-16) takes a similar approach to the significance of fashion for the individual. He brings forward two opposing arguments: Fashion can be seen as entertainment, a way of relieving boredom. On the other hand, some people see it as a "self-perpetuating capitalist cultural conspiracy", a set of normative rules that come from the outside, with strong benefit-seeking marketing forces behind it. Davis argues that clothing works as a visual metaphor. It can communicate very subtle messages about the identity of a person. Davis agrees with Simmel in that fashion arises from certain instabilities in the social identities of people, but does not see this as an individual weakness like Simmel, but rather as a natural part of being human.

As Casey and Martens (2007: 1-3) argue, consumption has often been regarded as a typically feminine practice. Women have traditionally been responsible for housekeeping, which has often been seen as consumption, not as productive work. In addition, Casey and Martens (2007:2) explain that shopping has been viewed as a predominantly feminine activity of finding pleasure. McRobbie (2009:3) sheds light

onto how women and girls, in particular, have these days adopted a new way of building their femininity through consuming. She argues that popular culture, such as the TV-series *Sex and the City*, have brought about the idea of consumer culture empowering women to express their femininity. McRobbie explains that where a woman's life used to be a cycle of getting married, having children and not rising in the spotlight, these days women are encouraged to become visible, luminous individuals. Things that can be achieved by consuming include better self-esteem, quality of sexual relationships and a standard of living, in general (McRobbie, 2009: 124 -132). Similarly, Talbot (2010:8-9) introduces “consumer femininity”, by which she means the way in which especially adolescent girls “claim adult status” and “female group membership and solidarity” through consumption. Talbot points out that socially, femininity means attractiveness in male terms, which young women pursue by consuming fashion and make-up. Gill (2007:195) also criticizes a paradox, apparent in different channels of media: On one hand women are encouraged to duplicate a very traditional and limiting image of femininity. On the other hand, magazines, TV and the internet are full of female models that celebrate empowerment on those very same terms that can be seen to limit their expressions of femininity.

McRobbie (2009) claims that when capitalism has indeed made this new kind of empowerment and identity construction possible, women consequently do not feel any need to question the grasp that capitalism has on us or the ideologies behind it. McRobbie (2009) expresses serious concerns about the way in which popular culture imposes this shallow feminist liberation on us, while at the same time she sees that wallowing in material goods blinds us from the real problems concerning the implications of western capitalism and the position of women in the society. Even Chaney, who generally sees consumption as a possibility for empowerment, as discussed earlier, admits that fashion has from its part played to the surfacing of pressures directed at female bodies to control their appearance. This way fashion can be argued to form a constituent of normative expectations on femininity (Chaney, 2002: 79-83).

Skeggs (1997), who has focused on the formation of gender and class by studying working-class women and their perspectives on class, explains that the women in her study consistently reported on wanting to change themselves for the better and not to

appear working-class (Skeggs, 1997: 82). They saw that they would achieve this by investing in cultural capital; changing their bodies, clothes and their homes, most importantly. The women attempted to create distances and distinctions from the people that they did not want to be seen to identify with. Skeggs (1997: 85) also discusses the conception of how outward appearance is seen to represent inner character. Finkelstein (2007:195) similarly claims that a person's appearance and material possessions have become to signify characteristics of the persona. She also explains how we allow value for material objects as signifiers of our sentiments: a ring symbolizes love, and a business suit wealth and power, for example. In addition, she claims that fashion is a process that makes our everyday life a more complex aesthetic experience. It makes us observe ourselves through the eyes of others and become more self-conscious. We thus become aware of how important other people are in defining our identity.

#### **2.4 Portrayal of consumption in the media**

Research has previously been conducted on how various media genres spread consumerist ideas and values. There are particularly many who discuss consumerist ideas in women's magazines. McRobbie (2009:99) explains that the high fashion image of women, women's glossy magazines and their portrayal of women as consumers were widely discussed particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. Magazines have played an important role in the process of commercialization because they have existed and developed hand in hand with it. This is why there are more research on and knowledge of commercialist values in magazines and other forms of traditional media available.

Mehita (2012), for example, discussed how magazine covers convey consumer culture, claiming magazines to be a prototypical example of consumer media (2012:5). She concentrates more on the visuals of the magazine cover, but brings forward some relevant arguments on how consumerism is portrayed in magazines. Her main concern seems to be on how consumerism is sold as a normative value through media practices (Mehita, 2002:161.) She points out that magazine readers have an assumed status as consumers, and readers are approached by addressing them as distinctive, consuming individuals (Mehita, 2012: 8-9). Consumption is regarded to be an expression of the self, a celebration of a person's individuality. Mehita (2012:161) also explains that "the presence of objects and images of objects" is presented as something that makes social

life more meaningful and fulfilling. Magazines also use superlative language to portray consumer goods as the culmination of positive feelings and experiences, this way conveying it as an essential part of the life of any young woman. Mehita (2012:107) also gives light to the way in which magazine covers juxtapose “desirable commodities with desirable personalities and bodies”. Magazines thus indicate that in order to be desirable a woman has to possess the articles that the magazine is displaying.

Talbot has also taken an interest in how magazines portray femininity as something that is constructed by consuming. Talbot (2010) focused on an article on lipsticks in *Jackie*, a magazine directed at teenage girls. She found that Jackie offered its readers a membership in a community of adult women, for which the only criterion was consuming a particular product; a lipstick. She notes that *Jackie* presents consuming as an important part of being feminine, and the kind of women that its teenage readers would grow up to be is presented to depend on the kind of look that they would “opt for” (Talbot, 2010:162). The article includes instructions on how to apply lipstick, and Talbot points out that it seems to encourage young women to experiment on consuming “extravagantly” and playing with different roles that consumer culture offers. In addition, lipstick consumption was strongly portrayed to symbol sexual attractiveness in male terms, which Talbot strongly criticizes. (Talbot, 2010: 138-163)

Some individuals have also shown an interest in sociological aspects of consuming in fashion blogs. Härkönen (2011), for example, concentrated on consumption and professionalization in Finnish lifestyle blogs. She found that consumers were portrayed as searching for their identity and trying to stand out from others, but they also felt affinity with others through it (Härkönen, 2011:25-35, 55-60). The bloggers of her study also consumed in a way that emphasized their femininity (Härkönen, 2011:55-57). Although the consumer has traditionally been regarded as passive, Härkönen (2011) found that in fashion blogs consumers appear as active agents and producers. Consumers also lust after and dream of consumer goods and find pleasure in consuming (2011:81). However, the bloggers in Härkönen's (2011:81) study also consumed in a considered, “ecological-ethical” way, portraying themselves as rational consumers.

I expect my findings to go hand in hand with many of those that Mehita (2012), Talbot (2010) and others have drawn in their research on magazines, as well as to make similar

notions to those detected by Härkönen (2011) in her study of fashion blogs. Talbot's main interest, however, was on femininity and the way in which it was presented as constructed by consumption, whereas I intend to address consumption as my focal point. Addressing young women as my specific reference group is based on the findings of Talbot (2010) and McRobbie (2009), for example, as well as my own impressions of the portrayal of femininity as constructed by consuming. In addition, one of Talbot's and Mehita's interests was the relationship and pressure from mass media to the consumers of magazines. In contrast to their findings, I will thus expect the genre of blogging with its often anonymous and more interactive relationship of bloggers to their readers to have an effect on the findings of this study.

### **3 RESEARCH DESIGN**

In this chapter I will shed light onto my aims and the way in which I intend to reach these aims. I will first present and justify the specific research questions that I plan to answer. I will then introduce my choice of data for analysis: how and why it was chosen and what it includes. Finally, I will explain the analytic methodology that I used for the purpose of drawing answers to my research questions from the data.

#### **3.1. Aims and research questions**

My aim in this study is to investigate how young female fashion bloggers regard and portray consumption in their blogs. As discussed, I intend to uncover possible dominant discourses that may often be used to portray consumption as a normative interest and a major part in constructing the self-image for young women. In order to reach this goal I set myself two research questions, which are as follows:

1. What kinds of meanings, values and attitudes do young female fashion bloggers attach to consumption in their blogs?
2. In which ways do they mediate possible norms regulating consumer culture?

With these two questions I intend to clarify my aim to investigate the contents and specific discourses that appear in fashion blogs written by young female bloggers and to analyze what they uncover about the bloggers' ideas and values towards consumption. I address the directly stated ideas and values, but also focus on what is implicitly indicated about the attitudes that the bloggers' may have and the norms that they may attach to consumption.

#### **3.2. Collection and selection of data**

In order to collect a comprehensive sample of consuming discourse in blogs, I chose seven fashion blogs for detailed investigation. I opted for blogs that were written in English, but I did not define which nationality the bloggers should be. However, I sought for blogs and bloggers that would represent “western” culture and way of thinking, and decided to include bloggers from North America, the UK, Ireland, Australia or Europe. My focus being young women as bloggers, I also defined women

in their late teens and twenties as my reference group. On judging this, I trusted their own description when provided, or my personal estimate, which was based on the bloggers' photographs of themselves and their described life situation. Another important criterion for my choice of blogs was how much they concentrated on consuming. I wanted to find blogs that dealt primarily with consuming and were typical of the genre of fashion and lifestyle blogs based on Kuvaja and Taljavaara's (2010) and Rydström's (2007) descriptions of fashion blogs. I was also interested in finding some variation in the bloggers' attitudes towards consuming. That is why I chose some blogs that did not focus as strongly on consuming, but their portrayal of consumption was more implicit or in some cases critical to some extent. This gave me the chance to analyze and contrast "consumer-positive" and critical blogs. In other words, I wanted to collect a diverse selection of fashion blogs for my data.

The last criterion in my choice of blogs was that they were active at the time that my final data was collected, at the end of January 2014. I made sure that the latest post in each blog was no more than a couple of weeks old at the time and that the blogger had posted fairly regularly during the last couple of months. This was to make sure that I would get up-to-date accounts of their attitudes towards consumption from each blogger, and also to ensure that the topics that the bloggers would write about would be somewhat similar; fashion and consumption often cycle according to season. Choosing active blogs meant that the bloggers' posts were more easily comparable, as looking back from the end of January, most of them discussed consuming around Christmas and New Year, for example.

In order to find blogs that were suitable for my data, I used the Google search engine to find popular fashion and lifestyle blogs. Finding fashion blogs that met my criteria and represented different spectrums of consumption turned out to be surprisingly demanding. This is why I did several searches, each time using a different combination of the following search terms: "popular/best/favorite" and "fashion blogs/lifestyle blogs". Many bloggers also link to other blogs, and I used these links to surf around the fashion blogosphere to find suitable fashion blogs. When coming across a promising blog I then did a preliminary examination of the blog in order to find out whether it was suitable for my research, i.e. whether it met the above-explained requirements. Some of the blogs of my data I had come across earlier on and chose them because I knew that

they met the criteria that I had set for the blogs.

Altogether I examined dozens of blogs, and from them I selected a combination of blogs that I estimated would represent a variety of attitudes, ideas, sub-cultures and age-groups within my framework. In order to find out how young women portray consumption and how these ideas are spread in blogs I wanted to keep my focus on bloggers that had somewhat mainstream attitudes to consumption, despite at the same time valuing the blogs' variation within this spectrum. I gathered an understanding of the blogs' similarities and differences during my preliminary examination of the blogs and based on this I selected the blogs for my study to represent a range of relatively mainstream attitudes towards consumption. I will now give a brief summary of the spectrum of attitudes that my selection of bloggers represent. I have numbered the blogs and bloggers from 1 to 7 and refer to the blogger and her blog by the same number in my analysis. This is reasonable because each one of the blogs in my analysis only has one author.

Bloggers (1), (2), and (3) represent a free attitude towards consumption; they spend a lot of money and take open pleasure in consuming. Blog (3) seems professionalized to the highest extent. Blogger (3), for example, includes many photos of herself wearing different outfits, mentioning the brand names or the stores she purchased or received the garments from, which may indicate collaboration with companies. She is also active on other channels of social media and has the highest number of followers, 48, 000 in January 2015 (<https://www.bloglovin.com/>). Blogger (1) is also very popular but her blog has a more personal feel to it, which concretely manifests in Blogger (1)'s detailed description of her everyday life and some reflection on her thoughts and feelings towards consumption and other aspects of life, as well. Blogger (2) similarly gives away more of her thoughts and personality, but has much fewer followers than Blogger (1). Bloggers (4), (5), (6) and (7) similarly consume rather freely and make new purchases often, but seem to attach consumption more strongly to constructing a non-mainstream identity, which can be interpreted from their efforts to stand out from the norm with their consumer choices, for example. Especially Bloggers (3), (6) and (7) seem to be more considered when making consumer choices, which shows in the way in which they seem to invest in quality more often than other bloggers. Blogger (6) and to some extent Blogger (2) and others also show more critical ideas towards consumption. Many

blogs concentrate on clothing fashion and make-up products, whereas some blogs, such as (1) and (6) incline more towards the genre of “lifestyle” blogs by discussing other (often material) aspects of life, as well.

Table (1) shows a summary of the variety of the bloggers by including some of the above-mentioned aspects. I also listed the bloggers’ approximate age if they had revealed it in the description of themselves, and, if they had not, made a rough estimate based both on their photographs and on the situations that they reported on being in their life. I also reveal their nationality and place of residence in the cases where the bloggers gave information on them in the blog. In addition, I include a short description of the blogger, describing her special interests and other characteristics. After my preliminary research I noticed that the bloggers’ interests and some characteristics seem to be in connection to some of their consuming patterns and attitudes. Providing this minimal information, then, creates a starting point that may be of importance when analyzing the bloggers’ portrayal of consuming.

Table (1)

<b>alias</b>	<b>approx. age</b>	<b>nationality/ place of residence</b>	<b>special interests/ topics</b>	<b>additional information</b>
Blogger 1	in her twenties	a small town in the United Kingdom	clothing, travelling, health and fitness goals, redecorating the house	expresses conflicting attitudes to consumption
Blogger 2	late teens	a small town in the United Kingdom	chain store fashion and cosmetics reviews	buys new fashion items often and expresses occasional guilt
Blogger 3	in her twenties	the United States	clothing fashion	active in other channels of social media. Blog seems professionalized.
Blogger 4	in her twenties	London, the United Kingdom	clothing fashion, travelling	seeks to perform a non-mainstream identity
Blogger 5	in her twenties	Vancouver, Canada	fashion and personal style, self-esteem issues and empowerment through style	seeks to perform a somewhat non-mainstream identity.
Blogger 6	in her twenties	Finland, currently residing in Barcelona, Spain	conscious consumption and ethical fashion	seeks to perform a non-mainstream identity, expresses critical ideas towards consuming
Blogger 7	late teens	Los Angeles, the United States	clothing fashion	seeks to perform a somewhat non-mainstream identity.

After choosing the blogs of my focus, I started my preliminary analysis by investigating blog posts backwards in time one blog and one post at a time and making notes on topics and discourses that I detected and that would reveal something about the bloggers' attitudes towards consumption. I followed the guidelines of grounded theory,

as introduced by Strauss and Corbin (1998). While doing this I noticed that the topics and discourses that I detected often started to reoccur in many of the blog posts and after a certain point fewer and fewer new patterns would present themselves. This is what Strauss and Corbin (1998:143), for example, explain as saturation. As no more new patterns emerged, I got an idea of how many blog posts from each blog I would approximately need in order to get representative results of the ideas, values and attitudes of the blogger in question. Consequently, from each blog I decided to concentrate on 18 posts that gave me sufficient knowledge of the bloggers' attitudes towards consuming for the purposes of this study. I started from the end of January 2014, and from there moved backwards in time, investigating blog posts in each blog, choosing the ones that gave me some insight into my research questions and leaving out the posts that did not deal with consuming or only contained pictures. Added together this means that my data consists of 126 blog posts in total. The analysis of the data contains examples from the blogs to illustrate the findings that I made. I have left the quotations in their original form with all their spelling and language errors.

In this thesis I am applying the ethical guidelines of the Association of Internet Research (2012). They introduce a number of questions to be considered when doing internet research. From the perspective of my study, the question that requires paying attention is the privacy of the bloggers. As the Association guidelines (2012:9) suggest, I need to consider "to what extent the data might be considered by participants to be personal and private, or public and freely available for analysis and republication". I conclude that after a blog text has been published for everybody to see and read, it is indeed public and free for research use. The guidelines also advice the researcher to take into consideration the ethical expectations of the community and authors (2012:9). I expect any internet user to agree that what he or she intentionally publishes for others to read, may indeed be freely cited. In addition, the guidelines suggest that if the method of analysis requires direct quoting, the ethical consequences of this should also be considered (2012:10). Certainly, by doing a web search with the quotations found in my thesis, anyone could find the blogs and the identities of the bloggers could possibly be revealed. However, the point of view from which I am investigating the blogs is not particularly sensitive and no real harm is likely to be caused to the subjects of this theses. For these reasons I also did not find it necessary to ask for the subjects' consent.

### **3.3 Methods of analysis**

Since my research questions demand complex textual analysis, I decided to concentrate on qualitative analysis: examining my data empirically and making justified arguments based on it (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2009:22). Making sense of the meaning of texts and social interaction, as Fairclough (2003:10-11) explains, is open to diverse interpretations, for which qualitative research methods offer the most fruitful field. Including some quantitative elements, such as elaborating on the frequencies of specific tendencies would have been an option that could have given the reader of this theses a better understanding of how common these phenomena were. However, I was more interested in analyzing the detected phenomena than their exact frequencies, for which reason I decided to concentrate on qualitative analysis.

As explained, I started by making notes on frequently occurring themes and discourses attached to consumption. I also did some preliminary analysis of these discourses and tried to detect what they implicitly suggested about the bloggers' attitudes towards consumption. For the purposes of my analysis I used the procedures of grounded theory, as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998), as my guideline. As they explain, to analyze text, to “uncover, name and develop concepts”, we need to “expose the thoughts, ideas and meanings contained therein” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998:102). This is a process that Strauss and Corbin call open coding. In open coding the data is divided into units and closely examined for similarities and differences. The units are then divided into categories based on conceptual similarities or related meanings. As Strauss and Corbin (1998:113-114) suggest, the next step is to group these concepts into categories, “important analytic ideas” that emerge from the data. In my analysis I applied these instructions by first listing fragments of text that I interpreted to reveal something about the bloggers' ideas and attitudes towards consumption and tried to identify concepts, to label the phenomena that they were representing. I used memoing, a process in which I listed ideas about concepts and their relationships to make sense of the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 110-113). I then coded my data by dividing it into categories based on the detected ideas and values, attitudes and norms. As Strauss and Corbin (1998:117) explain, the properties that define each category need to be clarified, so I outlined a definition for each category and subcategory.

The next step is called axial coding, “the act of relating categories to subcategories along the lines of their properties and dimensions” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998:124). However, the processes of open coding and axial coding are not necessarily distinct and separate steps. This was the case in my study. I started grouping the categories and subcategories as soon as I had gathered enough concepts, and adapted them along the way of my analysis. My main categories ended up representing some large-scale attitudes towards consumption that I detected, and the subcategories are more detailed tendencies that show how these attitudes are apparent in the posts published by the bloggers. As the last stage of the coding process Strauss and Corbin (1998: 143-161) introduce selective coding, where the categories are refined. Part of this is deciding on a central category, a category that highlights what the research “is all about” and other categories should relate to it (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 146-147). The first notion that I made when analyzing my data was the extent to which consumption is regarded as an identity constructor. I address this issue in the first section of my analysis, but it could just as well work as an umbrella term for the entire study, for which reason it is also my central category.

In this study I only concentrate on written textual discourse and leave out the analysis of other material, such as images and video. A more detailed analysis of multimodal elements could have given me some more insight into my research interest, but the scope of my study would have been extended too far, and the information I have gathered by concentrating on written text alone is already convincing. Despite leaving out images from my actual analysis, I do admit that seeing some of the pictures attached to the blog posts has in some cases affected my understanding of the bloggers' consumption habits. Images in the blogs usually portray the bloggers wearing clothes and styles that they elaborate on in the blog text, so in this sense the images do give me contextualization cues for the written entities of the bloggers' style and give insight into analyzing their views on consumption.

## 4 ANALYSIS OF THE BLOGS

In this chapter I will present the results of my analysis. I divided the results into three different categories, each of which was further divided into smaller subcategories. The first category, “Consuming as defining *the feminine me*” is the central category of this thesis, since the results presented under it also work as a basis for the rest of the findings in the latter two sections. The three main categories are named as follows:

1. Consuming as defining *the feminine me*
2. Consuming as a positive experience
3. Negative ideas towards consumption

I start by introducing the central category of consumption as an identity constructor. An important dimension in identity construction for the bloggers was creating a particular feminine identity, for which reason I named the first section of analysis “Consuming as defining *the feminine me*”. This chapter introduces findings that are most apparently linked to identity at large and feminine identity, in particular. However, as stated, I found that identity construction was behind most of the bloggers' ideas on consumption. In section 4.2 I concentrate on “consuming as a positive experience”, i.e., other things apart from identity construction that make the experience of consuming important and enjoyable for the bloggers. In section 4.3 I, on the other hand, deal with negative ideas and attitudes expressed towards consumption.

### 4.1 Consuming as defining the feminine me

One of the main findings in this study is the extent to which the bloggers create their identity through consumption: identity construction seems to be the main reason behind their wish to acquire consumer products and to make choices on consuming. Partly, this observation arises from the fact that the focus of consumption in the blogs selected for my data is on clothing fashion, which directly shapes the impression that one's physical presence conveys to others. However, other types of consumer goods that the bloggers reported on purchasing or using tended to have a similar function. Almost none of the items that the bloggers reported on purchasing or using were anything that they would have any actual use or necessity for, which I interpret as a signal for their sole significance as constructs of identity. In this sense my findings are in line with the ideas

of others, such as Davis (1992) and Chaney (2002:65), who emphasize the meaning of consumption as an identity constructor. Simmel (1986), from his part, criticized this artificialness of fashion consumption and saw the construction of identity through fashion as a sign of weakness.

In what follows, I will analyze this main category of consuming as defining the bloggers' identity, and feminine identity in particular. I divided the analysis into subcategories:

- 4.1.1 Traditional versus empowered femininity
- 4.1.2 Fun and creative consumption
- 4.1.3 Expressing a unique personality
- 4.1.4 Uniqueness versus uniformity
- 4.1.5 Branding oneself as an expert of fashion and style
- 4.1.6 Creating (false) impressions
- 4.1.7 Attitudes to money as a means for constructing identity
- 4.1.8 In conclusion

In the first section I will introduce how all the bloggers were seeking to perform a feminine identity, but mixed elements of traditional and strong, empowered femininity. I will then move on to presenting how consumption was portrayed to be a way of fulfilling oneself and being creative, after which I will discuss how the bloggers constructed their unique personalities, while at the same time consumed in a way that expressed membership to particular social groups. I will also address several bloggers' habit of branding themselves and striving for a celebrity or expert status, and discuss how the bloggers seek to portray an identity of themselves which may be partly artificially constructed. Finally, I will concentrate on the different identities that the bloggers expressed by their conveyed attitudes to money, before concluding the findings discussed in this section of analysis.

#### **4.1.1 Traditional versus empowered femininity**

As will be clarified in the following chapters with the help of examples of the bloggers' accounts of consumption, in the background of all identity construction for the bloggers was constructing a particular femininity. As Chaney (2002: 65-66), for example, argues, women have been regarded as forerunners in identification through material

consumption, which, in turn, has its origins in the traditional role of women as housekeepers; Women were responsible for “generating meals or clean household furnishings”, but also made sure that household facilities were “appropriate for the perceived character and identity of the household - -“(Chaney, 2002:65). The bloggers, however, do not indicate it explicitly that they regard their habit of consumption as distinctly feminine activity. This, of course, does not mean that they are not creating their femininity by consuming, just that it is not something that the bloggers would usually specifically write about. However, Blogger (1) is an exception:

(1)

Long time readers will know that I have a rather annoying habit that presents itself every time I go away on holiday. The habit is that I get a renewed sense of enthusiasm for doing things in the house. As you can imagine, Tom loves being away on holiday and discussing DIY and home improvements. I kid you not, one night at dinner in Slovakia Tom had his iPad connected to the hotel WiFi as we looked up the prices of shower rails.

Blogger (1) Jan 27, 2014

In excerpt (1) Blogger (1) describes her enthusiasm for home improvements, which she calls “a rather annoying habit” that her fiancé, against all odds, likes discussing with her. “Discussing DIY and home improvements” is not something that men are traditionally expected to enjoy, which Blogger (1) expresses by indicating that her readers might be surprised that her fiancé is taking part in it (“I kid you not”). Blogger (1), at the same time, portrays discussing consuming on the home as women’s silly little custom.

The bloggers display different kinds of feminine identities depending on the person and the situation. On the one hand, some orient to rather traditional femininity. In their case, femininity is presented as the opposite of masculinity and traditionally female characteristics are mostly emphasized through consumer choices and consumer talk. For example, most of the bloggers very openly enjoyed investing in their looks and consuming in clothes and make-up products, something often regarded as feminine, in contrast to masculine. Many, such as Lakoff (2004) have investigated and found differences between men and women's ways of using language. The bloggers have a strong tendency to use language in a way that is deemed typically feminine when they

discuss their consuming habits, which indicates that they, perhaps subconsciously, seek to portray femininity. In extract (2), for example, Blogger (2) demonstrates a clearly feminine identity:

(2)

First up is Mac's In For A Treat powder, this is the cutest highlighter ever! I absolutely love how it looks on my skin, and you can't beat a good ol' Mac product can you? I've also been loving M&S' Coconut Body Butter. I've only discovered this recently, but it's amazing. It leaves my skin really soft and smooth

Blogger (2) Jan 22, 2014

Blogger (2)'s expression of admiration with the use of adjectives "cutest", "amazing", as well as describing her skin "really soft and smooth" are examples of typically feminine ways to use language. Lakoff (2004), for example, explains that women and men tend to use adjectives in different ways. In addition, Blogger (2) uses a tag question "you can't beat a good ol' Mac product can you?", which, as Lakoff (2004:47-49) discusses, is another typical way for women to seek rapport in their language use. Blogger (2), as well as the other bloggers, are, then, constructing a feminine identity with their choice of vocabulary and other language use, whether it be conscious or not.

On the other hand, other bloggers often sought to perform a new, strong and empowered femininity, which included being feminine in a traditional way, but which took it to a new, emancipated level. Characteristics that have traditionally been regarded masculine, such as boldness, initiative and knowing oneself, were part of this strong, modern femininity.

(3)

Are you a dress girl? No me neither! Party season brings out the sartorial fraud in me because I wear a dress as if I'm meant to, when in any other situation, I'm barely ever found in one. My best friend lives in dresses but I always think, why would you waste the opportunity to style up several different separates together and try something new? Because once you've worn a dress, that's it, you've seen it.

Blogger (4) Dec 17, 2013

In excerpt (3) Blogger (4) portrays a typically feminine element, a dress, but rejects being “a dress girl” and instead wants to “try something new”. She feels that she has the power to be adventurous and different; to define her own persona and what best reflects it. Blogger (4) states that when she wears a dress, she does it as if she is “meant to”, indicating that if she decides to take on this traditional element, she is going to do it properly, with attitude. Excerpt (3) is, thus, a good example of a reflection of determined femininity.

In this sense Blogger (1)’s portrayal of traditional femininity in example (1) makes an exception by portraying exclusively traditional elements of femininity. In all the other cases, the way in which the bloggers create their femininity through consuming is also something that was not stated directly, but rather something that could be interpreted by looking into the bloggers' topic choices and discourse styles, as introduced above.

These findings are in line with Härkönen (2011), who made similar observations to my own in her study of fashion blogs. The fashion bloggers in her study constructed a strong feminine identity and emphasized that their role as consumers was active rather than passive.

#### **4.1.2 Fun and creative consumption**

All of the bloggers mostly described making consumer choices as something fun, creative and empowering, and these positive experiences were emphasized to a great extent. This notion is in close connection to section 4.2, where I introduce how consuming is portrayed as a positive experience. However, it is also important in this context, since I found that the joy that the bloggers felt through consuming particularly had to do with self-representation and empowerment. All the bloggers seemed to regard purchasing products and combining outfits from individual pieces of clothing and accessories as a creative and fun action; it seemed like a beloved hobby for the bloggers, something that played a part in defining their personality. An excerpt from Blogger (1) reflects this view:

(4)

I think if I had to pick an era to grow up in it would have been the 50s. I'd love to have

sported beehive haircuts, gone to roller discos and worn horn-rimmed glasses and bomber jackets. I think I'd have liked to have been a greaser girl like Rizzo, with tattoos, big sunglasses, pencil skirts, bandannas and victory rolls. I did once master a beehive for a vintage party, it took flippin' ages, though it was fun - this is from back in March 2012!

Blogger (1) Jan 3, 2014

In this excerpt Blogger (1) links the atmosphere of the 1950s to particular consumer goods, such as sunglasses, clothes and other fashion items. She describes using her creative eye and having “fun” in recreating the 50s look for a party. She also portrays being a fan of the 50s look as something that characterizes her; if she could have made the choice, she would have grown up in the fifties. Blogger (1), then, reflects the typical conception of the bloggers of consumption as fun and as offering possibilities for creativity and self-representation.

Blogger (3) similarly shows how she enjoys the creative practice of combining outfits from different garments, illustrating the same view towards fashion consumption:

(5)

Fashion is all about fun and experimenting and I thank you for being opened to my style choices. It motivates me to continue to take risks which is what makes fashion fun for me and I hope for you too.

Blogger (3) Jan 8, 2014

Blogger (3) seems to view fashion and style as a type of art. In excerpt (5) this shows in the way in which she regards fashion as “experimenting” and “fun”, a way to fulfill her creativity. In addition, she indicates that people may find her style choices too daring, in contrast to her readers, who she thanks for “being opened” to her style choices. Blogger (3) even states to have constantly taken risks in her style. This way she clearly portrays a bold, strong image of herself. The following excerpt from Blogger (5), similarly portrays putting together outfits as a creative action:

(6)

I look to pants pros Lady Morairty and Bianca for outfit inspiration; it surprised me how hard it is for me to figure out what to wear with them. A blazer and a

collared shirt with some loafers seemed like a dapper place to start!

Blogger (5), Dec 6, 2013

In this example Blogger (5) is looking for “outfit inspiration”, a word choice with which she juxtaposes fashion with art, the more common association with inspiration. She also describes trying to find inspiration, “to figure out” how to combine her outfit for a suitable ensemble.

The bloggers' understanding of fashion consumption as a way of fulfilling oneself and one's creative tendencies is a part of the experienced empowerment that McRobbie (2009) and others discuss. The attitude of the bloggers themselves towards consumption, however, is similar to the ideas of Chaney (2002:66), who did not see the arbitrariness of modern consumption as alienating as McRobbie (2009) and Simmel (1986), but rather as a source of playfulness and creativity. Mehita (2012) found that magazine readers paralleled consumer goods with positive and more meaningful experiences, and the bloggers of my study are an embodiment of this finding with their depiction of consumption as fun and creative. However, Mehita (2012) expressed her worry about the spread of this image, whereas the bloggers almost exclusively regarded consumption positively.

#### **4.1.3 Expressing a unique personality**

In the present data the bloggers give the impression that they know themselves well and they mostly identify with a specific subculture, which they express by their consumer choices and consumer behavior. My judgment on this is partly based on the photographs that the bloggers provide of themselves and the products that they own or are dreaming of. Bloggers (1), (2) and (3) show a clearly mainstream image of themselves. They, for example, show less concern to be unique and different from other people than bloggers (4), (5), (6) and (7), who show some non-mainstream tendencies to various degrees in their choice of style, appearance and consumer behavior.

The bloggers, however, have a very uniform way of portraying consumption, independent of their choice of clothing and style. Despite representing a variety of subcultures, Blogger (6) is the only one in the sample that knowingly builds a non-

mainstream identity by reporting on non-mainstream consumer behavior, in this case by paying conscious attention to ethical issues in most of her consumer choices. She displays her ideology in the following excerpt, where she discusses alternatives to curing “sick and unethical businesses”. The contents of her message together with her severe word choices portray her attitude:

(7)

Some see legislation as the only solution to change the sick and unethical businesses, while others highly believe in the power of us, consumers.(specialists in a critical fashion meeting)

Blogger (6) Nov 8, 2013

Other bloggers, such as bloggers (5) and (7), whom could be called more alternative portray this identity simply with the outlook of the products they have bought and their fashion and style choices, without any particular thrive to separate themselves from consumer culture and conspicuous consumption. They, for example, express hardly any serious intention or pressure to limit buying new clothes or other products. Despite Blogger (6)'s way of constructing a non-mainstream identity by consuming consciously, she still has a very similar way of giving meanings to products and consuming to the other bloggers.

(8)

I have wanted to get a zodiac sign necklace for so long and found one from Urban Outfitters sales!

Blogger (6), Nov 3, 2013

(9)

The world map print is very trendy at the moment and I just recently spotted a whole garment collection with the print (can't remember which brand). I almost bought this Urban Outfitters thermos bottle cause I really could start making coffee for uni rather than buying one every single day. The lunch box is really cute as well! Anyhow, I think this print works on garments insanely good! Would love to own a jacket with this print.

Blogger (6), Nov 2, 2013

Like every blogger in my study, Blogger (6), for example, attached feelings of love, admiration and excitement to consumer goods, as in excerpt (9), where word choices, such as “really cute” and “insanely good” reveal her admiration. In addition, she states that she “would love to own a jacket with this print”, which indicates that she has a habit of dreaming of products that she admires, exactly like the other bloggers in my study. In excerpt (8) she states having “wanted to get a zodiac sign necklace for so long”, and expresses her satisfaction for having finally found one, portraying a common tendency for the bloggers to search for products that they are dreaming of and feeling satisfied at the purchase. These findings I will discuss in more detail in the following chapters of this thesis.

In the present data, a typical way of expressing individuality and knowing oneself and one's preferences well included presenting oneself as an active agent, who is in control of one's own life and consumer choices. The market forces were not regarded as having any part in this. Instead, the bloggers could fulfill themselves and independently choose what and how to consume. Such an orientation is illustrated by Blogger (6)'s account of actively seeking for inspiration in her own way:

(10)

I just came to tell you that shopping sustainable clothing just got a hell of a lot easier. **Thanks to Future Threads Project**, a non-profit organization that lists all the coolest and fashionable sustainable clothing brands out there. Fantastic! Now you have no excuse for going to fast fashion stores!

I've been following them on **Instagram** and it's the quickest way to discover new interesting fashion brands!

Blogger (6) Nov 29, 2013

Blogger (6) shows how she is actively looking for inspiration elsewhere, not only taking popular fashion brands' conception of what is stylish and fashionable. She mentions Instagram, a social network channel, as an important way of finding consumer inspiration. Even bloggers who often report on shopping at popular brand stores or do not care for ethical issues the way that Blogger (6) does, express awareness of their own style and determinedly seek for products to fit their style:

(11)

I had a lot of difficult finding the right bedding, which meant I didn't have my room fully assembled until the second week of college (and it's still under construction). I'll probably switch it up in the new year but for now I'm really happy with this printed quilt and set of shams.

Blogger (7) Sep 26, 2013

In excerpt (11) Blogger (7) demonstrates how she had been trying to find “the right bedding”, one that she would be “happy with”. By this she means that the bedding should be “right” for her, to fit her personal style, or possibly also match the style of her room, and she is willing to put effort into searching for a product that fits her requirements.

As in excerpts (10) and (11), the bloggers seem to be very aware of what their personality is like and how to best express it with the kinds of products they would buy and style themselves with. The bloggers would not acquire every item that they found stylish and they could afford, but instead, they report on searching for products that are in line with their personality and fit their personal style.

Excerpt (12) offers another good demonstration of the bloggers' view of their style going hand in hand with their persona. Here Blogger (3) analyses her style in a blog post where she has made a collage of some of her outfits from the previous year:

(12)

Colorful and experimental are two words that screamed at me when I saw all of my outfits of the year in this manner. I can see how my style is evolving and really

defining who I am as a person just by the way I love to dress.

Blogger (3) Jan 6, 2014

Blogger (3) even states that her style is defining who she is as a person, which indicates the importance of clothes and overall outward appearance for many young women. As discussed, bloggers tend to portray themselves as active, independent agents. Interestingly, however, in these sentences Blogger (3) partly uses inanimate concepts, the words “colorful”, “experimental” and “style” as subjects of these sentences. At the same time she allows them the position of active agents that affect her, the object of the sentences. This may be her way of emphasizing the importance of fashion in her life and as part of her identity.

Blogger (7) also defines herself through her preference of particular lipsticks by stating that she is “not a gloss girl at all” (Nov 7, 2013). This shows that she thinks she knows herself very well and is able to classify which products reflect or do not reflect her as a person. In excerpt (13) Blogger (5) describes how her sweater “encapsulates” aspects of her personality, indeed portraying the sweater as a reflection of herself as a person.

(13)

I've been pining for this sweater since I saw this post back in 2010. The sweetly macabre motif encapsulates my tendency to simultaneously be bitingly sarcastic while wearing what is considered "cutesy" clothing.

Blogger (5) Jan 14, 2014

Every one of the bloggers also found it important that the portrayed image of the self was unique and different from others. The extent to which this was emphasized, however, varied between the bloggers. Some bloggers, such as Blogger (6), stated the importance of uniqueness rather directly. In excerpt (14) she quotes a motto that states the importance of being different, something that she agrees with. In excerpt (15) she uses the words “cool” and “unique” in reference to the same concept, implying that they go hand in hand. The sentence also presupposes that standing out is a positive thing. Others, like Blogger (4) in excerpt (16), indicate the importance of uniqueness more indirectly.

(14)

“In order to be irreplaceable one must always be different” said a pretty wise lady once upon a time.

Blogger (6) Dec 4, 2013

(15)

they have some very cool and unique pieces that cannot be found anywhere else, which make them stand out.

Blogger (6) Nov 25, 2013

In a similar way, blogger (4) displays pride in standing out from the others when a group of bloggers are choosing headphones as a gift from a partner in cooperation:

(16)

I'm usually referred to as the 'colourful Blogger' and this couldn't be a better example of why, as I'm the only one out of the 9 other ladies who chose the red colourway!

Blogger (4) Jan 20, 2014

The perception of material possessions and appearance representing the personality and characteristics of a person has been detected by others, so my findings give further support to this view. Skeggs (1992: 85) and Finkelstein (2007: 195), for example, have found and discussed how the outside is often perceived to reflect the inside. On the other hand, Ilmonen (2007) also presented a view on consumption as accommodation to products, as creating *me-ness*. Ilmonen discussed long-term accommodation, where consumers develop a togetherness to a product that they own. However, the bloggers of my study seemed to value their initial feelings of togetherness with a product and make their consumer decisions based on them.

#### **4.1.4 Uniqueness versus uniformity**

Although the most apparent effort that the bloggers were making by consuming was appearing unique and standing out, another important aspect of self-expression that consumption brought about was also being a member of a group, being accepted and searching for other people's approval. None of the bloggers, for example, step too far

away from traditional femininity. While it is acceptable and even desirable to express some characteristics that have traditionally been attached to masculinity rather than femininity, as discussed earlier, the bloggers are still very careful not to go too far and only adopt from masculinity moderately and where appropriate. Toughness and initiative, for example, were gladly portrayed, whereas “female group membership”, as suggested by Talbot (2010), was still searched by adopting traditionally feminine discourses of consumption and being groomed and styled to portray femininity in contrast to masculinity.

(17)

Here's a holiday look I've put together for another shivery day. This would be my ideal outfit for a Christmas Eve party. You will find that you can embrace these frigid holidays with this festive outfit. Underneath the coat is a Little Black Dress, which goes well with my honeydew coat and black tights. I wanted the coat to be the center of attention so I went with an all black look to give the coat the limelight. I felt that if I included other colors, whether it was complementary or not, it would be fighting for attention and the look would not be as flattering.

Blogger (3) Dec 10, 2013

In excerpt (17), for example, Blogger (3) portrays a strong, knowledgeable image of herself by portraying herself as an expert of fashion and style (as will be discussed in section 4.1.5), while at the same time she also discusses traditionally feminine elements of style, such as “a Little Black Dress” and “honeydew coat and black tights”. As Lakoff (2004: 45) discusses, women and men also tend to use adjectives in different ways. Blogger (3)'s use of descriptive phrases “shivery day”, “frigid holidays”, “honeydew coat” and pursuing a “flattering” look are good examples of typically feminine adjective use.

Some bloggers also had more concrete concerns to belong, and some of them voiced this directly. Blogger (7), for example, states her worry about her style fitting in with other college students:

(18)

Thankfully, college dressing isn't as bad or different as I thought it would be. I've still been able to wear everything I like without feeling constrained.

Blogger (7) Sep 26, 2013

This excerpt demonstrates how blogger (7) has clearly observed other people in her college to make judgments on what “college dressing” is like and how her own style matches that. She is happy to have noticed that she does, in fact, fit in the college world with her clothing, “without feeling constrained”.

The bloggers also express their efforts to stay on top of trends and consequently belonging to the frontline of fashion and style. On a few occasions some of the bloggers comment on their own style in a negative way, because they feel that they are late on the trend. Blogger (2), for example, tries a new lip balm that has been on the market for a while and of which she has heard elsewhere. Her remark “Yep, I’m far too late to this party” (*Jan 9, 2014*) shows that for her being on top of new trends and new arrivals in stores is an important value.

Most of the bloggers are very careful of which particular groups and subcultures they are identifying with, as discussed earlier. Some bloggers portray fashion bloggers as a distinct social group and express belonging to it:

(19)

It’s the fashion Bloggers’ favourite camera, look around at a meet up and we’ve almost all got them!

Blogger (4) Dec 15, 2013

In the next example Blogger (2) comments on an outfit that shows her belonging. The undertone is slightly negative, although possibly humorous. Blogger (2) indicates that looking like a typical fashion blogger may portray a lack of originality, but she, however, gladly identifies as a member of that group, possibly thinking there are other, positive associations attached to fashion bloggers:

(20)

this has got to be such a stereotypical fashion blogger outfit: collared shirt, disco pants, cobalt blue and velvet.

Blogger (2) Jan 18, 2014

These findings are similar to those made by many others before me. For example, in her study, Härkönen (2011:25-35, 55-60) found that fashion bloggers were trying to stand

out from others, but at the same time consumption was portrayed as a way to create affinity. In addition, Simmel (1986) discussed how fashionable individuals want to belong by being uniform enough, not step out of a generally accepted fashion but instead rise higher than others in it. This is exactly how the fashion bloggers of my study are presenting themselves, as will be elaborated in the next section.

#### **4.1.5 Branding oneself as an expert of fashion and style**

To start with, bloggers are usually just private persons, but in their blogs they assume a higher status than their readers. The bloggers seem to regard themselves as small-scale celebrities, perhaps rightly so, since many of them do have thousands of followers. Blogger (3), for example, has just over 48 000 followers, whereas Blogger (2) has around 1400 followers (Bloglovin.com, 2015). In this way, the bloggers could be seen as self-made micro-celebrities, whom Senft (2013:347), for example, has described as individuals who carefully brand themselves by being active in different social media channels to appear worthy of admiration by their online fans.

The bloggers' depiction of themselves as micro-celebrities is most noticeable in the way in which they portray themselves as experts of style and fashion consumption. This is apparent in the bloggers' frequent habit of giving their readers expert advice on style and fashion products.

For example, excerpt (17) by Blogger (3) highlights her attempts at portraying herself as an expert of fashion and style:

(17)

Here's a holiday look I've put together for another shivery day. This would be my ideal outfit for a Christmas Eve party. You will find that you can embrace these frigid holidays with this festive outfit. Underneath the coat is a Little Black Dress, which goes well with my honeydew coat and black tights. I wanted the coat to be the center of attention so I went with an all black look to give the coat the limelight. I felt that if I included other colors, whether it was complementary or not, it would be fighting for attention and the look would not be as flattering.

Blogger (3) Dec 10, 2013

Here Blogger (3) demonstrates a professional image of herself, appearing like an experienced stylist, giving insight into how she put the outfit together and how it should

be worn. She emphasizes her own role as a determined agent by using the personal pronoun “I” repeatedly, explaining what she, herself, “put together” ,“wanted” or “felt”, for example. She also underlines her role as an expert by addressing the reader directly and ensuring the effectiveness of her own advice: “You will find that you can embrace the frigid holidays with this festive outfit”. The excerpt almost seems to imitate the language of fashion advertising or television makeover shows, where professional stylists illustrate their styling process, instructing or trying to convince the reader or the listener. Blogger (3) could therefore be interpreted to draw from these genres to get herself additional credibility on the field of fashion consumption.

Another common way to display expertise is giving reviews on products and listing one’s personal favorites. The bloggers seem to indicate that they know the products that they are writing about rather well and have experience in similar products, which gives them legitimacy to claim that these particular products are indeed the best in their league. This is not directly stated but, however, indicated in the kind of language the bloggers use.

(21)

Also, here's an insider fact for y'all. Matalan's age 16 is equivalent to a size 12. So, you know, don't forget to check out the Candy Couture line, if you're ever in store! (But, I should probably mention that the cobalt jumper actually comes up rather small!)

Blogger (2) Jan 13, 2014

Excerpt (21) from Blogger (2) shows how she gives expert advice to her readers. Blogger (2) is indicating that she is an “insider”, and she is now revealing knowledge that she possesses and her readers, in contrast, do not. She also adopts a similar fashion professional language as Blogger (3) in excerpt (21), using the imperative form “don't forget to check out”, however hedging it with the colloquial expression “so, you know” in order to give the impression that she is on the same level with her readers, almost like a friend. Blogger (6), in turn, takes an authoritative position in sustainable clothing and critical consuming. She advises her readers on how to consume in a sustainable way, taking the role of a moral guardian of the readers:

(22)

The party season is here and everyone are getting new clothes.. That's why I wanted to remind you how many stunning vintage garments are out there waiting for you..

Blogger (6) Dec 4, 2013

(23)

I just came to tell you that shopping sustainable clothing just got a hell of a lot easier. Thanks to Future Threads Project, a non-profit organization that lists all the coolest and fashionable sustainable clothing brands out there. Fantastic! Now you have no excuse for going to fast fashion stores!

Blogger (6) Nov 29, 2013

In excerpts (22) and (23) Blogger (6) is sharing her insight; She reveals to her readers something that she does not expect them to be aware of yet. In both excerpts she allows herself the role of an active agent, often putting “you”, her readers, in the position of the objects of the sentences. She indicates that if she did not “remind” the readers about vintage garments and “come to tell” them about shopping sustainable clothing, the readers might continue shopping in less sustainable ways. In excerpt (23) she is being more direct. Her comment “Now you have no excuse for going to fast fashion stores!” includes the presupposition that her readers, in contrast to her, have previously made excuses to shop in ways that Blogger (6) finds unsustainable. The comment sounds like something that a parent or a teacher could say to a naughty child, portraying Blogger (6)'s assumed higher, more knowledgeable status.

In the following excerpt Blogger (6) also compares herself to other bloggers. It demonstrates how she sees herself as having risen above others in her consumer behavior, making her a unique consumer of fashion:

(24)

I believe, as a reflection of our consuming behavior, things will change. The most shocking thing for me is that when it comes to fashion, people stop caring. I know bloggers who do other kind of charity in forms of collecting money, for example, for the red cross on the streets, but when it comes to the most basic thing and perhaps the biggest issue a fashion blogger has an impact on they simply do not care. They do not care that the brands they are promoting and accepting free clothes from use human slavery. That is just absolutely sick in my opinion.

Blogger (6) Nov 8, 2013

In excerpt (24) Blogger (6) states her understanding that “things will change” “as a reflection of our consumer behavior”. She draws a distinction between herself and some other bloggers who, in her view, have not yet understood this. These bloggers, in her opinion, do charity work but in ineffective ways, not noticing or caring about “the most basic thing and perhaps the biggest issue a fashion blogger has an impact on”. Blogger (6) herself, on the other hand, is aware of these issues and sees herself as entitled to judge other bloggers, even label their actions “absolutely sick.”

As stated at the end of the previous section, the attempt to appear expert-like is closely linked with what Simmel (1986) has argued about the nature of fashion and fashionable people. According to him, in order to be fashionable, people need to stay in a framework of what is generally accepted, while at the same time rising higher than others within the framework. These bloggers do, in fact, create their identity by positioning themselves higher than others, most prominently, their readers. The most typical way for the bloggers to rise above others is their knowledge and eye for style. The blog posts also indicate that bloggers see their courage and creativity with which they put together outfits as factors that distinguish them from others. Many of the bloggers seem to feel that they are an inspiration to their readers, who themselves may not possess the same stylishness, boldness or insight as the bloggers have.

#### **4.1.6 Creating (false) impressions**

When, on the one hand, the bloggers show a tendency of presenting consuming in a way that shows their personality and uniqueness, they also indicate that consumer goods may be used to create impressions of certain desired but non-existing characteristics. In many cases the bloggers also consume in order to achieve actual changes. The bloggers describe how they acquire products in order to imbibe certain personality traits or to show new aspects of their personalities, or something that would not necessarily be there if it was not for the new products representing these characteristics.

(25)

Well aren't I looking all grown up for once?! Occasionally I like to dress up like an

adult and leave the TV presenter look behind and there's no better way to channel 'grown-up workwear' than with a silk shirt.

Blogger (4) Jan 12, 2014

(26)

Animal prints are always a great neutral that gives more flare and attitude than a boring solid.

Blogger (3) Dec 27, 2013

These excerpts show how these bloggers want to give an impression of themselves which is not quite the personality that they consider their true self, and use clothes to convey the desired image. Blogger (4) wishes to "channel" a more adult, professional impression and Blogger 3 wants to show more "attitude", by which she probably means boldness that she would like others to associate with her personality on the basis of her choice of print. Blogger (5), in turn, makes a humorous remark that demonstrates her awareness of her own attempt at identity construction through the choice of clothes:

(27)

I feel super tough with my hair slicked back; pair that with a letterman jacket and I'm about ready for a schoolyard brawl... If I look tough it means I am tough, right?

Blogger (5) Nov 21, 2013

In these examples the bloggers themselves are aware of the artificiality of the image that they are creating, although they do not see it as faking anything, but rather as a fun and exploratory play with the different personas that one can convey to others only on the basis of outfit choice, as discussed in section 4.1.2.

Although these examples express little but an enjoyable play with different possible identities, on many occasions the bloggers seem to suggest that they and other people alike can and should improve themselves, their appearance, personality and change the way they feel about themselves. The bloggers portray consumption as the key for achieving change, a tendency apparent in most of the blogs. In addition to trying to give a desired image of themselves to others by making the right consumer choices, the bloggers actually seem to indicate that by purchasing and wearing new clothes and other fashion items it is possible to make changes that concern the inside. Mental wellbeing,

self-esteem and even some personality traits were suggested to change hand in hand with a new wardrobe.

Blogger (5), in particular, reports on her personal growth which her appearance and new clothes are both a signal for and the cause of. She has previously struggled with her weight and fitting in with other people, and she mentions her sexual identity as one reason for this. Now she has a new, bold style and she claims to have overcome her problems, two things that she sees as going hand in hand. She, for example, calls a flowery dress her “shine bright like a dia-mond” dress (Jan 29, 2014), indicating that wearing the dress makes her feel confident and on top of the world. In addition, she reports on going out of her comfort zone by wearing a formfitting outfit. By pushing the boundaries of what she is comfortable with she feels that she has experienced a boost for her self-esteem:

(28)

In the spirit of getting out of my comfort zone, I've been scoping outfits that are a) more form fitting and b) more modern! I've been intimidated by sensual dressing in the past but I've been feeling pretty damn good in this body of mine lately. Surely, this outfit will seem very tame by modern standards, but I was definitely reaching outside of my comfort zone to wear this ensemble. See this as an attempt to push those fears aside... here's to more body conscious outfits!

Blogger (5) Dec 10, 2014

Blogger (5) and Blogger (4) also express a desire to become like somebody else, which materializes in purchasing the right products. Sometimes the object of imitation is a celebrity that has a style and a persona that have made a lasting impression or become a symbol for a certain style. This is portrayed as fun and inspirational, and serious concerns to imitate a celebrity are not expressed.

(29)

Orla Kiely is a standby for wardrobe inspiration that I can recreate with items already in my wardrobe...

the muted palette and styling is a perfect marriage of sweet schoolgirl with a touch of rebellious Margot Tenenbaum. Who wouldn't want to be that girl?

Blogger (5) Dec 2, 2013

Blogger (5)'s rhetoric question “Who wouldn't want to be that girl?” in excerpt (29)

implies that she, herself, indeed would like to be “that girl”, sweet but rebellious like Margot Tenenbaum. This portrays how Blogger (5) wants to create an ideal image of herself by wearing the right clothes. In excerpt (30), Blogger (4) similarly expresses her desire to see herself as a different person, but unlike Blogger (5), she has no particular person in mind:

(30)

Sometimes it's fun to pretend to be someone else for a bit, and where better to do this than on a trip to Pareee darling?!

Blogger (4), Oct 19, 2013

The phenomenon of feeling the need to change oneself through consumer choices, illustrated by these examples, has been discussed extensively by, for example, McRobbie (2009). She is particularly worried about the empowerment that women experience by changing their appearance. In her opinion, there is a pressure for women to change themselves for the better, and portraying change as empowerment hides the oppressive aspects of this expectation; women are not good enough as they are, but instead should change themselves to meet the expectations of men and others, in general. In her work, McRobbie (2009) focuses on make-over TV-programs that duplicate the ideology that women should change themselves from the outside in order to become more confident and feel good in the inside. Based on my analysis, the bloggers, in fact, seek to feel better about themselves and try to achieve this by consuming, which may only help them on a superficial level with actual self-esteem problems or even conceal their actual cause. To some extent I therefore agree with McRobbie in her concerns. However, when it comes to how the bloggers themselves see their fashion consumption, Chaney's (2002) account of it as creative play with different personas is closer than the more critical approaches of McRobbie (2009), Talbot (2010) and others, who concentrate on consumption and its oppressive expectations on femininity.

#### **4.1.7 Attitudes to money as a means for constructing identity**

Most of the bloggers report a desire for objects or services that they cannot afford and some of them have plans for saving money. For some, this is only a necessity, but for

many, their portrayal of money and luxury items is a way to construct a particular identity.

Some bloggers, most explicitly Blogger (2), seek to create a down-to-earth identity by separating themselves from purchasing expensive luxury products and instead take pleasure in finding something that they regard as particularly affordable.

(31)

This dress has got to be the biggest bargain, in all the history of Topshop sales. I stumbled across it in my local store, reduced to £5 in the Boxing Day sales. Whaaat? It was originally £29, and I absolutely love it! I would definitely say that Primark is my favourite place to shop for statement jewellery! The pieces are all so pretty, yet so cheap! Again, this fluffy jumper was another bargain at £10, and you won't believe the quality of it! It's so soft and genuinely feels really well made - money well spent, me thinks!

Blogger (2) Jan 25, 2014

(32)

Bought a tripod. Oooh, look at me getting all fancy. No, I just thought it would make taking outfit photos so much easier! Plus, this one folds down into a bag which makes it super handy. It's definitely a, what I call practical purchase.

Blogger (2) Jan 19 2014

Excerpt (31) shows how much Blogger (2) rejoices in the affordable price of the products that she purchased. She also reports on the quality of the products as an advantage, something that cannot be presupposed when a product is cheap. She emphasizes the good qualities of the products with adjectives, such as “pretty”, “soft” and “favourite” and uses the superlative phrase “biggest bargain”. She also uses several intensifiers, “absolutely”, “definitely” and “genuinely” to make her point. Excerpt (32), in turn, is an indication of constructing an identity where the blogger separates herself from those “fancy”, snobbish girls who throw around their money for expensive luxury products. She has indeed herself purchased an item that in her standards is expensive. For example, her comment “Oooh, look at me getting all fancy” is probably meant as an ironic remark, when in reality she thinks she is everything but. After that she makes a considerable effort on making excuses on why she has bought the product and why it still does not make her alike those snobbish girls. In this sense Blogger (2) is doing

exactly what Skeggs (1992) discussed in her study of working-class women and their gender identity. She found that the women in her study could not define particularly well what their identity was, but they were nevertheless very aware of with whom they did not want to identify, and were trying to create a distance between themselves and those others. Blogger 2, similarly, creates identity by building an imaginary bridge between herself and people who buy expensive luxury products.

Blogger (3), in contrast, creates a polished image of herself by reporting on purchasing and using many luxurious products, and by emphasizing their quality. With her careful choice of products that she mentions she creates an impression of classy ladylike femininity. When something is high-quality she is also ready to spend some more money on it. Excerpt (33) from her blog does seem like it could be a paid product placement, but it nevertheless demonstrates Blogger 3's attitude towards more expensive products. For Blogger (3) the quality of a product is an important value, and she is ready to pay for it. She calls her boots “an amazing investment”, a purchase worth its price, which she emphasizes by acclaiming the high quality of their material:

(33)

My Classic Tall boots have become a winter staple in my wardrobe because they are extremely comfortable and warm. The sheepskin lining helps my feet stay comfortable at room temperature, which is why my feet don't sweat. That type of lining is what makes these boots an amazing investment.

Blogger (3) Dec 22 2013

In sum, it could be argued that the bloggers' attitude to money is one component in their expression of identity, and it supports the kind of identity that they are constructing, in general. For example, Blogger (3)'s smart and ladylike identity is not only apparent in her attitude towards investing in luxury products, but she also expresses it in other ways. For example, her wardrobe is, in general, compatible with the identity she is constructing; she introduces outfits like the “Little Black Dress” (Dec 10, 2013), or “off white blouse with and embellished collar and a white fitted and structured blazer” (Dec 27, 2013), which are often attached to classy femininity and business style. The other bloggers similarly spend money and invest in products compatibly with their pursued identities.

#### **4.1.8 In conclusion**

In chapter 4.1 I discussed one of the key findings of the present study: how the bloggers construct identity by consumer talk and consumer choices. The findings reported on here could be compared to observations by previous scholars, such as Davis (1992) and Chaney (2002) who, among others, have also focused on the ways in which people construct their identity by consuming. Davis (1992), for example, calls clothing “a visual metaphor” of personal characteristics or messages that a person consciously or unconsciously seeks to convey. The bloggers in my study also view clothing and fashion as a message that is given of oneself to others. By their fashion and style choices the bloggers were reflecting their personalities to others and creating desired images.

However, my findings also emphasize the individual consumer’s feeling of togetherness with a certain product. Instead of just wanting to show others a certain picture of oneself, the personal feel and rightness of the product for the blogger herself were important in giving meanings to the products: The bloggers preferred using and purchasing products that they felt were portraying their persona. On the other hand, on many occasions the bloggers also used clothes and other fashion items to construct an image of themselves which they did not feel was based on their true persona. Instead, they wanted to portray desired aspects of personality, such as boldness, without necessarily regarding themselves as bold to begin with. Because the bloggers may be unaware of their underlying motives behind their choice of clothes and other products and may make the decisions for subconscious reasons, it was difficult to detect how far the bloggers in reality value their personal relationships and togetherness with products, flaunting the inside to the outside, and to what extent their significance is on the (possibly artificially constructed) images they convey to others. Perhaps these two aspects of identity and consuming should not be separated from each other, at all. However, it is clear that both motives are present when making consumer choices.

One of my most notable findings that I discussed in this chapter, was reflecting empowered, modern femininity through consumption. Again, in this respect my findings are similar to those in previous research. For example, McRobbie (2009:3) has discussed the feeling of empowerment that modern women experience through consuming and my findings clearly support her ideas. The active role that the bloggers take in creating their own, personalized styles and the feelings of finding one’s true self

and being in charge that they bring about, discussed earlier in this chapter, particularly seem to be a part of this modern, strong femininity.

McRobbie also expresses her concern on the phenomenon, finding the construction of one's feminine identity on consuming as alienating, a plague of the modern time. Gill (2007:195) is similarly worried about the paradoxical feminine empowerment portrayed in the media: women are encouraged to seek empowerment in ways that only emancipate them on a surface level, while at the same time keeping the role of women as limited as ever. After examining these blogs in detail I am, to some extent, inclined to agree with McRobbie and Gill in their concerns, considering the vast amount of time, money and attention and the value which these bloggers give to consuming in their life and constructing their feminine identities on consumption. It seems that many are constructing their femininity and identity in general very strongly on the basis of consumption, which I believe to be a reason for some concern.

## **4.2 Consuming as a positive experience**

When investigating the seven blogs that constitute the data for my study, the idea explained by Chaney (2008), of lifestyle as identity constructed by consumer choices became apparent. In the previous chapter I focused on how these bloggers do, in fact, create identity and define themselves through their consumer lifestyles. In this section, I will focus on the more concrete aspects of consumption that the bloggers of my study portrayed to play their part in constructing the positive experience and significance of consumption for the individual. I will start this chapter by giving light to how the bloggers experienced consumption as something that made their life more meaningful and enjoyable. I will then move on to discussing the way in which they regarded consumption as a comprehensive experience, and then concentrate on the significance of a product for the individual. Finally, I will talk about positive emotions that the bloggers attached to consumption and consumer goods.

### **4.2.1 Fulfilling life through consumption**

The bloggers frequently conveyed the idea that consuming somehow made their life more meaningful, enjoyable and adventurous. For example, this is how Blogger (4)

paints a picture of an enjoyable Saturday, in which consumer products play a significant role:

(34)

Aah, there's nothing like strolling down to treat myself to a tasty portion of Chicken Shop goodness on a Saturday, especially whilst listening to one of my fave bands; Awolnation on some pretty nifty new headphones! And then having a little boogie in the street, of course!

Blogger (4) Jan 20, 2014

Blogger 4 describes a personal, relaxing moment in the street – a moment that is not particularly special in any way except for the atmosphere and the feel of the moment. The elements that she describes as creating this special moment are, most importantly, treating oneself to “a tasty portion of Chicken Shop goodness” and listening to one of her favorite bands “on some pretty nifty new headphones”. This indicates that consuming and consumer products are, as a matter of fact, important components of her special, “enjoying the little things in life” – moment.

Blogger (7) also reports on consuming providing her with a new exciting experience, when she describes trying out new lipsticks:

(35)

I felt as if I was diving into completely uncharted waters... but they say you should do one new thing every day, right? When the three tubes arrived in the mail I went home and tried them on with my mom and cousin. We had so much fun experimenting with the different shades, it was like a mini-cosmetics party (those exist, no?).

Blogger (7) Nov 27, 2013

Blogger (7) portrays trying new lipsticks as “diving into completely uncharted waters”, being reckless and adventurous. She states a guideline in life that people commonly cite; “you should do one new thing every day”. This principle indicates that by acting accordingly a person can acquire new experiences and become more open to enjoying life to the fullest, which Blogger (7) realizes by trying out new lipsticks. In addition, she describes the process of trying out the lipsticks with her mother and cousin as resembling a “mini-cosmetic party”, rejoicing all the fun that they had while engaging in it. This shows how she portrays consumption as an important implementation of

being adventurous and enjoying life.

Travelling and going on holidays was one of the most typical ways in which consuming is reported to enhance the quality and zeal of life. Travelling is in many blogs presented as a self-evident part of life, as a way of easing stress and separating oneself from routines. Blogger (1) describes her choice of holiday destination, where practicality and price were the main reasons for making the decision.

(36)

Just before Christmas I decided that I wanted to treat Tom and I to a few days away in January to give us something to look forward to and get us through the post-festive-period depression. I initially wanted to take us to Iceland to do a Northern Lights tour but as it was intended to be a little bonus Christmas present I thought that £600 (the cheapest I could find for both of us) was pushing the budget too far. In the end I found a few good deals on Secret Escapes, and after a bit of research, plumped for Kosice in Slovakia. I'd wanted to visit Slovakia for some time and had heard that it was a relatively cheap place to visit with lots of good food. The last thing I wanted to do was treat us to a little break where we ended up then having to spend loads of money just to eat and get around (\*looks sideways at Copenhagen\*) so I thought this sounded like a great deal, especially as the package included a room upgrade, breakfast and a three course meal every night at the hotel and entrance to the hotel spa.

Blogger (1) Jan 26, 2014

As she explains in the example, Blogger (1) wanted to go on a holiday and chose Slovakia for its practicality and low price. This illustrates how travelling is seen as a tool for pampering oneself and getting away from the everyday environment and routines. Blogger (1) did not travel to Slovakia because she was particularly interested in experiencing Slovak culture, but because she wanted to relax and distance herself and her fiancé from their everyday life. Surprisingly, the description of the holiday that follows does not concentrate on conspicuous consumption, although that is a theme that dominates the blog otherwise. Instead, the blogger reports on enjoying the nature and the architecture of the town and focuses her consumption on eating out. This may be because she intended the holiday as a break from her usual life, enjoying some peace and quiet and some good food.

Blogger (4) has a slightly different approach to travelling. She similarly regards it as a hobby, something that she does every now and then, and in her New Year post reports on going abroad nine times during the year 2013. However, for her the most important

aspects in travelling are excitement and getting new experiences, not only relaxing and pampering oneself.

(37)

My travel buddy Kristabel and I concluded that we didn't have nearly enough time to explore this vibrant, arty city. We wanted more random night time concerts in the park, more cool designy shops and more posh meatball restaurants! ,Stockholm we're coming back.

Blogger (4) Jan 3, 2014

Blogger (4)'s descriptions of her travels often deal with consumer products that she finds typical of her destination. Through consumption she feels that she is getting the authentic experience of the place, such as when visiting "cool designy shops" and "posh meatball restaurants" in Stockholm, whose vitality and artistry she perceives as its defining characteristics. However, she also reports on meeting locals and engaging in new activities while travelling, so shopping is by no means the only content of her holiday. It could be concluded that the bloggers mostly travel abroad and consume there in a way that support their individual identity, such as in the case of Blogger 4.

My finding of consuming being regarded as something that enhances the content and quality of life is not a new one. As discussed in chapter (2), Mehita (2012:161) found in her study of magazine covers that social life was defined "meaningful and fulfilling by the presence of objects and images of objects". She also discussed how consumer goods were paralleled with positive and more meaningful experiences, which is a directly compatible notion with the ones made by myself in this study.

#### **4.2.2 Consumption as a comprehensive experience**

These bloggers evidently regarded consuming as a comprehensive experience, in which products, and especially purchasing them, carried a range of other meanings in addition to the end result – a newly acquired product. Identities, values and feelings were, of course, some of the things attached to consuming, but on a more practical level these aspects were carried by smaller things, such as the appearance of the store or the packaging in which the product came - in other words the entire consumer experience of purchasing a product was important.

(38)

It all started with a trip to Morocco (ok not Tokyo but you know!) Where I sampled an incredible array of sushi's which tasted even better than you'd imagine mainly because they were displayed on a crazy wooden bridge...

Blogger (4) Jan 16, 2014

(39)

I bought this crop top from a small boutique in Brick Lane and the garment itself is made in the UK. My favorite thing from the whole trip is without a doubt this sick palm tree necklace! It's just insane! And the hoops as well. Got them from a small store in Brick Lane too.

Blogger (6) Nov 3, 2013

In excerpt (38) Blogger (4) may be exaggerating for the sake of style and impressiveness, but she nevertheless states that her food tasted better because of the “crazy wooden bridge” that it was displayed on. Similarly, in excerpt (39) Blogger (6) sees the place where she bought the products in question as an important value. She appreciates buying the products from a small boutique, most likely because she feels this adding to the uniqueness of the product, and consequently to her own uniqueness. She also mentions Brick Lane twice, a street in London that enjoys a non-mainstream reputation. If she had seen the same product in a department store in central London, she most likely would not have acquired it, which demonstrates the importance of aspects in consumption that go far beyond the actual use of individual products.

#### **4.2.3 The value of a product**

In this category I will discuss the bloggers' habit of emphasizing the beauty of and attaching value for individual products. The bloggers had different ways of doing this, such as describing continued use to emphasize quality, expressing their appreciation towards particular products, as well as hunting down dream products and attaching a product to some other, abstract and meaningful aspect of life. I will now discuss these in detail.

The timespan of my study is, of course, limited and I cannot make infallible conclusions on whether a certain product has appeared in the blog before, but my overall impression is that these blogs focus on presenting newly acquired products. However, there are

some exceptions, as well. Blogger (7), for example, has a habit of emphasizing how much she has used a particular product. She often praises the quality, beauty or other positive aspects of the product by reporting on using it repeatedly:

(40)

I bought this dalmatian spot/polka dot dress this past summer and wore it non-stop at work and on the weekends

Blogger (7) Sep 26, 2013

(41)

Lately I've been throwing on this vintage faux fur collar over any sweater or coat I'm wearing. The fact that it is detachable means it is totally versatile and I love it.

Blogger (7) Dec 5, 2013

Blogger (2) reports on cosmetic products that she has found particularly good after using them for a period of time. The time may, however, only be some days or weeks, and the frequency with which Blogger (2) reports on purchasing new cosmetics indicates that she has probably used none of the products for a long time and instead wants to purchase new products simply for the sake of novelty.

(42)

I think I may have just found a new holy grail product that has been too well hidden within the beauty industry... - - I've been using this since the 25th, and I must say it's fab! It leaves my skin really soft and smooth, as well as perfectly nourished!

Blogger (2) Jan 22, 2014

(43)

I've been absolutely loving pink lipstick recently. I don't know what it is or why, but the good ol' coral lip has gone out of the window. (For now.) And, it's only been over these last few days that I've rediscovered Pink Mallow. I've had this for months but it's always been sat unloved, at the back of my drawer.

Blogger (2) Jan 27, 2014

In excerpt (42) Blogger (2) even gives a date when she started using the product, which gives the reader the indication that the timespan of a product is usually not very long for her. She uses stark exaggeration to convince the reader of the quality of the product,

calling it the “new holy grail product” of the industry, which is a typical habit of hers: she uses superlatives and exclamations in her blog posts when referring to almost any product. By reading only one post the reader may get the impression that she, in fact, finds a particular product exceptionally good and intends it for continued use, but in reality she acquires new products frequently and praises many of them highly. In example (43) Blogger (2) states that she has become bored of a product that she claims having used for a long time, throwing “the good ol’ coral lip” “out of the window”.

Blogger (2)’s reports on accommodation to products may be based on exaggeration, but other bloggers also discuss having used particular products for a period of time. The bloggers often describe these products like trustworthy, old friends that have served them well over time.

(44)

I’ve had my Macbook Pro for the last 3 years and as with most of the tech I invest in, I wouldn’t ever go back to what I had before.

Blogger (4) Dec 15, 2013

This quotation shows continued use and accommodation to the product. This attitude, however, was not typical of Blogger (4) in relation to many other products, mostly clothing, which also indicates that she intends technological products for continued use, whereas clothing is much more disposable and comes and goes in frequent cycles.

Often when the bloggers discussed the continued use of a product, they were also showing respect for the product, almost allowing it a human-like value. The same appreciation was also shown for newly acquired products when they were regarded as particularly impressive.

(45)

Laura recently went home to Scotland and found these sequins in her collection of vintage that was in storage; she kindly gave it to me for my birthday. I’m feeling pretty great about owning something so special, next time I wear it detail photos will be in order!

Blogger (5) Dec 18, 2014

(46)

had big dreams for photographing this dress - it truly deserves to be flaunted at a funfair with candy floss, being twirled by the seashore or being draped with a (faux) fur stole and taken to dinner. Sadly the weather has put paid to those plans (will it ever stop raining? Must I build an ark and find another fluffy white dog to pair with Bodhi and sail away?) - and so it has had to put up with being twirled in my hall and flaunted in the confines of my home only. But it shall have its day!

Blogger (1) Jan 3, 2014

(47)

Welcome to January! Isn't it just... grey?! If you have an extensive sequins collection like me, it's probably feeling a little dejected in its post-Xmas/NYE hang-up-over

Blogger (4) Jan 5, 2014

In excerpt (45) Blogger (5) states that she feels “pretty great about owning something so special”. With these words she is doing honor to the products in question, showing them her appreciation. In examples (46) and (47) the bloggers similarly show their appreciation for garments and use personification, portraying the pieces of clothing as active entities. Blogger (1) describes her dress that “deserves to be flaunted” and “has to put up with” conditions caused by the bad weather. Blogger (4) states that a sequins collection may be “feeling a little dejected”, by which she allows the collection, a material entity, the human capacity of feeling. Blogger (1) and Blogger (4) could both be using humor in their accounts of garments feeling and deserving, which may partly be due to stylistic reasons of the blog text, but this does not change the fact that they are, in fact, presenting material goods as human-like. This, from its part, plays to my overall understanding of the immense significance that the bloggers give to consumption and consumer goods.

The appreciation that the bloggers showed to certain products was also shown to particular stores and brands:

(48)

These leopard print Nike Free trainers are from good old JD Sports- the shop where I used to get kitted out for all my school activities! Have you seen their campaign that was splashed all over the London Underground recently? It really caught my eye, all that colour and freshness definitely got me interested in the store again!

Blogger (4) Dec 29, 2013

It seemed that showing appreciation or allegiance was in connection with identity constructive factors of consuming. For Blogger (4), for example, JD Sports appears to represent “colour and freshness” which she probably links to dynamism and youthfulness. She also clearly identifies herself as colorful and fresh, which makes her feel togetherness with a brand that uses such adjectives in its advertisements. When these “new” aspects that the advertisements brought about are paired with the nostalgic feelings from Blogger 4’s childhood, these together build up her appreciation of the store.

The bloggers also expressed their appreciation of certain, individual products, lifting them higher in importance compared to other products, by referring to the action of shopping as “hunting”.

(49)

I'd been on the hunt for a kimono that was pretty and elegant enough to wear for both day and night; I think I've met my match with this one.

Blogger (7) Dec 27, 2013

(50)

What do you think of my new leopard wedges? I snapped them up in the M&S sale - I'd been eyeing them up when they were full price so I was pleased I managed to hunt them down at my local store.

Blogger (1) Jan 13, 2014

The concept of hunting clearly includes the idea of primitive urges that need to be fulfilled, portraying shopping as natural and necessary. On a more concrete level the discourse of hunting emphasizes the active role that the bloggers take in the action of finding and purchasing products that suit the bloggers’ personal taste and preferences. It also displays the enthusiasm with which the bloggers engage in the act of shopping,

portraying it as an important hobby and life content. The bloggers often had a particular product or a very clear image of it in mind and they were prepared to “hunt it down”, to search for the desired product which, when eventually caught, would bring about feelings of satisfaction and fulfillment.

A pattern that was particularly typical of Blogger (1), but also apparent in other bloggers’ posts, was conveying products as symbols for more abstract, sometimes much more meaningful things in life. Blogger (1), for example, conveys the common conception of engagement rings representing the love and personalities of her and her fiancé:

(51)

The idea of a bespoke ring rather sets my heart a-flutter - all of the elements of our wedding that we've discussed so far have been things that we like and are very 'us'; we certainly have not tied ourselves to any details or pre-requisites just because they are 'traditional' and instead we're just having things that would make up our vision of the perfect day. So having wedding rings that celebrate our personalities and preferences would certainly fit with that - I love the idea of having something different and unique.

Blogger (1) Dec 30, 2013

Blogger (1) is planning a wedding that is “very us” and searching for rings that “celebrate our personalities”. She feels that their wedding rings, material objects, should represent their unique love and characters.

In the following example she similarly discusses her health and fitness goals of the New Year, which materialize as objects that she has bought for the purpose of achieving these goals:

(52)

Along with my exercise bike I also have two new DVDs, a hula hoop, a slendertone belt and an ankle support to help my running post-sprained ankle. I'm feeling really positive about being more active and am excited to see, and feel, the results. I've taken measurements and weighed myself as I know that tracking my progress is a huge motivator for me and I'm really hoping to see positive changes.

Blogger (1) Jan 14, 2014

Instead of riding her exercise bike or exercising using her newly acquired equipment she simply states owning them, which she hopes will result in “positive changes”. She most likely does not actually assume that simply possessing the equipment will lead to the desired outcome, but she sees that the physical objects reflect her new active lifestyle and her goals of achieving the bodily changes that they are intended to bring about. Even later on, she never reports on exercising using the products; the account on the products is limited to purchasing them. After the turn of the year Blogger (1) dedicates several posts to getting closer to her true self and trying to feel good in her own skin, which she aims to achieve by making lifestyle changes; eating healthier and exercising. The exercise equipment, then, also symbolize her determination and the inner changes that she feels having experienced and the goals that she has set for herself.

#### **4.2.4. Attaching positive emotions to consuming**

Every one of the bloggers had a strong tendency of attaching emotions to consuming. They often did this by using verbs that directly express feelings. They also more implicitly revealed emotions towards consuming and consumer goods that could be gathered from their ways of giving meanings to consumption. Consumer goods were, for example, portrayed to ease stress and have an impact in one’s mood, which some of the bloggers took conscious advantage of.

The most common emotion, one that every one of the bloggers attached to consumer goods, was the feeling of love and affection. All of the bloggers used the word “love” to a great extent to describe their feelings towards certain items. There were different shades to the love that the bloggers expressed, but most typically the bloggers used words that are normally used to describe romantic love. A typical expression was *falling in love* with a certain product. This often involved the idea of obsession, being unable to resist the product and phrases such as “can’t live without”, “can’t resist” and “can’t get enough” were commonly attached to consumer goods. Blogger (5), for example, states that she “couldn’t say no” to a unicorn sweater. The bloggers frequently seemed to use this addiction-like emotion as an excuse to both themselves and their readers for purchasing products.

(53)

Wow. Cobalt blue is so much brighter than I thought it would be. But, I love it - perhaps a little too much Oh, and disco pants are another thing I've recently discovered, and I think I'm converted. I honestly didn't think they'd suit me at all, but I love them. - - I've declared my love for this necklace before, so I'm not going to ramble on about it for too much longer.

Blogger (2) Jan 18, 2014

As in this quotation from Blogger (2), who states loving her new cobalt blue sweater “perhaps a little too much”, the love that the bloggers expressed towards products was often the forbidden type. Blogger (2) also states having “declared” her love for a necklace. Other bloggers similarly use the same discourse of forbidden love, such as Blogger 1, who is “trying to stop” herself from buying a coat despite having fallen in love with it:

(54)

I am trying to stop myself buying the final coat - I saw Ellie Harrison wearing a similar one on Countryfile (where I get all of my style inspiration from, obvs) and I rather fell in love!

Blogger (1) Jan 7, 2014

As in the previous examples, conspicuous consumption was often portrayed as something that the bloggers felt they should not be indulging in, but they could not help it because of the love that they stated feeling for certain products.

Another romantic feeling typically attached to commodities was unattainability. The bloggers were dreaming of products that they felt they badly needed or wanted, but, often from financial reasons, could not reach it:

(55)

but I can still dream about what they might eventually look like. I'd love a 'country bathroom' feel - rustic floorboards, a roll-top bath and old apothecary bottles filled with lotions and potions. I love this rustic style flooring, the 'chateau' laminate looks like old French fruit crates and would be perfect for bringing a bit of 'country vintage' to a room. And I'd love an Ikea kitchen!

Blogger (1) Jan 24, 2014

The volume with which the bloggers conveyed feelings of love and affection towards

consumer goods seemed overwhelming and the emotions exaggerated. I did get the impression when analyzing the blog posts that the bloggers were repeating a pattern that they had adopted from other popular media sources or by reading other fashion blogs, and the habit of showing exaggerated love towards consumer goods was something that some of them did not really think through and instead were duplicating a pattern that they had adopted elsewhere. Nevertheless, this finding and particularly the significant frequency with which love was expressed towards products functions as a clear indication of the values of these bloggers. Traditionally, such emotions have been shown in personal relationships towards other human beings. This discourse, consequently, lifts consumer goods close to those relationships in importance.

A different type of attachment that many of the bloggers expressed was nostalgia towards certain products and stores, such as in these examples:

(56)

I remember buying my first pair of GHDs when I was about 15! It was the first expensive item that I bought myself but boy was it worth it!

Blogger (4) Dec 23, 2013

(57)

I showed it briefly in my last post, but basically I'm loving this holographic clutch from American Apparel. - - It reminds me of Zenon: Girl of the 21st Century in the best way possible.

Blogger (7) Dec 10, 2014

In both of the examples the bloggers are looking back to their childhood or teenage years. Blogger (4) brings forward nostalgic memories of a product that she bought as a teenager. Blogger (7), on the other hand, describes a nineties-style handbag and is faced with memories of a movie that she saw as a child. In her case it is the material of the product, not the product in its entirety that brings about the old memories. None of the bloggers' accounts of nostalgic products were negative: it seems that memories grow sweeter with time in relation to consumption, as well. It may be that products that the bloggers associated with their childhood made them feel somehow good and safe, although this may not be something that the bloggers consciously acknowledged. In addition, the relative frequency of this phenomenon in the blogs of my focus is

undoubtedly in connection with the retro fashion. What was especially apparent was the 90s trend, which has its origins in the time when these bloggers were living their childhood years. The nineties trend is particularly apparent in this account by Blogger (7), where she actually states “feeling” some products that she finds nostalgic, or rather, retro fashionable, considering her young age that makes it almost impossible for her to have personal experiences from nineties fashion:

(58)

I'm feeling things like red nails, sheer separates, gold accents, old Hollywood actresses, young Winona, black lingerie, big overcoats, sequins, shiny things and super hot 90s Sandy Bullock with Keanu Reeves.

Blogger (7) Nov 20, 2013

Easing stress and making oneself feel better was also displayed as an important capacity of consumption. Many of the bloggers conveyed this perception, but it was particularly typical of Blogger (1), who reported on “treating” herself to commodities, for example. She also used consumer goods for lifting the spirits of others, such as in this example:

(59)

They kindly recently gave me a £30 voucher and I thought my parents both deserved a little treat.

Blogger (1) Dec 22, 2013

The following example by Blogger (2) also reveals how she sees consumption as a way of pampering oneself. She claims needing a break from a tiring hobby, which she realizes in the form of a lazy Sunday. This lazy Sunday of her description consists almost exclusively of consumer goods, and she even lists specific details on the products that make her feel most relaxed:

(60)

Here we have the ingredients for a big ol' lazy Sunday. As most of you'll already know, recently I've been involved with a local pantomime, and oh my, it's a tiring hobby. On Sunday we had no shows to perform or dances to rehearse, so a lazy day, quite frankly, was in order...

- Tea (Preferably in a cute mug) - **Check!**
- Cookies (Salted caramel if possible) - **Check!**

- Face masks (Clear Improvements is fab) - **Check!**
- Pyjamas (Obviously, slippers too) - **Check!**
- Candles (Yep, left over from Christmas) - **Check!**
- Bath (Lush bath ballistics are perfect) - **Check!**

So there you have it, the perfect recipe for a lazy day. Also, don't forget the other important things, your: nail painting, magazines and films (Mean Girls, obviously!)

Blogger (2) Jan 21, 2014

Feeling less stressed out was not the only desired outcome that consumption was expected to bring about. Some of the bloggers conveyed the idea that it was a good way of making one feel better in general or get oneself on the right mood, such as Blogger (7), who suggests that this is best carried out by wearing the right dress and Blogger (3), who states that an outfit choice can change one's attitude towards something unpleasant to be more positive:

(61)

Sometimes a shiny silver party dress is just the perfect thing to get you in the mood for the holidays.

Blogger (7) Dec 24, 2013

(62)

Here's a holiday look I've put together for another shivery day. This would be my ideal outfit for a Christmas Eve party. You will find that you can embrace these frigid holidays with this festive outfit.

Blogger (3) Nov 12, 2013

In these cases the bloggers indicate that particular products can be used in order to awaken a certain feeling or mood. However, not always did the products stimulate more positive feelings, but they were also often reported to reflect feelings and moods. For example, dressing according to one's mood was, in fact, a typical idea that the bloggers conveyed. This is in close connection to the idea discussed earlier of consumption reflecting one's persona and inner character; what one conceives to be or feel in the inside is reflected to the outside, the way a person dresses.

(63)

I must have been feeling summer-y that day (owing to the sunshine streaming through the window I'd wager) so I paired it with some peep-toes, albeit also with some nude tights to be safe.

Blogger (1) Jan 23, 2014

In this example Blogger (5) even suggests that wearing a certain garment may be her motivation for doing adventurous things and having a good time:

(64)

The Sacramento Style skirt just begs for an outfit suitable for fun loving adventures with your best pals!

Blogger (5) Oct 24, 2013

It has been argued by McRobbie (2009) that women seek their femininity and self-worth by pampering themselves with material goods and acquiring luxury products. McRobbie (2009:124-134) states that women are encouraged to pamper themselves with material goods in order to feel special and respectable – they are told that they are worth it. I agree with McRobbie in her concerns on this phenomenon, but based on my data I also claim that this process is not as straightforward as McRobbie claims it to be. The bloggers certainly did not regard themselves as victims of the consumer culture, the way in which McRobbie portrays women, but instead felt that they were fulfilling themselves and having fun, as discussed earlier. However, it must be said that the bloggers may not necessarily be conscious of the reasons behind their consumer behavior. Buying and consuming was definitely often carried out in the hope that it would make one feel better or experience certain emotions. However, in many of the cases the bloggers gave the impression of being on top of their own motives to consume and regarded the act of shopping or enjoying the acquired products as a way of having fun and relaxing.

#### **4.3 Negative ideas towards consumption**

Not all emotions attached to consumption were exclusively positive. Instead, some ideas against mass consumption were expressed. Most of the bloggers showed some tendency of feeling guilty for consuming too much or otherwise expressed the idea that

consumption may have negative side effects. These bloggers described trying to reduce their consumption or consume in a way that was, in their opinion, more acceptable in some ways. In this chapter I will discuss the attitudes and ideas that the bloggers expressed against conspicuous consumption, as well as the ways in which the bloggers still justified their consumption despite acknowledging the negative aspects. I will also explain a paradox that I noticed when studying the blogs between the ideas expressed and the actions taken, looking into the trendiness of conscious consumption.

### 4.3.1 Guilty conscience

As I discussed in the previous section about feelings of love and attachment, the bloggers frequently expressed feeling guilty about consuming, but they nevertheless indulged in it because they, in their own words, could not resist it. Wanting to save money was often the main reason for trying to consume less. However, many bloggers state that they should limit or change their consuming without giving explicit reasons, such as the expense, for why they regarded consumption as such a bad habit. Excerpt (65) from Blogger (2), for example, shows that she acknowledges that conspicuous consumption also has some negative aspects. She, nevertheless, does not specify what these are and shrugs her unease off with humor:

(65)

I love shopping. Perhaps a little too much. But, you know, that's allowed – right?!

Blogger (2) Jan 13, 2014

She also sets herself a spending ban, and in this quotation portrays buying too much as a personal problem which she is trying to limit without success:

(66)

*Broke my spending ban.* I managed a whole 8 days without spending - woo! I think shopping may be a serious problem...

Blogger (2) Jan 12, 2014

Particularly buying too much was sometimes seen as self-evidently negative by some bloggers, without much need for explaining the reasons behind it, as in the previous

examples. Saving money may, of course, be a reason in the background, despite being mentioned as such. In excerpt (66), money seems to be the main motive, which the word choice “spending” indicates. In addition, some of the reasons that are usually mentioned for reducing consumption or consuming more critically are environmental issues and humanitarian concerns in countries where the production is centered. However, with the exception of Blogger (6), the bloggers rarely mention any of these reasons for their attempts to limit their consuming.

Some of the bloggers expressed pride in consuming in a sensible and carefully considered way:

(67)

I hadn't given into the hype as I'd read many a mixed review, and I literally have a gazillion lip balms on the go, at the moment.

Blogger (2) Jan 9, 2014

(68)

The tablet world is a bit of an alien mindfield to me so I made sure I had a quick look at Acer tablet reviews before taking the plunge.

Blogger (4) Dec 15, 2013

Despite the product in question being hyped, Blogger (2) reports on having been rational and considered the negative aspects of purchasing the product, namely having read mixed reviews and already owning enough similar products. Blogger (4) similarly emphasizes the consideration that she did “before taking the plunge”. This tendency indicates that being in control of one's spending and making sensible and considered consumer choices is seen as a virtue. Giving “into the hype”, as Blogger (2) discusses, is seen to portray lack of control. Considering the bloggers' general tendency of regarding consumption as a way of reflecting personality and characteristics, as discussed earlier, it could be concluded that some of the bloggers may juxtapose being in control of one's consuming habits with being in control of one's life, as a whole. Perhaps some of the bloggers regard indulging in uncontrolled conspicuous consumption as something silly and superficial, something they want to separate themselves from. This occasional habit of emphasizing rational consumer choices, thus,

indicates that limiting spending or consuming in rational ways may work as a way of constructing identity. Some of the bloggers, most prominently Blogger (6), probably reported on trying to consume less or more consciously in order to appear convincing, classy and in control.

The bloggers often gave excuses for why they were buying extensively. Feeling love for and being obsessed with products was the most typical excuse for the bloggers to justify conspicuous consumption. The bloggers often explained their inability to resist buying with their obsession and lack of control with something so compelling. The good qualities of a product were important in emphasizing the irresistibility of it. Similarly, the bloggers often portrayed consuming as a necessity when in reality it was not, and used this as their excuse for buying anyway.

(69)

This outfit features two articles in my wardrobe I am consistantly obsessed with; an Urban Renewal trench that I tried on whim and purchased for \$10 three and half years ago. I feel like Carmen San Diego and Inspector Gadget's *ultra cool* lovechild when I where it. The other piece is a Wilfred fedora that my friend Andy gave to me. It may be my most complimented chapeau...no one can resist a perfectly peaked crown!

Blogger (5) Nov 6, 2013

(70)

I wanted to pick über delicate pieces to contrast with the industrial nature of the navy button-up and dark denim I was wearing that day. Also, rose gold is my favorite type of metal, so these pieces were a must.

Blogger (7) Nov 16, 2013

In excerpt (69) Blogger (5) lists very typical reasons for indulging in consumption: She describes being “obsessed” with products and states that “no one can resist” them, this way denying her own responsibility in the purchase, as she portrays herself as no different from anybody else and the product as irresistible. She also exaggerates the good qualities of the products with word choices and the use of superlatives, such as

“ultra cool”, “most complimented” and “perfectly peaked”. Blogger (7) similarly describes her purchases “über delicate” and “favorite”, and states that the pieces were “a must”, dispelling her own initiative in making the choice. The last sentence also portrays a simple consequence: When a product is really good, it must be purchased and no other excuses are needed.

As with the case of irresistible feelings of love or passion, what was common to all the excuses was the expression of lack of power, of being a victim of outside forces that compelled one to consume. A typical way of portraying consumption was to portray it as normative action. Some bloggers expressed the idea that excess shopping is something that young women are almost self-evidently impelled to. In example (71) Blogger (1) uses this normativity as her excuse, claiming that in January people are simply supposed to reinvent themselves by consuming more:

(71)

I'm not quite sure why I'm so full of lust for new things this month, I guess it's because January is always heralded as a time for reinvention and it turns out, I want to reinvent my shoe collection, my wardrobe and my haircare regime!

Blogger (1) Jan 7, 2014

The bloggers also used phrases that showed how they were trying to take a passive role and elude responsibility for their consumer choices by claiming that their consumption “simply happened”, which was often done in a humorous way:

(72)

I'm not sure how it happened, but I've noticed a shift in my wardrobe.

Blogger (5) Jan 14, 2014

(73)

I appear to be putting on more mini skirts and vest tops in the mornings.

Blogger (4) Jan 19, 2014

Härkönen (2011:35), for example, has discussed the “ecological-ethical” attitudes that fashion bloggers show towards consumption. The bloggers of her study described

consuming sensibly a virtue. In Härkönen's study, this rationality showed in the bloggers' habit of estimating the price-quality ratio of products, as well as purchasing products in the sales and avoiding purchasing on impulse. As Härkönen (2011:35) discusses, it is particularly a part of occidental, protestant cultural tradition to consume in a considered way. My findings therefore support Härkönen's views and bring forward concrete ways in which bloggers portray considered consuming as a virtue.

#### **4.3.2 Conscious consumption**

As many, such as Moisander (1996), discuss, consuming ethically, acknowledging the consequences of one's consumer behavior, has become more and more fashionable in recent years. Human rights and the conditions of workers are often listed as significant downsides of mass production, but these aspects were not highlighted in the selected blogs with the exception of Blog (6). However, another set of data could have brought this up more strongly. Instead, the bloggers of my study particularly made comments that had to do with environmental issues.

Each one of the bloggers in my study expressed some ideas that can be interpreted to promote more conscious consumption. Mostly these ideas were shown to emphasize the good qualities of one particular product, as in excerpt (74) by Blogger (2). Sometimes do-it-yourself, repairing used articles and tuning one's own was introduced as environmentally friendly, as in excerpt (75) by Blogger (3). Many of the bloggers also often reported on buying second-hand fashion items, but Blogger (6) was the only one to voice any ethical thinking behind this tendency. In most accounts of conscious consumption there seemed to be no real ideology behind these expressions: many bloggers who reported on acquiring large amounts of rather inexpensive products (thus possibly often produced as cheap as possible in doubtful conditions) at frequent intervals would occasionally comment on a certain product because of its supposed ethical value. Blogger (2), for example, often shows off her garments and cosmetic products, newly acquired from Primark and other affordable chain stores. On many occasions she shows satisfaction in her purchases when she has made them particularly cheap, which indicates that the low price is an important value for her when making consumer choices. In my data she does not pay any attention to the materials or ways in which the products that she buys are manufactured, apart from one exception, when she

praises a face cleanser that she has purchased:

(74)

I love that it's so exfoliating, thanks to the polenta and flour! Which leads me onto another reason why I love this so much: it's made of natural ingredients! (And it's vegan too!)

Blogger (2) Jan 24, 2014

A similar example is provided by Blogger (3)'s blog post where she introduces the idea of making book covers herself instead of buying them from the store:

(75)

While you can go out and buy pre-made book covers, you can also make them at home for free, which is good for the environment.

Blogger (3) Nov 19, 2013

Before this example, which appears in the last blog post of my data from Blogger (3), she never expresses any concern for the environment with her consuming habits. These and some other examples from the blogs lead me to suggest that, despite expressing some pro-ethical consumption ideas, most of these bloggers are only taking part in a fashion and ethical statements that are made of certain products only work as a curiosity, adding the value of the product without being a value in itself. Moisander (1996), for example, has introduced the idea of consumers' attempts to give a certain impression of themselves through conscious consumer choices. She, however, talks about expressing an entire lifestyle by consuming consciously. However, my perception is that these bloggers were simply trying to seem more aware and up-to-date with their rare accounts of green consumption.

Blogger (6) makes an exception by consuming critically and paying attention to ethical issues in most of her consumer choices, and is in this way a typical example of a consumer that constructs identity by consuming consciously, as introduced by Moisander (1996). She consciously searches for small brands and products that herald ethical values, taking pride in her awareness. Being an ethical consumer is clearly an important part of her identity, something that she sees as separating her from others and lifting her above the usual chain store consumer, as briefly discussed in chapter 4.1.

In spite of her extensive emphasis on consuming critically, Blogger (6), however, is not entirely consistent. She, for example, seems to purchase just as many fashion items as the other bloggers in my study, without many of them appearing more than once in the blog. She justifies her excessive buying with accounts of buying vintage clothes that have already been worn by someone else and by buying from brands that take ethical aspects of manufacturing into consideration. However, she, for example, also introduces a whole series of products that she has bought from *Urban Outfitters*, a chain store directed at a hipster population, who are often regarded as most interested in building their identity by consuming to appear ethical and conscious (e.g. "Vice and Hipsterdom Walk Hand in Hand into the Mainstream", 2014). However, unlike in many other cases, she does not shed light on any ways in which *Urban Outfitters* would be an ethical choice. This indicates that the "hipster" status of *Urban Outfitters* as a brand, which is seen to include the concepts of *aware* and *critical*, is enough for Blogger (6), and, unlike with some more unknown brands, she ignores the actual ethicality of her purchase. This indicates that for Blogger (6) identifying as an ethical consumer may, after all, have much of its value as a status symbol in addition to (or perhaps even instead of) being an ideological choice.

### 4.3.3 Distancing oneself from consumer culture

A typical negative perception of consumption, and excess buying, in particular, was that it makes us shallow and concerned with material values, somehow detaching us from what we really are. Other bloggers expressed this idea, too, but Blogger (6) most explicitly words her thoughts:

(76)

I have totally alienated from the blog world and have even started to doubt if I should continue with this. I have no desire to make you guys buy more clothes. The whole fashion industry has indeed started to feel revolting to me. It's so fake, unethical and polluting that it is sick how so few people question it. I haven't even visited fast fashion stores for at least six to eight months. I haven't been buying new clothes like I used to. I haven't even read any fashion blogs for months.

At the end of the day, what truly matters is my family and the closest people around me.

What you own will end up owning you. Build up your reality from things that matter. You will always be looking for that other dress. You will never be

satisfied. This will only keep you going on an endless road of suffering. Dispatch yourself from the materialistic world.

Blogger (6) Jan 18, 2014

In excerpt (76) Blogger (6) uses very strong words to describe how “revolting” and “fake” she finds the fashion industry, describing her disengagement from the fashion and blog world. She states that other things, namely her family and the closest people around her are what truly matter. She seems to indicate that these two somehow cannot go hand in hand, and excess fashion consumption is detaching her from those important things. Later on, she more directly states that material possessions detach people from “things that matter” and bring about dissatisfaction, even “suffering”. After this outburst, however, Blogger (6) returns to her usual ways in the blog post that follows this one.

Blogger (1) also does some philosophical analysis of the role of consumption in her life, concluding that there are other things more meaningful:

(77)

When I think of the change that would have the most impact on my life, it's not my job (though there will be great change in that area in 2014), my house, my bank balance or anything I could buy or be given. It's the goings-on inside my head, my attitudes towards myself and the habits I have developed that contribute negatively to my stress levels and my confidence and general contentment.

Blogger (1) Jan 2, 2014

Blogger (1) also feels that possessing too many material goods may be a cause of stress. In this extract she describes getting rid of some items in order to feel calmer:

(78)

My first task when I returned from holiday last weekend was to have a bit of a war on clutter. Much to Tom's annoyance I collected all of the items on various surfaces in the lounge, hallway and kitchen and piled them up on the dining table. My Saturday project was to either find them a home, bin them or put them to a charity shop. It took a few hours but it was so worth it, it makes me feel much calmer now walking into a room without various small items, books, DVDs and bits of paper piled up everywhere.

Blogger (1) Jan 24, 2014

Blogger (1) states that she feels “much calmer” after getting rid of excess material possessions, calling the process “a war”. This reveals her negative attitude towards too many possessions; the items seem to have lost any significance and enjoyment that they may have brought for Blogger (1) earlier, simply becoming “clutter” in her eyes. They end up becoming a cause of stress, which can be relieved by getting rid of them.

Zavestoski, (2001: 175-177) for example, has discussed the dissociation from consumerism as a main tool for self-formation that some people feel the need to make. He explains that these people no longer feel that consumption works as a method for “overcoming stress, dissatisfaction and lack of fulfillment”, in other words becoming happy and feeling good about themselves. Zavestoski also discusses the desire for authenticity of many consumers, introduced by many others, which concentrating on pursuing material wealth and goods is seen to distract. According to this view, consuming less and avoiding constructing one's image of the self on consumption brings individuals closer to what they really are. Bloggers (1) and (6) clearly represent this view in some of their accounts of consumption. They, compatibly with Zavestoski's findings, express the idea that conspicuous consumption detaches us from our true nature and consequently seek authenticity by reducing their consuming, consumer talk and getting rid of material possessions, as in the case of Blogger (1). For the bloggers, however, these feelings seem to come and go, and apart from occasional accounts of anti-consumerist ideas they consume rather freely.

## 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study, I have aimed to give light to the ways in which young female fashion bloggers portray consuming in their blogs and the kinds of meanings, values and attitudes that they attach to consumption. My particular interests were to examine what significance young women give to consumption in their life, but also to reveal how bloggers portray consumption as a normative action. Blogs are a good example of what Bruns (2008) calls *produsage*, a phenomenon where the boundaries between traditional media and the private sphere are intertwined. Bloggers, who are private persons writing with their own voice, have become authorities and role models for many young women and thus can influence the way in which consumption is seen and valued among young women, in general. This is why more conscious attention should be paid to learning to read blog texts critically.

I conducted my study by analyzing the consumer discourses in seven different blogs written by young females from the United States, the United Kingdom and Finland, concentrating on blog posts from late 2013 and January 2014. I paid attention to the bloggers direct, unconcealed accounts of consuming, but also tried to detect ideas and values that the bloggers did not explicitly voice, but which they nevertheless, consciously or subconsciously, portrayed. I used Strauss and Corbin's (1998) coding frame, typically used to create grounded theory, as my guideline for creating categories and subcategories based on typical ideas that arose from my data. I will now summarize the results of the study, after which I will discuss the limitations of the study and my findings and their significance in everyday life.

### 5.1 Main findings

My main finding was that the bloggers viewed and presented consumption as an important identity constructor. Most of my other findings are based on this notion. This came as no surprise, since the identity constructive powers of consumption have been discussed since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, first by Veblen (1899), and later on by many others (see chapter 2). Identity construction was in the background of most consumer choices and the way in which consuming was portrayed. The most important aspect of identity that the bloggers were portraying was femininity. Each one of the bloggers

sought to express their own type of femininity, but there were also many similarities between the bloggers. In many ways they constructed a traditional femininity, which concretely manifests in their way of emphasizing their feminine qualities, such as sweetness and strong interest in appearance, and using language in a way that is deemed typically feminine. They nevertheless also expressed some characteristics that are often deemed typical of strong, emancipated femininity, such as independence, and courage through consumption. The bloggers expressed this empowered femininity by presenting themselves as active agents in the process of consuming, seeking for products that matched their taste and persona. They also felt that they were fulfilling their creativity by consuming in inventive ways and putting together outfits. The bloggers also sought to portray themselves as unique individuals, separate themselves from other people, and often did this by lifting themselves in an expert position in the field of fashion consumption, giving advice to their readers.

A similar notion on bloggers emphasizing their femininity in fashion blogs has been made by Härkönen (2011), for example. She, however, did not distinguish between traditional and modern, empowered femininity. Härkönen (2011) did point out that whereas consumers have often been regarded as passive, modern bloggers emphasize their active role in consuming, a finding that the results of the present study strongly support. Many others, such as McRobbie (2009) and Talbot (2010), have also found that consumption is portrayed to signal feminine empowerment, but they concentrate on representations in traditional media, such as magazines.

Despite expressing confidence and self-awareness, the bloggers also implied that they could and should change themselves and acquire certain characteristics by wearing the right clothes, or at least give the impression of possessing such characteristics. Some bloggers particularly reported on becoming more confident, which was seen to go hand in hand with purchasing and wearing fashionable clothes. Another way of constructing identity for some bloggers was clearly separating themselves from people who consumed in different, undesirable ways. At the same time, the bloggers also expressed belonging to a certain group through their consumer choices. Some bloggers, for example, acknowledged their togetherness to other fashion bloggers. The bloggers also expressed concerns to be on top of trends and fitting in their social groups.

Fashion consumption as signaling individuality on the one hand, but belonging to a group on the other hand, is a widely acknowledged phenomenon. Simmel (1905) was one of the first to address it, and, for example, Härkönen (2011) has more recently found that even today fashion blogs portray fashion consumption as something that unifies social groups. Talbot (2010), in turn, found that the teenage readers of *Jackie* were encouraged to join a sisterhood of adult women by consuming a particular consumer item.

Consumption was seen to make life more meaningful and add to its quality. Some bloggers sought for new, exciting experiences by consuming. This finding goes hand in hand with those of Mehita (2011), for example, who noted that magazines portray consumption as a key to an exciting, fulfilling life. The bloggers of my study portrayed travelling abroad as one of the most typical ways to do this, but often individual products were similarly portrayed to bring about excitement and enjoyment. In addition, the bloggers valued the entire process of purchasing new objects: not just the product itself, but also the conditions in which it had been bought added to the value of it. Products were also conveyed to signify other, more meaningful things, such as love, new decisions and goals in life. The bloggers also discussed many consumer items in a way that made them sound human-like, thus emphasizing the role of consumption in their lives. They expressed feelings of appreciation and togetherness related to certain products that were particularly important to them and that had been in use continuously, this way adding the experienced value of them. Particularly typical was expressing romantic love, or at least using language typically used in it. The love that the bloggers expressed towards consumer goods was often forbidden and out-of-reach and included the feelings of lust and obsession, the same way that romantic love between people does. Wearing certain clothes or buying new products was also seen to lift one's spirits and pampering oneself and others had stress-reducing capacities.

On the other hand, all of the bloggers also expressed at least some negative or critical attitudes towards consumption. Consuming too much and for the purpose of constructing identity was seen as shallow and alienating from one's true nature, and non-material aspects of life were regarded as more meaningful. The type of femininity that was constructed through conspicuous consumption was occasionally regarded as unfavorable. In addition, consuming consciously was mentioned by all bloggers, but

this was mostly done for identity constructive reasons and for appearing up-to-date with the trend of green consumption. Other reasons for the choice, such as reducing the negative impacts of production on the environment or the conditions of workers in production countries were only seldom mentioned. Some of the bloggers expressed guilt at their consumer behavior, but found excuses for why they nevertheless kept on with it. These bloggers conveyed conspicuous consumption as a norm, obsession and necessity, eluding the responsibility for their own consumer choices. Similar findings have been made by Härkönen (2011), for example, who found in her study that fashion bloggers portrayed an “ecological-ethical” consumerism, where the bloggers described making considered consumer choices. All of the bloggers in Härkönen's study conveyed this view more strongly than most of the bloggers in my study. Härkönen, however, concentrated on Finnish bloggers and described “ecological-ethical” consumer ethics as a typically western, but above all, Finnish tradition. Most of my bloggers are British or American, so Härkönen's view may be correct.

## **5.2 Limitations of the study**

I managed to gather a good understanding of how young female fashion bloggers portray consumption and what meanings, values and attitudes they attach to it. However, the scope of the study is limited and concentrating on only seven bloggers is not sufficient to make certain claims about the way in which bloggers, in general, present consumption. In hindsight I should have been more precise in defining the criteria for choosing the blogs. My goal was to choose a variety of blogs that would represent a large spectrum of fashion blogs in the blogosphere. However, whereas other blogs somewhat portrayed what I defined “mainstream” representation of consumption, Blogger (6) perhaps differed too much from other blogs, being the only Finnish blogger and the only one with strong criticism towards consumer culture. Despite this, Blogger (6) also portrayed consumption in a similar way to other bloggers in many respects. The problem was rather that my analysis on consumer criticism and conscious consumption was strongly based on Blogger (6)'s attitudes and values, and other bloggers only offered occasional examples to support findings made from Blogger (6). Particularly the part on conscious consumption in the present study, thus, would have benefitted from a wider variety of data, and more detailed analysis on the matter is required before applying these results to young women's views on conscious consumption, in general.

In addition, in hindsight, the study would have benefitted from a quantitative account of the frequencies of the tendencies that I detected. This way the reader of this thesis would have gained a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena and how common they were among the bloggers.

However, I believe that I managed to describe many interesting phenomena and prove my findings in a way that helps gain insight into young female bloggers' ideas, values and attitudes towards consumption. My overall findings may also apply to many young women's depiction of consumption. The substantial role allowed for consumption in identity construction and in adding meaning to our lives, as well as attaching positive feelings, and on the other hand feeling guilty about excess consumption, are examples of results that I drew and believe are applicable on a wider level.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

My aim was to provide a broad understanding of the often hidden ways in which consumption is portrayed as an essential part of our life today, and give tools with which to approach both media texts and our own attitudes more critically, challenging the importance of the role that consumption is allowed. Blogs offer a fruitful media to observe the issue from different viewpoints at the same time. On the one hand, we follow blogs as outsiders, regarding blog posts as media texts, which we may even know should be read critically in order to question the ideas and values conveyed by them. On the other hand, bloggers as new types of media producers are just private persons that usually write subjectively about their personal experiences, often in a diary-like way. Any one of us could become a blogger and we often relate to bloggers and their posts on a personal level. This is why detecting often normative ideas and values in blogs may be more difficult or take more effort compared to being critical of other media texts. In addition, modern bloggers have become small-scale celebrities, and blog readers may look up to the bloggers, dreaming of the same lifestyle. Blogs are also full of marketing collaborations these days, so the blogger could actually be advertising products and companies without the reader understanding this. This also portrays a very consumption-centered image of life to fashion blog readers. Critically examining the role of consumption in blogs may make us more aware of our own subconscious attitudes and be helpful in questioning them. This thesis has played its part in creating

this awareness.

In the present study fashion consumption was found out to have many positive effects, such as having fun and easing stress, so I do not see it exclusively harmful, as do many others that I have cited in this theses, such as McRobbie (2009) and Talbot (2010). Instead, I want to point out that when fashion consumption is not allowed too big a role in our identity construction and life, in general, it can add to our everyday experience and be a source of enjoyment and self-fulfillment. However, I am worried about the attitude that obtains in the fashion blogosphere of consumption being an effective basis on which to construct one's identity and confidence. The bloggers of my study themselves often felt that they were expressing their true persona and letting it blossom by consuming, hardly ever acknowledging that constructing one's self-image on that basis could in any way be harmful or limiting. Although the bloggers themselves merely regarded changing oneself for the better by consuming as fun and empowering, I agree with McRobbie (2009), Talbot (2010) and many others who suggest that in the background there lies an expectation to fit the model of generally accepted femininity. Along the lines of ideas of McRobbie and Talbot, for example, my view is that teenage girls and young women are particularly susceptible to influences and pressures in the social media, and the interactivity and first-hand personal experience it offers in contrast to traditional media, as discussed above, makes it even harder to question these offered models. When women learn to register and challenge these normative expectations on what Talbot calls consumer femininity in social media as well as traditional media, they hopefully also learn to base their identity on other things, such as their interests and ambitions, too, and take pleasure in consuming on their own terms.

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