Master’s Thesis

FASHION BLOGGER’S METHODS OF COMMUNICATION OF CONSUMPTION EXPERIENCE

Based on qualitative research of StyleOnTheCouch fashion blogger practice

By

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Abstract

This paper is an exploratory study aimed at examining methods of consumption experience communication within fashion blogging context. The study is based on a qualitative descriptive semi-structured interview exploring the fashion blog communication practice of StyleOnTheCouch fashion blog. This paper proposes a holistic conceptual model of use of multiple communication methods taking place in fashion blogging, their co-existence, and influential aspects having an impact on the choice of the particular methods. To support the conceptual model creation as a generalized outcome of the study research, Chapter 6.1, the research questions in Chapter 1.3 have been constructed.

Fashion blogging recently became one of the sources for inspiration and information for audiences interested in fashion-related topics. Fashion bloggers present their own experience with new fashion trends and styles on web pages of their blogs.

This study of the personal internet-based fashion blog is oriented at clarifying what methods the fashion blogger includes in his/her personal communication strategy, what characteristics that can enhance the process of communication through the blog does the fashion blog possess as a communication channel, what possibilities of using marketing purposed elements there are in the fashion-related blog context.

This study also presents potential practical application of the found conceptual knowledge in Integrated Marketing Communication perspective for fashion brands, as well as suggestion for future research regarding process of communication within fashion blogging.

Preface

The idea to investigate specifics of communication process within fashion blogging is inspired by my personal motivation. On the one hand, I have been interested in fashion for many years. I appreciate the new computer-mediated forms, such as blogging, which reinforce my interest by easier access to overviews of fashion collections, new trends and brands. I have been following a number of personal fashion blogs. The personal characteristic of the fashion blogs has always been attractive for me because of the sense of emotional closeness with a particular fashion blogger. I noticed that fashion bloggers use not only one approach to communicate their experiences by making videos or posting pictures of fashionable items, but that they combine several methods.
On the other hand, my educational background in Corporate Communication Master program at Aarhus University nurtured my interest in Integrated Marketing Communication studies. I am particularly interested how the usage of emotional and sensorial links with audiences contributes to the communication process, and as a consequence, increases the level of loyalty.

The research questions that I pose in this study are aimed at gaining deep insight into the personal independent fashion blog, and illustrate the fashion blogger’s incentives to communicate and create emotional ties with the audiences.

I would like to thank my professor, Joan Pape Rasmussen, for providing insight and support throughout the duration of this study project.

I would like to thank the fashion blogger, the creator of StyleOnTheCouch fashion blog, who participated in my research as an interviewee and helped me to obtain the data for this study.

Introduction

Modern computer-mediated sources attempt to find more interesting and creative ways to provide their audiences with needed information and new learning about fashion news (Lankshear, 2006, p. 2). Recently, fashion blogging has become a communicative tool that provides audiences with multiple channels and views on fashion experience. The personal identity of the blogger standing behind any fashion blog has an important and influential impact on the process and content of communication (Thelwall & Staurt, 2007, p. 524). Fashion bloggers communicate not only latest fashion trends, but also their consumption experience related to dreaming about, talking about a particular clothing item or brand, moment of the purchase, service at the store or packaging, the level of satisfaction of the purchasing process or purchased item, and memories and emotions related to this particular purchasing experience (Carù & Cova, 2003, p. 271). This personal consumption experience can be communicated to mass audience by using technical features of a personal blog or methods and techniques of communication described in communication theory.

This study attempts to explore what kind of methods can contribute to the communication of the fashion blogger’s consumption experience towards an audience interested in fashion and how the fashion blogger’s self-identity can influence the
selection of the certain methods. Three theoretical directions of methods of experience communication that can be used by bloggers have been chosen. These directions are: traditional communication methods used through the blog, special characteristics of the blog that may support the communication flow, and experiential marketing approach (Schmitt, 1999), which may support the communication process and create emotional ties with audiences.

Each of these theoretical directions can be deeply studied in relation to fashion blogging. However, the idea of this study is to examine what methods can be used and applied by the fashion blogger in order to reinforce and influence the process of consumption of experience communication. This study is not aimed at detailed consideration of each method of sending messages to audience using blogs, or evaluating its experiential content. Instead, this study is aimed at investigating and understanding the feasibility of multiple communication methods taking place in fashion blogging, their co-existence in a holistic sense, level of integration within the process of communication, and the role of the blogger’s self-identity in building of the communication process.

A semi-structured qualitative interview with an experienced fashion blogger has been selected as the main empirical data collection approach (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The chosen fashion blogger has four years blogging experience of an independent personal fashion blog. To ensure credibility of the qualitative data gained by the selected fashion blogger, this study has been supported by the grounded theory method to provide a pre-understanding and contribute to further analysis focusing on meanings.

**Structure of the study**

This study is presented in several chapters. Here is their outline for easier navigation.

Chapter 1. “Problem definition” presents the scope of the study, problem statement, and research questions that the study attempts to answer.

Chapter 2. “Review of theory” presents the relevant theory as the foundation of existing knowledge about fashion blogging and other related concepts, as well as approaches and perspectives of the relevant theory.

Chapter 3. “Scientific position” presents the scientific method that this study employs to answer research questions.
Chapter 4. “Research design” presents all information about how the research has been carried out.

Chapter 5. “Analysis” presents the analysis based on the pre-understanding and collected data, and the findings of this analysis.

Chapter 6. “Discussion” presents the theoretical model generated through data analysis, potential practical application and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 7. “Conclusion” presents the main conclusions of this study.

1. Problem definition

1.1. Problem statement

The purpose of this study is to investigate what kind of methods of fashion blogger communication can be used in order to provide the bloggers’ consumption experience to audiences interested in fashion. Fashion blogging is one of the most popular and browseable topics within social media. In recent years, fashion blogs on Youtube, Instagram, Facebook, and other online platforms are gaining mass popularity (Chittenden, 2009). Video and photo as communication tools support writing texts to share personal experiences, critique, response, recommend or advise against certain purchased products and brands (Schmidt, 2007, p. 1413). The overall methods of online communication, such as visual and written, can be applicable to blogs with various content topics. This study focuses on the communication methods used by fashion-specific blogs. Blog as a channel of communication between blogger and audience possesses many options for sharing experiences. In addition to the technical features of any blog, it is characterized by a need for active participation and engagement of the blogger himself to provide a strong social contact (Trusov, Bodapati, & Bucklin, 2009, p. 5). Therefore it is interesting to analyze how these and other characteristics of a blog as a social media can support the process of experience communication.

Communication provided by social media, which blogs are considered part of, establishes meanings and experiences, which has ability to influence audience (Kotler, 2010, pp. 9-10). Therefore blogs can be used by brands and companies to create meanings, establish horizontal relationships, and increase brand or product loyalty by providing experience to current or potential consumers (Kotler, 2010, pp. 9-10).

However, personal fashion blogs are managed by independent bloggers, who may have different motivations to create own fashion blog. Engaging audiences on a more
emotional level is among these reasons. Elements of experiential marketing can be consciously and unconsciously used by bloggers to create emotional ties with audiences (Ornbo, Sneppen, & Wurtz, 2008, p. 13). This marketing communication approach leads to consider a question of application of experiential marketing methods in the blogs.

1.2. Scope of the study

This study investigates methods of communication from the blogger's perspective. The blogger’s identity and his/her methods of communication through the blog are the central objects of the study. This study does not address how the blogger influences the audiences by methods of communication, and does not intend to treat the audiences in particular. It is not concentrated on a blog as a marketing tool, instead it considers a personal independent blog based and structured by a certain person. This paper is focused on studying how the blogger builds his/her communication through the blog to share personal consumption experiences and then generate more emotional and close relationships with audiences on a personal level. To understand this, it is necessary to explore what methods and techniques of communication are possible to use in connection with the specific fashion content.

Identity of the blogger and the personal fashion blog's specific properties are selected as the central perspectives. The blogger’s personal experience, self-identity, willingness and reasons to share experiences, his/her level of involvement into the fashion topic, and possibility of the blogger’s emotional reflection through the blog are critical for this study. This is because blogging can be used as a channel to express these personal implications; furthermore self-expression is a core of any personal blog (Newson, Houghton, & Patten, 2008, p. 24). These personal implications of the blogger may influence the communication process by shaping certain methods of communication according to personal understanding of these methods and their influential power on building the blogger’s social-oriented identity (Miller & Shepherd, 2003). Figure 1. Chart of the scope of the study shows the contextual concepts, concepts where the study is concentrated, and their cognitive interrelation.
Fashion blogger and the blog are the central concepts on the presented chart. Gaining consumption experience consists of pre-consumption experience (dreaming about a certain product, talking, planning to purchase), purchase experience (purchasing act, service at the store), core consumption experience (sensations about the product, level of satiety, satisfaction/dissatisfaction), and remembered consumption (nostalgia, memories, stories about the product or its purchasing) (Carù & Cova, 2003, p. 271). Conditioned by fashion context, the blogger interprets it according to his/her knowledge, experience, identity and world perception. The interpreted consumption experience is broadcasted by the blogger in a variety of communicative forms like written statements or photo reports within a personal blog (Chittenden, 2009, p. 517). The personal blog itself as a communicative tool, the communicative content, and the particular methods of communication build a communication process between the blogger and audiences (Schmidt, 2007, pp. 1410-1411).

The following research questions are concentrated on understanding what methods of communication can be used by the blogger, and what is the role of the blogger’s identity and his/her world perception during implementation of these methods for sharing consumption experience.
1.3. Research questions

1. Which methods of communication are used by the fashion blogger to share the consumption experience, and what role does the fashion blogger's self-identity play in the choice of the certain methods?

Communication methods within blogging are the main research topic in this study. They are broadly studied in different perspectives by modern social scientists. These methods are developed according to the nature of information exchange organized by individual bloggers through the blogs. These methods are developed according to the nature of blogging, which, in its turn, is built on a well-defined blog structure and rules (Schmidt, 2007, p. 1411). These methods contain: textual and visual demonstration of experience, possibility of commenting, sharing sources and links, designing a blog according to the particular topic of the blog and other methods (Schmidt, 2007, pp. 1411-1412); (Lankshear, 2006, p. 3); (Newson, Houghton, & Patten, 2008, p. 24). These methods will be described in details further in Chapter 2.

However, after examining literature on this subject, it is possible to argue that there appears to be a lack of studies regarding process of communication specifically within fashion blogging context. This lack of studies creates an uncertainty and obscurity of the possibility using the same methods of communication that are used by blogs with content other than fashion. Furthermore, this study is delimited to consider only consumption experience sharing by the blogger. Consumption experience theory is also conceptualized with its scientific nature (Carù & Cova, 2003). These narrow specifications of contextual concepts are taking place around the main research objectives such as blogger’s self-identity and the fashion blog, and lead to construct and then answer the research question above. Self-identification of the fashion blogger can play a particular role. First of all, a personal blog requires to be built on the personality of the blogger (Chittenden, 2009). Michael Hammond argues that the blogger also constructs his/her social-oriented identity using blogging (Hammond, 2006). The second part of this research question is aimed at provide an understanding of what aspects of a unique identity of an individual may influence the process of constructing the blogger’s social identity.
2. **What characteristics does a fashion blog possess as an interpersonal communicative tool to support experience communication?**

Blogging is a new form of computer-mediated channel of communication (Lankshear, 2006, p. 2). The content structure of any blog prescribes daily or frequent updates of posts with a content fulfillment according to the blog’s topic (Robbins, 2009, p. 9). Any blog possesses clear rules and structures that identify a blog in its nature (Schmidt, 2007, p. 1411). Going beyond the technical features of the blog, which are not a part of the objectives of this study, the blog possesses a number of characteristics that make it possible to identify a blog as a communication tool (Schmidt, 2007, pp. 1410-1412). The main characteristic is active participation of the blogger, his/her motivation to update the blog with information on a daily basis (Trusov, Bodapati, & Bucklin, 2009).

This research question is interested in the characteristics of the fashion blog as a communication tool, which is able to contribute to the communication process of the blogger’s consumption experience. To answer this research question, the level of the blogger’s participation will be examined. A comparison of the previously defined theoretical rules of the blog as an interpersonal communicative tool with the practical properties of the fashion blog will be implemented to examine fulfillment of these rules.

3. **Can experiential marketing approach be used by fashion bloggers to reinforce experience communication process?**

Personal blog is an instrument that allows the blogger to get in touch with audiences by creation of experiences within the blog (Kotler, 2010, pp. 10-11). Modern communication theory is mostly describing this blog’s possibility to use the marketing approaches, such as co-creation or involvement of senses and feelings into experience creation and sharing (Kotler, 2010, pp. 10-11). From integrated marketing perspective, experience communication is aimed at involving consumers into dialogue and increasing the level of trust among consumers towards brands and companies (Kotler, 2010, p. 11). However, common sense of experiential marketing approach is creation of emotional ties with consumers (Ornbo, Sneppen, & Wurtz, 2008, pp. 13-15). This research question has been posed to explore the possibility of existence and use of these marketing communication techniques by the fashion blogger. Furthermore, this research question seeks to examine how the blogger establishes emotional foundations with audiences aimed at involving followers by own experience sharing and creation.
2. Review of theory

2.1. Blogging within modern social networks

2.1.1. Concept of social networks

Concept of social networks has firmly entered into the 21st century, and taken a significant place in the media communication. The use of social networks in companies as a marketing tool or among individuals, as an easiest way to communicate with each other, became popular because of some “multimedia ingredients” (Schneider & Huber, 2008, p. 3) and interactive tools with benefits of two-ways communication (Schneider & Huber, 2008, p. 3). Now social networks have different computer-based social networking services, such as social media pages or online communities with a possibility of easy access and account creation for everyone (Tuomi, 2001). An account in any social network does not only provide an opportunity for large-scale communication, but is also valuable for companies to influence consumers. The way to achieve this using online communication tools is to involve consumers into dialogue about brands and analyze what is said (Court, Elzinga, & Mulder, 2009, p. 9).

Social networks cannot be considered only as a marketing tool. First of all, those are social phenomena, which in most of cases have been created to share opinions among people with similar interests. Anthony Robbins, in his book Twitter Power, emphasized the social contribution of social media – “the publishing is now about participation” (Robbins, 2009, p. 3). He was referring to any posts in social media designed to receive feedback and involve social media members into discussion (Robbins, 2009, p. 3).

The most popular social media pages, such as Facebook, Youtube, or Twitter, consist of many online communities and sub-communities, which could be created by individuals with similar lifestyle and hobbies. One of the most accurate definitions of online community has been given by Jenny Preece (2000):

“People who interact socially as they strive to satisfy their own needs or perform special roles; a shared purpose that provides a reason for the community; policies that guide people’s interactions; and computer systems to support and mediate social interaction and facilitate a sense of togetherness” (Preece, 2000, p. 10).

The motivation for using online communities is sharing opinions, which could be supported by audio-visual content, contributing of forum discussions, sharing sources of information (Schneider & Huber, 2008, p. 2).
2.1.2. The blog and its main characteristics

A phenomenon of the blog can be described as “a website that is updated frequently, with new material posted at the top of the page” (Lankshear, 2006, p. 2). Blog is a new computer-mediated communication channel (Schmidt, 2007, p. 1409). In the paper Blogging as Participation: The Active Sociality of a New Literacy by Colin Lankshear and Michele Knobel, this definition of blogging by Torill Mortensen was considered:

“A true-born child of the computer medium, the weblog may have its roots in the research journal, the ship’s log, the private diary and the newspapers, all at the same time” (Lankshear, 2006, p. 2).

Blog hosting services offer easy creation of blogs for creating and updating content. The blogs are read like regular reports, expressing opinions on any subject with the possibility of the feedback by leaving comments (Lankshear, 2006, p. 3). However, blogs have clear rules and structure, which do not affect content of the publication, but keep a particular blog-page structure and sequence of comments (Robbins, 2009, p. 9).

Blogs can be categorized regarding their content fulfillment (Newson, Houghton, & Patten, 2008, p. 4). There are some of the most popular categories: academic, arts, business, food, personal, technology, etc. (Newson, Houghton, & Patten, 2008, pp. 4-5).

From the communication perspective, it is important that the blog is a source of information, regardless the content (Treadaway & Smith, 2012, p. 127). Blogs provide social contact, guidelines, and information to blog users (Tremayne, 2007, p. 130). Tara Chittenden working on her study “Digital dressing up: modeling female teen identity in the discursive spaces of the fashion blogosphere” argue that blogs have become an important tool not only for users, but also for the bloggers themselves (Chittenden, 2009, p. 517). Blogs allow people to learn about themselves and their relationships with others, and express themselves through text and visual features in the digital space (Chittenden, 2009, p. 517). Personal blog allows expressing a personal point of view, it is low-cost and little technical skill required (Hammond, 2006, p. 1). Michael Hammond argues that some bloggers can be seen

“as playing with identity, signaling an interplay between self-identity and socially constructed identity” (Hammond, 2006, p. 1).

By this statement he meant that personal blogs attempt to provide collaboration, ranging from feedback on individual thoughts to co-creation within shared space (Hammond, 2006, pp. 1-2). The blog is an ego-centered practice (Cardon, Delaunay-
Te’terel, & Fluckiger, 2007, p. 2), which means that blogger’s personal values and ideas are the core of the blog.

Blogs can also be politically and socially oriented, which may make blogs more popular bringing increased attention from visitors and media (Tremayne, 2007, p. 128). Blogs can use both one-way and two-way communication form at the same time (Tremayne, 2007, p. 130). Visitors may be actively engaged in the communication, or not (Treadaway & Smith, 2012, p. 129). Michael Trusov in his article Determining of Influential Users in Internet Social Networks argued that the main characteristic of the blog as a communication channel is active participation of the blogger him-/herself. He mentioned that the number of visitors of a certain blog fell during the blogger's vacation due to his/her passive participation in the updating of the blog (Trusov, Bodapati, & Bucklin, 2009, p. 5). Therefore, the level of participation can vary according to the blogger activity or visitors’ degree of engagement. In this case, the concept of participation of the both blogger and visitor is crucial.

Motivation to actively participate in the blogosphere is described by Mark Tremayne in his book Blogging, Citizenship and the Future of Media (Tremayne, 2007, pp. 127-130). He argues that the blog, as an online community, can be interesting for “online intellectuals” seeking the more in-depth analysis, which is not available using the traditional media (Tremayne, 2007, p. 130). However, bloggers tend to consider issues from one side, which contributes to a sense of belonging to a group of people with similar world-view (Treadaway & Smith, 2012, p. 130).

Barbara K. Kaye examined the motivations for establishing and using blogs for both parties: blogger and followers, where she analyzed a number of reasons for accessing blogs (Kaye, 2007). These motivations have been grouped by six factors: Information Seeking, Convenience, Personal Fulfillment, Political Surveillance, Social Surveillance and Expression/Affiliation (Kaye, 2007).

2.1.3. Rules and methods of communication through blogs

Blogging can be considered as a new form of media, which is comparable with traditional forms of media (Thelwall & Staurt, 2007, s. 524) (Thelwall & Staurt, 2007, p. 524). The blog is potentially a more democratic communication channel, because of the individuality of a blogger standing behind any blog (Thelwall & Staurt, 2007, pp. 524-530). Jan Schmidt noticed that no matter what communicative goal a blogger possesses,
blogging communicative practice would be developed by some precise rules (Schmidt, 2007, p. 1411). He describes procedural rules (Schmidt, 2007, p. 1411) of the blog communication process.

*Procedural rules* are framed here to consider reasons why the blog can be selected from other available media forms to achieve a specific communicative goal (Schmidt, 2007, p. 1413). Jan Schmidt these rules are:

1. **Selection.** This rule depends on the blogger as a recipient of media content. The blogger decides the informational sources and then frames the information with personal impact to share with audience. In its turn, the audience is influenced by the blogger’s selection of informational source and field of interest, as well as by the blogger’s social ties (other blogs on the same field of interest or friends’ blogs). Often bloggers share links to selected informational sources (Schmidt, 2007, p. 1412).

2. **Publication.** Publication rule depends on the blogger as an author of the media content (Schmidt, 2007, p. 1412). The blogger decides on the content and themes of the blog, topics to discuss and the way to present this content. Main methods to communicate the content are texts, pictures, podcasts, video files, and also blog design in general (Schmidt, 2007, p. 1413). Design of the blog-page plays important role. It somehow presents how the blogger view the world by using a specific design, and presenting his/her visual preferences.

“*Blogging is all about self-expression, and the design of your blog is an important part of expressing what your blog is about*” (Newson, Houghton, & Patten, 2008, p. 24).

However, the blogger's personal opinion and open dialogue are core elements of blog communication. Therefore, publishing a blog is a way to self-presentation that has to meet audience’s expectations about the blog and the blogger’s authenticity (Miller & Shepherd, 2003).

3. **Networking.** This rule considers the blogger as a network establisher (Schmidt, 2007, p. 1413). The blogger sets social relations of semantic references, which support continuous communication process (Schmidt, 2007, p. 1413). Main communicative techniques that allow expressing social ties are links within a posting or a blogroll (a listing of other blogs that blogger either subscribes to or recommends (HowStuffWorks.com, 2013)) or adding comments to other blogs (Schmidt, 2007, p. 1413).
2.2. Fashion blogging

2.2.1. Fashion as communication

The phenomenon of the fashion blog publicly appeared in 2006 (Fandrich, 2011, s. 444). Bloggers realized that the topic of fashion is demanded among large communities, therefore the amount of fashion blogs grew to meet the needs of the communities interested in fashion (Fandrich, 2011, pp. 444-445).

The interesting idea that fashion by itself can be perceived as communication has been described by Malcom Barnard in his book “Fashion as Communication”. He argues that from the cultural point of view, fashion possesses a communicative function (Barnard, 2002, p. 59). “Fashion and clothing symbolically tie a community together” (Barnard, 2002, p. 59). By this statement, he means that through his/her fashion style an individual communicates his/her position or belonging to a certain cultural group. A message that an individual sends towards the society using clothing can be identified by eight aspects described by Malcom Barnard:

1. **Individualistic expression.** Malcom Barnard refers to Roach and Eicher (1979) study, where they argue that fashion may be used to reinforce, reflect and create mood (Barnard, 2002, p. 60).

   Additionally, individualistic expression is closely linked to the self-identity concept (Barnard, 2002, p. 61). Fashion helps to construct self-perception and differentiate an individual within a society (Chittenden, 2009, p. 517). Tara Chittenden argues that fashion is a language by which individuals gain self-esteem in the impression they make; fashion also provides cultural and symbolical resources that construct identities (Chittenden, 2009, p. 512).

2. **Social worth or status.** People make judgments and perceive other people by what they wear (Barnard, 2002, p. 61). Status may accrue from multiple sources such as the family, gender, age, etc. All cultures taking care of the status difference use clothing to distinguish between male and female, family members, etc. (Barnard, 2002, p. 62). From the anthropological perspective, the status changes such as from being single to being married will be accompanied by costly and elaborate changes in clothes (Leach, 1976, p. 59) (Barnard, 2002, p. 62).

3. **Definition of social role.** Clothing serves to indicate social positions that people occupy (Barnard, 2002, p. 63). Fashion style may be interpreted as a sign that defines a social role, and by this sign people expect a certain behavior. A simple example may be
white clothes of a doctor; the society will expect a certain behavior of a person wearing white clothes in a hospital (Barnard, 2002, p. 63).

4. **Economic worth and status.** Fashion may define productive or occupational roles within an economy (Barnard, 2002, p. 64). It mainly refers to a level in an economy individuals operate or work (Barnard, 2002, p. 64).

5. **Political symbol.** Roach and Eicher in their book *The language of personal adornment* (1979) argue that fashion is closely connected to the working power (Roach & Eicher, 1979, p. 15). Fashion can illustrate a political function and working power (Barnard, 2002, p. 65).

6. **Magico-religious condition.** The fashion can also be used to express religious beliefs. Use of amulets indicates such thing as belief and strength of belief (Barnard, 2002, p. 67).

7. **Social rituals.** Fashion also defines an ongoing social ritual, such as wedding. Culture prescribes marking a special ritual with types of clothes (Barnard, 2002, p. 68).

8. **Recreation or activities.** Fashion has a power to indicate the engaging in recreation or different activities, such as sport or hobbies (Barnard, 2002, p. 69).

### 2.2.2. Dimension of fashion blogging

Fashion blogs are mediated spaces where bloggers put together their outfits and share their shopping-related experience (Chittenden, 2009, p. 504). By statement, “...fashion blogging as situated practice requires moving between the discursive and representational aspects of the blog” (Chittenden, 2009, p. 507).

Tara Chittenden described the fashion blog as a practice with a discourse regarding fashion topics in the form of texts, comments or video recording and visual representation in the form of pictures or published video recordings. (Chittenden, 2009, pp. 507-508).

Michelle Webb Fandrich in her article *“La Dernière Mode: Blogging fashion”* considering fashion history pointed out four criteria for identification and evaluation of a real fashion blog: motivation, content focus, originality and immediacy (Fandrich, 2011, p. 452).

By motivation Michelle Fandrich meant that a fashion blog is an independent entity, which driven by blogger’s motivation and expression as opposed to fashion
periodicals, which orient their publications onto commercial profit and anticipate relationships with advertisers (Fandrich, 2011, p. 453).

Fashion blogs should have a strong fashion content focus. However, fashion blogs are based on a blogger personality and worldview, thus personal topics penetrate into the blogs’ content (Fandrich, 2011, p. 453). Michelle Fandrich suggests that fashion blogs can be evaluated by taking into account a critical view within fashion only (Fandrich, 2011, p. 453).

The originality of ideas contained in a particular fashion blog may identify an original fashion blog (Fandrich, 2011, p. 454). Bloggers may use various fashion sources without adding personal critique and original content, which will bring knowledge but not a sense of a blog’s originality (Fandrich, 2011, p. 454).

The final and important category for fashion blog identification is immediacy. The phenomenon of fashion is very fast moving because of rapidly changing fashion cycles and trends (Fandrich, 2011, p. 454). Therefore an ability of fashion blog as communication tool to respond and criticize current fashion trends immediately is a valuable aspect (Fandrich, 2011, p. 454).

2.3. Fashion blogger consumption experience
2.3.1. Significance of sharing experience through online community
An experience can be defined as a knowledgeable result of an individual’s participation in some event (Schmitt, 1999, p. 60). Experiences are “of” or “about” something; they possess reference and intentionality (Schmitt, 1999, p. 61). Jens Ornbo, Claus Sneppen and Peter Franklin Wurtz argue that learning is particularly important and optimized in any experience (Ornbo, Sneppen, & Wurtz, 2008, p. 23). They argue that learning is optimized when experience involves three experience dimensions: physical (what we see, smell, sense, hear and taste), mental (when feelings are involved) and social experience (when experience leads to interaction and communities) (Ornbo, Sneppen, & Wurtz, 2008, pp. 23-24).

Social researchers Gurzick and Lutters while formulating a theory for online communities pointed out that sharing experience is essential for online communities. Experience sharing within online community is a key for the interaction and audience
involvement process. They also emphasize that community audiences consider an online community, a blog or another type, as a reliable source of information, and as “a mean for continuing relationships established through experience sharing” (Gurzick & Lutters, 2004, p. 4).

The experience sharing through a blog is beneficially effective for increasing amount of the involved audience (Gurzick & Lutters, 2004, p. 5).

2.3.2. Consumption experience theory

This study is aimed at consider a blogger as a consumer, and find the methods by which the blogger communicates his/her personal consumption experience through a fashion blog. Fashion bloggers fill their blogs’ content with their experience in fashion by sharing pictures of themselves wearing purchased items or discourses about purchased items. Thus, fashion blogger is not only a source of fashion knowledge, but also a fashion consumer.

In the book Purchasing Power: Black Kids and American Consumer Culture, Elizabeth Chin argues that postmodern consumption is not limited by active shopping process, it includes a thinking process about goods, ideas, talks, imagination and other activities (Chin, 2001, p. 7). Authors Antonella Caru and Bernard Cova conceptualizing consumption experience used a broad definition of experience based on anthropology: “…a way in which individuals live their own culture; and how events are received by consciousness”(Carù & Cova, 2003, p. 270).

Based on this definition and their researches, the authors identified two main trends to consider for any consumption experience:

- Consumption experience prescribes dependency on the acquisition of products and services from the market including family experience, friendship experience and citizenship experience (Carù & Cova, 2003, p. 281);
- Consumption experience seeks to over-saturate all events to construct a long series of strong emotions and unforgettable and extraordinary experiences (Carù & Cova, 2003, p. 281).

Bernd Schmitt argues that contemporary consumers define consumption experiences as presenting something more than objects, because consumers need to express their life values (Schmitt, 1999, p. 27). Erik J Arnould discussed the fact that consumption experience consists of a series of consumers’ activities, such as:
• The pre-consumption experience, which involves searching, planning, dreaming about or imagining the experience;

• The purchase experience, which derives from choice, payment, packaging, the encounter with the service and the environment;

• The core consumption experience, including the sensation, the satiety, the satisfaction/dissatisfaction, the irritation/flow, the transformation;

• The remembered consumption experience and the nostalgia experience activates photographs to relive a past experience, which is based on accounts of stories and on arguments with friends about the past, and which moves towards the classification of memories (Carù & Cova, 2003, p. 271).

These above described dimensions of consumption experience determine consumers as highly emotionally involved in the consumption process where multiple emotions are appreciated (Carù & Cova, 2003, p. 272). Marsha L. Richins also supports this statement by her investigation regarding measuring emotions in the consumption experience. She argues that emotions are specified by the context of interpersonal relations; and there is a difference between emotions experienced by interpersonal relations and emotions experienced during a process of consumption (Richins, 1997, p. 129).

2.4. Experience communication

2.4.1. Marketing view on experience creation

From the marketing perspective, the tendency to involve online communities to create and provide experiences has been described by Philip Kotler in his book Marketing 3.0. His point is that collaboration with consumers has affected business more than a full brand control, because of the “collective power of the consumers” (Kotler, 2010, p. 10). The horizontal relationships resulting from consumers trusting other consumers more than companies turn consumers into marketers. Thus, collaboration with consumers and listening to their opinions towards a brand helps a company to create experiences and value, which is reflected in the rise of social media. In this order, social media plays a role of a tool to involve the parties in the collaboration process, where consumers are free to communicate with other consumers and companies (Kotler, 2010, pp. 10-11).

A concept of co-creation can be an example of collaboration with audiences. Co-creation means creating experiences through collaboration taking into account
consumers’ personal needs and meanings (Prahalad C.K, 2004, pp. 5-6). The process of co-creation consists of a platform development meaning an object that can be customized further, consumers within the network who customize the platform to match their identities and feedback that enrich the platform by customization efforts (Prahalad C.K, 2004, pp. 5-7).

2.4.2. Experience communication as emotional involvement

Experience communication is a powerful marketing tool used by companies to bring values to life and increase their influence on internal and external stakeholders (Ornbo, Sneppen, & Wurtz, 2008, pp. 12-15). Researchers Jens Ornbo, Claus Sneppen and Peter Wurtz argue that experience communication has a goal to establish emotional ties with people you meet (Ornbo, Sneppen, & Wurtz, 2008, p. 13). They also emphasize that people are more interested in their emotional needs and therefore it is essential for communicator to consider not only the minds of audience, but also their hearts (Ornbo, Sneppen, & Wurtz, 2008, pp. 13-15). According to Bernd Schmitt (1999), experiences occur as a result of encountering, undergoing or living through things; and contribute with sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral and relational values (Schmitt, 1999, pp. 22-25). From the marketing point of view, experiences can be created to engage audiences in long-term, sustainable and developing relationships (Schmitt, 1999, pp. 22-25). Joseph Pine and James H. Gilmore have noted that experience is memorable; and audience should be engaged into series of enjoying events in a personal way (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, pp. 2-3). Bernd Schmitt created 5 models by which experience can be created (SEMs): Sense, Feel, Act, Think and Relate. He called these models Strategic Experiential Models. He argues that SEMs have to be managed by marketing managers’ actions such as communication or product that should touch sense, heart and mind of the audience (Schmitt, 1999, pp. 22-26). The below descriptions of all 5 models of experience creation are given by Bernd Schmitt (1999):

- **SENSE.** This model refers to sensory experience through sight, sound, touch, taste and smell. This model can be used to add values to products;
- **FEEL.** This model is mostly directed at touching emotional inner of audience. Experience creation through FEEL is oriented at establishing positive mood, strong emotions of joy and pride;
- **THINK.** This model appeals to cognitive problem-solving experience where
audiences will be creatively engaged;

- **ACT.** Physical and lifestyle experience can be contributed by ACT model. Inspirations and motivations to change or improve the audience’s lifestyle is an aim of marketers using this model;
- **RELATE.** This model possesses a cultural basis. Desire for self-improvement and need to be positively perceived by others are the main drivers for using the RELATE model (Schmitt, 1999, pp. 64-69).

Experience communication is also about true stories as Jens Ornbo, Claus Sneppen and Peter Wurtz noted (Ornbo, Sneppen, & Wurtz, 2008, p. 15):

"Today people are not interested in passively consuming pre-fabricated dreams and stories; we want to be activated and have an influence – and we want true stories with personal significance" (Ornbo, Sneppen, & Wurtz, 2008, p. 15).

By this statement they mean that audiences are seeking credibility and authenticity, going beyond the product and brand. Therefore, creating relationships and networks with audience supports experiential marketing (Ornbo, Sneppen, & Wurtz, 2008, p. 18). Modern audience is rich by material needs, but poor by emotional and mental fulfillment, therefore experiences of senses and feelings are becoming equipment for companies and brands to improve communication with audience (Ornbo, Sneppen, & Wurtz, 2008, pp. 18-19). Thus, creation of emotional ties with audiences is at the core of experiential marketing theory, which allows influencing and communicating on a higher level touching hearts and emotions.

**2.5. Approaches and Perspectives**

Theoretical perspectives considered above provide us with an understanding of blogging theory as related to the problem statement. However, a large amount of the considered literature describes the concept of blogging and social networks from Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) perspective aimed at contributing to business by increasing the loyalty towards a particular brand (Schultz, 1991). Blogging as a social phenomenon is not described as well as the business-oriented view. One reason for this could be practical business application of blogging theory: management of information flow from company to potential consumer and creation of consumer loyalty towards brand (Kotler, 2010, pp. 9-11). This tendency is also related to other considered theories, for instance, experiential marketing approach is a theory used for marketing
research. However, this perspective will be shortly discussed further in Chapter 6.2 highlighting potential practical application of the research findings from IMC perspective.

Considering the lack of research on the subject of blogging as a social phenomenon and its relation to experiential marketing, this paper is looking to explore the experiential approach on a deeper level. In particular, the area of communication through blog for creation of emotional ties with the audience, and how this relates to experiential marketing is interesting.

The aim of this paper is to consider fashion blogging as a social phenomenon. From the sociological perspective blogging is aimed at create and reinforce relationships by continuing interactions between the blogger and the audiences, maintaining existing social ties and developing new social ties with others with similar interests (Ali-Hasan & Adamic, 2007, p. 1). The research approaches within blogging-related studies use mainly qualitative research methods. These methods allow researchers to support data collecting, analyzing and interpreting information needed to identify and solve problems related to the problem statement (Birks & Malhotra, 2003, pp. 2-4).

Other research approaches applied by multiple scientists studied for this paper refer to ethnographical methods, such as observation of blogger behavior (Chittenden, 2009), (Fandrich, 2011), interviewing fashion bloggers and gathering written materials. A new online mediated scientific approach used by researchers is netnography. This methodology provides researches with an analysis of behavior of individuals within the Web-space (Kozinets, 2002). Netnographical research method allowed researchers to investigate textual discourses and collect data of interactions within blogs. For example, netnography can support analysis of an online community's content and the users' activity assessment (Trusov, Bodapati, & Bucklin, 2009).

3. Scientific position

3.1. Philosophical basis for knowledge creation

This study will be based on the philosophical paradigm of social constructivism as a modern cognitive learning theory and process (Daymon, 2002, p. 133). Social constructivism will provide this study with an understanding of how to create new knowledge through experience and reflection of that experience onto our reality (Huitt, 2009). The main idea of social constructivism is to construct knowledge (Daymon, 2002,
p. 133). Therefore, it prescribes to realize the problem that needs to be investigated, to ask the right questions to solve the problem, to explore sources and to assess the findings (Huitt, 2009). Thus, this study is aimed at generating new knowledge by answering research questions and analyzing data.

Any philosophical paradigm, including social constructivism, may be perceived as a complex of beliefs, which are constructed by an individual's worldview (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 107). That means that an individual generates knowledge according to personal worldview and reality perception. There are three philosophical dimensions that help to form and ask right questions to understand the nature of reality: ontology, epistemology and methodology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, pp. 107-108).

Ontology is a philosophical study of the nature of existence and beings (Fettke & Loos, 2003, p. 2945). The main question that this philosophical study poses is “What does exist” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108). Therefore ontology can consider relationships or concepts, which might exist in our reality. According to Guba and Linkoln (1994), ontology is a multiple local and specific “constructed” realities (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108). In other words, ontology considers general frameworks, principles of being, structures and patterns, which will support the study to gather and understand meanings of reality.

Epistemology is another philosophical branch of knowledge that is more related to the researcher itself (Hirschheim, 2003, p. 10). This philosophical view considers nature of knowledge, and how knowledge is created, its adequacy and legitimacy (Hirschheim, 2003, p. 10). It is very important to realize the relationships between reality and the researcher to produce the knowledge, and the researcher is an active participant within the reality being investigated (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108).

Debora Levy investigated methodology as a systematic set of methods that should be applied to research, which concentrates on understanding and interpretation of reality. She reconsidered a quote given by Michael Myers in “Qualitative Research in Information System” (1997):

“... access to reality is only through social constructions such as language, consciousness and shared meanings. Such interpretive research does not redefine dependent and independent variables, but focuses on the full capacity of human sense making as the situation emerges” (Levy, 2006, p. 369).

Levy emphasizes that methodology aims at reaching an understanding of what constitutes human knowledge and what kind of knowledge can be achieved from the
research (Levy, 2006, p. 371). Methodology applicable for the research based on social constructivism should possess the characteristics of hermeneutical (interpretation of meaning) and dialectical (conversational relation) (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111), which means that individual world perception can be understood and interpreted through direct interaction between a researcher and an individual having his or her personal experience and world view (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111).

This philosophical foundation allows this study to be constructed according to a clear scientific approach. Ontological and epistemological dimensions will provide this study with enabling to understand and interpret an individual worldview, which has a significant impact on the perception of aspects of reality and their importance. Ontological view will also support to understand and interpret the described theories earlier (Chapter 2) and following research data. The epistemological view will have an impact on new knowledge construction by experiencing real life by the researcher, its legitimacy and adequacy. Methodology will provide this study with data collection through direct social interaction.

3.2. Justification of the methodological choice
This study is an exploratory research, which seeks to find qualitative exploration for the subject’s lived world (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 106). Exploratory research is aimed at defining a problem more precisely, identifying relevant courses of actions and discovering deep insights (Birks & Malhotra, 2003, p. 63). The main purpose of an exploratory study is to provide a better understanding of the situation (Academic Resources, 2011, p. 28).

Exploratory research may help to establish the appropriate variables and their connections (Birks & Malhotra, 2003, p. 63). David Birks and Naresh Malhotra presented major descriptions of an exploratory research. Table 1 Exploratory research defines the main properties of this approach related to research objectives, characteristics, findings and methods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>To provide insights and understanding of the nature of the phenomenon; To understand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics</td>
<td>Information needed may be loosely defined;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This study seeks to explore and discover insights of the interviewed fashion blogger's methods of communication through the social phenomenon of blogging and the blogger's world perception. The research questions for this study have been developed according to the exploratory research method and understanding of the problem statement. The research questions (Chapter 1) have been posed to find non-objective truth (Levy, 2006, p. 373); where the truth is constructed by an individual through interaction with realities (Levy, 2006, p. 373). Therefore the research questions are generated to investigate opinion and meaning of the particular experienced fashion blogger as an expert in the blogging field.

The methodological choice for this study relates to the theoretical perspective that underpins the study research (Levy, 2006, p. 371).

![Diagram](image)
Figure 2 demonstrates four elements of research design to the methodological choice. This philosophical understanding, the previously described constructivism requires interpretation as a suitable theoretical perspective (Levy, 2006, p. 373).

The theoretical perspective can be understood through a definition given by Michael Crotty:

“The philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes” (Crotty, 1998, pp. 88-92).

Interpretivism as a theoretical perspective suggests that an individual’s knowledge of the perceived world is meaningful in its own terms; therefore it can be understood through careful use of interpretive procedures. This theoretical perspective allows focused research to be constructed on understanding of what is happening in a given context (Levy, 2006, p. 374). This approach includes multiple realities, high involvement of researcher and different perspectives and taking into account the context of the study (Levy, 2006, pp. 374-375).

Table 2 has been formed on a basis of Broad Definitions/Explanations of Interpretivism and Methodology given by Debora Levy. It shows how this study relates to interpretivism as a chosen theoretical perspective.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Interpretivism</th>
<th>Relation to this study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus of research</td>
<td>Concentrates on understanding and interpretation</td>
<td>Aimed at understanding what methods of communication can be used by the fashion blogger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of researcher</td>
<td>Researcher wants to experience what he/she is studying</td>
<td>Personal fashion blogging experience and in-depth understanding of the possible methods of communication used by fashion bloggers are the key motivations to make research in this field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow feelings and reasons to govern actions</td>
<td>Researcher interprets and builds the study applying personal experience in the field</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partially create what is studied, the meaning of the phenomena</td>
<td>Researcher applies prior knowledge to construct the theory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of pre-understanding is important</td>
<td>The study is formed on knowledge of the relevant concepts according to the problem statement and context of the study. Additionally, the particular fashion blog observation helps generating the pre-understanding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinctions between facts and value judgments are less clear</td>
<td>Data according to the blog observation and interview will be interpreted as meaningful and credible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept influence from both science and personal experience</td>
<td>Researcher strives to use personal experience and understanding of the fashion blogging field, as well as following a methodological frame prescribed by social constructivism, and theoretical foundation established in various relevant scientific papers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Techniques used by the Qualitative methods: one-to-
Qualitative in-depth interview
Table 2 Relations between this study and the broad definitions and explanations of interpretivism. Based on (Levy, 2006, pp. 374-378).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>researcher</th>
<th>one interview, focus group, case study</th>
<th>will be applied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

According to the previously considered philosophical and methodological basis, the study’s relation to interpretivism as a theoretical perspective, and meaning and opinion associated with the research questions, qualitative research is selected as the most appropriate methodology. Figure 2 illustrates the research methods that can be implemented for qualitative research: one-to-one interview, focus group or case study. To select a certain research method, grounded theory can also be supportive (Levy, 2006, p. 378).

Grounded theory refers to the aim of the researcher to determine a particular research method by collection of personal and professional experience and the relevant theoretical background (Levy, 2006, p. 378). To apply the grounded theory, the research problem should possess three characteristics according to Carson et al (2001): research should be interpretive; research should consider complex social processes between people, and researcher should bring a considerable background in professional and disciplinary knowledge to an inquiry (Carson, Audrey, Perry, & Gronhaug, 2001, pp. 61-65). The grounded theory is closely related to logical methods of knowledge: induction and deduction (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 106).

Deduction and induction play important roles in the process of acquiring new knowledge on the basis of elimination from the previously obtained (Tyagnibedina, 2009). Deduction may support a study related to social constructions with a transition of general knowledge of a certain class of objects and phenomena to the personal and individual kind of knowledge (Tyagnibedina, 2009). As opposed to deduction, induction is associated with the generalization of the results of observations and researches. The main function of the induction is getting the general judgment in empirical and theoretical data (Tyagnibedina, 2009).

The aim of this study is to investigate and understand the feasibility of multiple communication methods taking place in fashion blogging, their co-existence in a holistic sense, and the role of the blogger’s self-identity in building of the communication process. This aim is interpretative in its nature, because it seeks to establish theoretical
knowledge by interpretation of the information obtained from the blogger. This research is based on the background knowledge of the relevant concepts such as methods of communication, social media theory, scientific methodology and social interactions in general, gained by the researcher during the master’s program in corporate communication and the researcher’s personal motivation to explore fashion blogging. Therefore, grounded theory is applicable to this study.

Deductive method of knowledge creation can provide this study with an understanding of background knowledge on the process of communication through the blog; implicated communication techniques and relevant concepts may be applied by a particular fashion blog. Inductive approach is reasonable to use for analysis, when methods of communication by a certain fashion blogger will be discovered and explained. This data will be consequently generalized into a theoretical concept in a common sense of possible methods of communication by the fashion bloggers and influence of their self-identity on the communication process.

3.3. Nature of qualitative interview and major principles

3.3.1. Theoretical understanding of the qualitative interview

Qualitative research is based on two intellectual traditions (Birks & Malhotra, 2003, p. 133). The first is the broad area of psychology, which leads to a development of methods, such as an interview, to gain access to individuals’ subconscious and unconscious levels (Birks & Malhotra, 2003, p. 133). The second tradition is the set of ideas and methods associated from sociology, social anthropology, ethnography and linguistics (Birks & Malhotra, 2003). This set gives a holistic understanding of reality and world perception by an individual. It also develops empathy, makes minds and feeling accessible for the researcher (Birks & Malhotra, 2003, p. 133). Therefore, qualitative interview, as a method, provides studies with compelling description of the human world and well-founded knowledge about reality (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Interviewing can be considered as a social production of knowledge (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 17). In this case, interview is an active social process where interviewer and interviewee produce knowledge through a verbal interaction (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 17-18). The knowledge may also be produced through linguistic, contextual and narrative form during the verbal interaction (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 17-18).
In general, qualitative research is aimed at in-depth understanding of the study object, which in this study is the fashion blogger. It is direct and personal, aimed at how the object experiences the world. Qualitative interview does not aim at gaining facts; instead it is focused to reach a cognitive clarification of experiences and meanings (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 25-26). Qualitative research possesses sensitivity and flexibility in the interview questions. The interview questions are mostly semi-structured and open-ended (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Steiner Kvale and Svend Brikmann suggest that qualitative interview can have explorative, hypothesis-testing or descriptive purpose (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 106). An explorative interview is usually open with little pre-planned structure. Its purpose is characterized by introducing an issue, the research area and problem complex to be uncovered. The interview’s answers seek new information about the topic and new perspectives to answer the research questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 106). The hypotheses testing interview are mostly applicable to researches within groups (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 106). This type of interview can be used to compare the interviews from the groups. Hypotheses testing can also take place in within a single interview. In this order interview questions need to be developed in a confrontational interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 106).

According to Steiner Kvale and Svend Brikmann, descriptive qualitative interview seeks “to chart key aspects of the subject’s lived world” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 106).

It attempts to inductively develop theoretical conceptions and social relations of the research topic. Descriptive qualitative interview refers to collective activities in action of research, which is connected with the methodological approach of grounded theory (Chapter 3.2).

This study chooses a qualitative interview as the research method for explorative and descriptive purposes, because the study is oriented to obtain the knowledge about complexity of the usage of methods of communication. It also seeks to uncover roles and key aspects of the blogger’s experiences, such as using blogs, self-expression through the fashion blog. It is aimed at exploring new knowledge through the description of the blogger’s experiences and point of views in the lived world of fashion blogging.
3.3.2. Semi-structured discursive interview

According to the Table 2, interpretivism suggests qualitative techniques that can be used by the researcher: one-to-one interview, focus group or case study.

A one-to-one qualitative interview has been selected as a method for the study. It has been selected as a most suitable method because of the philosophical and methodological conceptualization of the study and research questions described above (Chapter 3.2). Other qualitative methods presented by Debora Levy such as focus group and case study have been rejected. The reasoning for this delimitation will be described below in Chapter 3.5.

Having considered the above philosophical views in connection with the research questions, a semi-structured in-depth discursive interview with an experienced blogger will be the main empirical data source, which subsequently will be analyzed focusing on meanings according to the qualitative research method theory described by Steiner Kvale and Svend Brikmann (2009). The semi-structured interview is an interview with a flexible structure, which is an effective tool in the case of sensitive subject matter and investigation of personal feelings and emotions (Levy, 2006, p. 380). It also creates an environment where participants would be likely to speak more openly and frankly (Levy, 2006, s. 380). An in-depth interview respects personal thought and the respondent’s attentiveness to questions. (Levy, 2006, pp. 380-381). Basically, it is a mix of an open everyday conversation and a closed questionnaire. Questions in the semi-structured interview are built on themes according to the research objectives and research questions, and the interviewee is free to choose a way to how to answer the questions. Questions may be asked randomly, depending on the already given answers, and covered themes (Hancock, 1999, p. 314).

One-to-one interview possesses an observational function. During the interview, the interviewer observes a behavior of the interviewee or his/her willingness to answer the questions. One-to-one interaction has a learning encourage that allows participants to identify “real life” situations, discuss and evaluate specific experiences regarding the interview questions (Levy, 2006, p. 381). Therefore the interview questions can support and direct the interviewee and the interviewer to discover new perspectives about the lived experiences. The result of this kind of interview is collection of in-depth and informative data about the personal experienced facts, emotions and thought framed by a world perception of the interviewee (Levy, 2006, p. 381).
3.4. Observation of the fashion blog as a part of the qualitative research

The purpose to use visual observation of the certain blog is to gain a pre-understanding aimed at assessing authenticity of the fashion blog, evaluating the status of the fashion blogger, getting an impression of the blogger, and observing the structure of the communicative process by the particular blogger. This gained and understood information will provide the study with meanings about the particular fashion blog and help to formulate more specific and personal oriented questions for the in-depth interview.

This observation of the blog can defer to a new method of online community research named netnography. Netnographical research is adapted from ethnographic research techniques attempts to study communities that are emerging through computer-mediated communications (Kozinets, 2002, p. 62). It is based on the observation of textual discourses and structure of communication process within community. This approach is primarily used to support data collection in combination with other qualitative methods (Kozinets, 2002, p. 62). Netnography is primarily used in studies with a consumer or marketing perspectives (Bowler, 2010). This method is aimed at analyzing the content of the online community, the participants' behavior within an online community, their reactions and meanings regarding content of topics (Kozinets, 2002).

In this study netnography cannot be applied to its full extent. This is due to its focus on the knowledge creation by collection of content-based data of the particular community. (Bowler, 2010, p. 1273). Netnography is a participant-observation research, and it should consider a number of different members to generate data through their interactions and meanings (Bowler, 2010, p. 1273). This study intends to observe the fashion blogs’ pages to support with knowledge for the qualitative interview. It does not intend to analyze the textual discourses within the blog, and it is not directed at understanding the opinions by the blog's followers. It is conversely focused at understanding how and in what forms the content of the particular blog is presented.

During the visual observation of the fashion blog pages, the main focus will be concentrated on the blog’s design, the identification of methods of communication (text posts, pictures, video files, blogrolls) (Schmidt, 2007, pp. 1412-1414).
This information will not only provide a pre-understanding of the studied fashion blog, but may also positively influence the interview questions by more personal and narrow content of the question by the certain aspects of the blog.

3.5. Limitation of the alternative qualitative methods

Qualitative research prescribes using the most appropriate method or a set of different methods for a particular study based on the methodological foundation of the study, purpose and nature of research questions. Research method selection has to be implemented according to a pragmatic use within the study and logistical considerations that guide the choice of the most data collection method (Levy, 2006).

This study research will be built on interpretivism, as it is described and justified in Chapter 3.2. An in-depth interview has been selected as an applicable method aimed at gathering data and creating new knowledge for credible and reliable answers to the research questions. Other qualitative methods such as focus group and group interview have been rejected.

Method of focus group possesses a form of discussion within small group of 3 to 6 people (Levy, 2006, p. 380). It is also used to gather data as well as one-to-one interview, but the main difference is that possible outcomes are developed in order to a common brainstorming by different viewpoints, and not as experience of an individual (Levy, 2006, p. 380) (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 150). This method is generated to express viewpoints which may be conflicting and influenced by others (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 150). This research, however, is focused on the self-identity of the blogger, his/her understanding and personal usage of the blog. Furthermore, the study is oriented gaining clear meanings and emotional aspects regarding the blogger’s self-expression and his/her relation to the communication process through the personal blog. Therefore, the method of focus group is not applicable to this study.

Case study is not considerable for this study because of its contextual meaning and only document-based data collection. Case study is used to investigate a particular case or situation with a certain issue (Levy, 2006, p. 380). This method is mostly implementable within organization or industry, because major data collection emerges from documentation review (Levy, 2006, p. 380). The reason for the case study rejection is that the current study is not focused on an organizational issue within blogging, but on real personal insights of the blog, which can be understood through the personal interaction.
Case study could be suitable if the study would be focused on the company or brand perspective in the blogging field.

3.6. Summary of the methodological conceptualization

The above considered methodological review and choice, is needed to be clearly framed to avoid misunderstandings and confusions in the further application of the method and analysis.

The below Figure 3 demonstrates a chart of the methodological idea for the particular study.

![Diagram](chart_of_methodoligical_conceptualization.jpg)

*Figure 3. Chart of the methodological conceptualization of the study.*

The research questions of the study are developed to understand and interpret the fashion blogger’s experience within consumption experience sharing through the personal blog. The qualitative method chosen for this study’s data collection is in-depth one-to-one semi-structured interview. To obtain the necessary pre-understanding, the researcher has focused on three grounded theory aspects: review of the relevant theory, observation of the particular fashion blog and personal experience and knowledge. This pre-understanding is key for implementing the concepts related to the research questions such as “blogging” and “consumption experience” into the interview. These concepts outline discursive topics that should be covered during the interview.
4. Research design

4.1. Interviewee selection

The sample of a potential interviewee is important to ensure the verity of the study, maximize the depth and enrich data to address the research questions (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 318). The selected interviewee should share the critical similarities related to the research questions (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 318).

The research questions are focused to understand the point of view of the fashion blogger. Therefore, the most appropriative interviewee to utilize is a fashion blogger with his or her personal fashion blog. To reinforce and ensure the creditability of the research data (Attride-Stirling, 2001, pp. 395-397), the following criteria were used for selecting the appropriate candidate:

• The fashion blogger should possess a personal and independent blog;
• The fashion blogger should be able to share personal point of view in English, Danish or Russian;
• The fashion blog itself should be available in the Web-space;
• The fashion blogger should have a willingness to participate in the research.

To find the potential interviewee, Google and Youtube search have been applied. Google search resulted with more than 127.000.000 web-pages by searching key words “fashion blog” (Google, 2013), and Youtube with more than 2.970.000 of videos related to fashion channels (Youtube, 2013).

During the search, contact details of a number of the bloggers were obtained for further contact by email or phone. The research was not limited by the age, gender, religion or culture of a fashion blogger. The language ability of the fashion blogger was narrowed to three possibilities: English, Danish or Russian. These three languages were selected according to the researcher’s ability to communicate in certain languages. Therefore, the national delimitation took place in the searching actions because of the linguistic boundaries.

The selected number of the potential interviewees was contacted by email to present of the purpose of the study and offers to take a part as an interviewee within qualitative in-depth interview. The content of this mail is presented as Appendix 1.

It should be noted that the respondents answered reluctantly. The content mail was sent to twenty-one fashion bloggers. Only two of them replied with an initiative to
participate in the research. After continued discussion regarding the interview, particular
date and time, as well as technical issues, the author of StyleOnTheCouch personal
fashion blog from United Kingdom agreed to be the main practical object of the study
possessing all criteria required above.

4.2. Formulation of the pre-understanding based on the StyleOnTheCouch
fashion blog observation

4.2.1. Significance of observation based pre-understanding

Based on the observation StyleOnTheCouch fashion blog, personal researcher
knowledge within fashion blogging and the relevant theory review (Chapter 2), it is
possible to define the topics to be covered during the interview, and make the interview
questions more personal (Chapter 3.2 & 3.6).

The easy access onto StyleOnTheCouch fashion blog provided the researcher with a
pre-understanding of the design of the fashion blog, structure of the blog page, existing
partitions on the blog, visible and functional methods of communication. Appendix 2
illustrates a view of the randomly opened pages and posts of StyleOnTheCouch fashion
blog.

It is important to mention that the visual observation of the particular fashion blog
provided an understanding of the relevance of the certain fashion blog and identity of the
fashion blogger according to the central objects of the study presented in Chapter 1.2.
Existence of a certain number of followers and interactions evidenced by the amount of
comments indicates the vitality and relevance of the blog among audiences (Chittenden,
2009). Through visual observation is was possible to determine the posts on the fashion
blog related to sharing consumption experience, as well as existence of the different
message-sending methods, such as textual posts, photos and blogroll (Schmidt, 2007).

4.2.2. Findings based on the observation of the fashion blog

During the observation of StyleOnTheCouch web blog, the following factual notes
have been taken:

- The blog possesses simple design and clear structure;
- The blog is equipped with a blogroll, page with contact details of the fashion
  blogger, page with an overview of media releases regarding StyleOnTheCouch
  fashion blog, small informational box “About me” (StyleOnTheCouch,
  StyleOnTheCouch fashion blog, 2009) with brief personal information about the
fashion blogger, and hyperlinks for quick access to StyleOnTheCouch's social media accounts;

- 3750 subscribers of StyleOnTheCouch fashion blog;
- A rubric of the posts: *Friday Lingerie Lust* (StyleOnTheCouch, Friday Lingerie Lust, 2013), (Appendix 3);
- Structural aspects of the home page allows to select categories and recent posts;
- Monthly archive on the home page;
- The fashion blog possesses textual posts with dates of uploading, photos of outfits and items, and field under each post for leaving comments;
- The blog photos illustrate the fashion blogger herself as well as other models.

This information gained by the blog observation will be used to create personal and close questions aimed at uncover deep motivation for selection of particular communication methods, to understand the fashion blogger's opinion regarding her fashion blog's structure and design, and probe for insights into self-identity that might influence the choice of the certain communication methods.

The research questions of the study are aimed at be considered in the particular context of consumption experience. The scope of the study (Chapter 1.2) forms the framework of the fashion blog's content to be studied. In other words, the fashion blog's contents should possess a clear sharing of consumption experience according to the stated research questions. On the observed StyleOnTheCouch blog, some posts randomly selected have been perused to assess the viability of a blog on the subject of consumption experience. During the observation, it was noticed that textual posts and related photos carry information about different brands and items. The content of these posts was aimed at sharing meanings about a particular brand or item, emotions and opinions regarding them. Appendix 4 illustrates an example of a post with strong consumption experience content. In this post the fashion blogger describes her second wedding dress by DKNY (StyleOnTheCouch, StyleOnTheCouch fashion blog, 2009). According to Caru and Covas' understanding of consumption experience, memorable and emotional experience can be a part of it (Carù & Cova, 2003, p. 281). In this certain post, the fashion blogger shares her memories about the dress, and her emotional attitude about having the particular dress by the particular brand.
4.3. Ethical issues and quality within the interview inquiry

4.3.1. Relevant ethical issues

Many researchers studying the qualitative research methods pay attention to ethical and moral issues regarding preparation and conducting of the interview. Kvale and Brikmann argue that interview inquiry is a *moral enterprise* (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 62), because the interview interaction has a power to influence the interviewee, and the knowledge produced may affect understanding of a human condition (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 62). Therefore the ethical issues have to be considered and contemplated throughout the duration of the interview process.

According to Barbara DiCicco-Bloom and Benjamin F Crabtree, the four ethical issues related to the interview process have been considered before the interview conducting:

- *Reducing the risk of harm.* As consequences of the interview process, the interviewer's task is to listen and reflect on personal information back to the interviewee. This process may develop in unforeseen ways. To avoid this kind of harm the interviewee will be informed that gained personal data will be interpreted according to the researcher understanding and perception. Therefore this data will be subjectively interpreted. The researcher will ask clarifying questions in a situation of misunderstanding.

- *Protecting the interviewee’s information – confidentiality.* The fashion blogger has been asked about the willingness to information protecting. The researcher and interviewee have agreed that, one on hand, the interview does not possess any confidential data. On another hand, the interview contains personal information that can be used in antagonistic intent. Therefore the agreement is not to use the real name of the blogger to protect her professional and personal life.

- *Effectively informing interviewees about the nature of the study.* The interviewee will be informed about the purpose of the study and the research questions.

- *Reducing the risk of exploitation.* The gained data during the interview will not be used in any other reasons than to encourage and contribute the scientific research (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 319).

4.3.2. Interview quality

The interview quality criteria have to be considered before conducting a particular interview. Kvale and Birkmann (2009) highlighted six criteria, which should contribute to
verification and findings of the qualitative interview. These criteria have been taken into account as norms for the interview guide.

- The extent of spontaneous, rich, specific and relevant answers from the interviewee;
- The extent of short interview questions, and long interview answers;
- The degree to which the interviewer follows up and clarifies the meanings of the relevant aspects;
- The interviewer attempting to verify the interpretations of the subject’s answers over the course of the interview;
- The interview being self-reported that hardly requires additional explanations (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 164).

4.4. Scripting and conducting the interview

4.4.1. Chosen technique and dimensions for structuring the interview

To apply structure to the semi-structured in-depth interview, a technique described by Kvale and Birkmann (2009) has been used. According to this technique, questions need to be worded by the outline of the topics that have to be covered. These topics are pre-determined by the research questions and the pre-understanding.

According to this approach, the presented research questions of this study have been divided into relevant conceptualized topics with a support of the considered literature review and the data from the fashion blog observation. The interview questions have been structured with a potential free possibility to ask a second question, if the answer is open and needs to be explained, or hiding a question if it is not relevant, or answer has been given earlier (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 130-132). The interview guide is also supplied with a funnel shape, which means that interview questions are structured in order from general questions to specific questions designed for deeper understanding. One example of this technique from the interview guide:

What was your motivation to create a fashion blog?
Why did you choose a blog as a method to communicate your experience? (Appendix 3.).

The interview guide has been created taking into account thematic and dynamic dimensions considered by Kvale and Brikmann. These dimensions support the study by contributing a knowledgeable and well-structured interview interaction (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 131). Thematically, questions should be related to the “what” of the interview. Asking “what” provides theoretical conceptions of the research topic (Kvale &
Brinkmann, 2009, p. 131). This type of question is directly aimed at producing knowledge. These questions may uncover the interviewee’s understanding of the topic, her point of view, and clarify the meanings of the answers on the stage of the interview analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 131).

Dynamically, the questions pertain to the “how” of the interview. Promoting a positive interaction, establishing emotional interests to talk and explain and keeping flow of the conversation may take place by using dynamically oriented questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 131).

The interview guide also contains fields for purpose descriptions for each topic. This option provides justification of the particular question, its connection with the research questions and an easier implementation of the further analysis.

4.4.2. Types of the interview questions

Kvale and Brikmann presented some types of questions that may be useful for the different goals according to the particular research. The interview guide has been developed taking into account these types of questions. The main types of questions are presented below.

1. Introductory questions. This type of question is aimed at open discussion, orienting the interviewee to share the opinion and understanding of the main aspects and concepts of the study. Example: Can you briefly tell me what a blogroll means? (Appendix 5. Question 13).

2. Probing questions. The goal of this question is to probe the content of dimensions. Example: Could you tell me more about your motivation to share your emotions and thoughts about particular item or brand? (Appendix 5. Question 5).

3. Specifying questions. These questions attempt to gain more precise descriptions. Example: How often do you update your blog page with new posts? (Appendix 5. Question 9).

4. Direct questions. Asking direct questions introduces the main topics and dimensions of the research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 135). This question type indicates central aspects of the researched phenomena. Example: When I visited your blog I noticed that pictures are using more space than texts. Does it mean that posting pictures is a way that you like to communicate through your fashion blog? (Appendix 5. Question 10).
5. Interpreting questions. This type aimed at rephrase an answer to gain deeper interpretation and more clear explanation. Usually this type can be used as a second question in the situation of uncertainty or to avoid misunderstanding.

The interview guide for the current study has been developed according to these above described recommendations. A full version of the created interview guide is presented in Appendix 5.

4.4.3. Conducting the interview

Interview has been conducted in an oral form 30th of October by Skype\(^1\) with a functional audio recording application for MacBook software – Callnote\(^2\). During the interview video translation has provided a visual picture of the interviewee. Thus emotional and behavior observations during the interview have been conducted as well.

The interview took 33 minutes. Before the interview, the interviewee had been informed about the purpose of the research, the research questions, basic principles of conducting the interview, and fact of the audio recording. The interviewee has been asked about the confidentiality of the gathered data. Only two participants, researcher and interviewee, were present during the interview.

4.5. Method of transcribing

The current one-to-one qualitative interview has been audio recorded in respect to the main requirements of the further transcribing into a form of a written document. The requirement of the fact of audio recording (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 179) has been completed. Another requirement for transcribing, namely that recorded conversation should be audible without mumblings and other background noises (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 179), has been implemented by providing a quiet and comfortable atmosphere for the both interviewee and interviewer during the interview.

Video recording was not implemented as a possible part of the interview process. The reasons for it were the technical comprehensiveness of video recording of Skype calls and time-consuming process of video analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 179). Furthermore, video recording is a unique opportunity to reinforce analysis, but it is not a requirement for transcribing of an interview.

The documented form of the conducted interview is presented in Appendix 6.

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1 Skype is a voice communicator service, a part of Microsoft software (About.com, 2013).
2 Callnote is a software for Mac OS X providing free audio and video recording of calls by Skype (Kandasoft, 2013).
4.6. Research design limitations

The qualitative research method can be criticized and limit the research data. Some disadvantages of applying this method can be discussed according to David Birks and Naresh Malhotra (2003): the results of the research have a lack of structure that makes them susceptible (Birks & Malhotra, 2003, p. 183). Another disadvantage concerning the obtained data can provide difficulties during to analysis and interpretation. There may be several interpretations and hidden values in one or more interview results. The current research is involving a strong theoretical understanding of the problem and using grounded theory approach (Birks & Malhotra, 2003, p. 183).

The current research is limited to only one particular fashion blogger StyleOnTheCouch as an interviewee that may be a reason for too personalized data obtained during the interview, which may influence data interpretation and the answers of the research questions as well.

Another critical point may be that the selected interviewee is a fashion blogger with western-cultural based experience within fashion blogging. That means that the collected data can be obtained and analyzed without taking into account the peculiarities of fashion blogging in different cultural contexts. This limitation may be explained by the purpose of the study. The study is aimed at exploring and understanding personal experience, and creating theoretical knowledge, which will be inductively interpreted as a feasible theoretical concept for using methods of communication consumption experience within fashion blogging.

5. Analysis

5.1. Main theoretical aspects of interview analysis focusing on meaning

The process of analysis of the qualitative interview is creative, dynamic and individualistic. It requires inductive reasoning, thinking and theorizing (Basit, 2003, p. 157).

Breaking up the interview data on themes, paraphrases, or keywords is a coding of the interview data. This approach categorizes themes to identify touch points with the research questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 202). Coding plays an important role according to grounded theory approach to qualitative research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 202), because codes enter into the qualitative research in relation to context, other codes and action consequences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 202). This approach allows finding
of explicit rationalizations and their implicit signification (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 388) within the interview data.

Open coding will break down, compare and conceptualize the gained data. This method will support to develop knowledge inductively, because codes or themes shortly define the experience or action described in the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, s. 202). The coding will also be useful on the further step of the data interpretation.

The interpretation itself is a creative process of finding meaning. This process can be characterized by contextualizing the knowledge produced by means of broader frames of references (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 209): the reviewed theoretical knowledge, pre-understanding gained by the fashion blog observation, and cultural and personal experience of the researcher.

5.2. Data analysis based on the coding

Breaking the interview data into codes (Appendix 7.) and presented earlier purposes of the operational questions (Appendix 5.) give the start to data analysis by comparing codes with the purposes of the particular operational questions.

StyleOnTheCouch fashion blogger has 4 years of experience within fashion blogging. The motivational factors to establish a fashion blog were desire for expression of creative insight outside of the workplace and a passion for wearing clothes in a fashionable way. Based on this data, an assessment is made that StyleOnTheCouch is experienced and highly involved into the topics of fashion and blogging.

The blog as a communication channel appealed to the blogger because of the personal need to write and interest to challenge herself through photography. The blogger found the blog as a way to be creative, to be involved and purposeful. One other reason to use a blog, mentioned by the StyleOnTheCouch fashion blogger, is the major functional aspect of the blogging – its form of a visual journal or diary. By doing the fashion blog, the blogger has found a way to express herself, evolve her personal style and grow personally. It is important to mention that the fashion blogger finds doing the fashion blog an educational process, by which she has evolved and grown in understanding of fashion as well as personal style and development.

By clarifying of involvement into fashion context of the blog, it has been understood that StyleOnTheCouch finds the blog as an extension of her personality, a way to express herself, communicate to society the choices that she makes, and the meanings of fashion in
The fashion blogger finds personal self-expression by posting outfits on the blog page, she also emphasizes that her preferences within clothes communicate personal characteristics towards the society, such as wearing harnesses is a way to express strength. Therefore, the blog is geared towards communication of new trends and presenting the “world” how she perceives herself, and what characteristics she possesses. This self-presentation process through clothing exists in several forms on StyleOnTheCouch fashion blog outfit posts: publishing photos with small textual descriptions, posts regarding interesting lingerie trends, and brands or particular items describing new designs or presenting the designer. This content has been selected by the fashion blogger according to her personal interests and preferences. In addition, this content is the subject of the blog’s development and the blogger’s personal development in last four years. According to the interview data and the findings of the StyleOnTheCouch fashion blog observation, it is possible to argue that the content of the StyleOnTheCouch shares sensation and satiety, emotional empathy towards different brands. The consumption experience concept prescribes classification of memories (Carù & Cova, 2003, p. 271) in a form of photos, stories or notes about a certain product or brand. Referring to the theoretical definition of a blog as a form of social media, particularly that the blog is a private diary and a newspaper at the same time (Lankshear, 2006, p. 2), and based on the StyleOnTheCouch interview data regarding the main content of the fashion blog, it is possible to conclude that StyleOnTheCouch fashion blog possesses a strong consumption experience content.

Additionally, selected content of the blog’s posts present independent choices of the blogger according to her passions within fashion. The main sources of the fashion content or inspiration of the particular fashion trends and brands for written posts are Tumblr³, fashion press publications and fashion related events. The criteria for the content selected by StyleOnTheCouch refer to her personal understanding of uniqueness and niche design, which are determining factors in the choice of content.

The interview data shows that the specific of a particular professional or educational background may have an impact on the conduction of the fashion blog. This rationalization is based on the blogger’s reasoning that working as a psychologist; she assesses personal emotional inputs into StyleOnTheCouch fashion blog (Appendix 7.) That means that the blog bears a reflection of the blogger’s identity, not only her attitude.

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³ Tumblr – a microblogging platform and social network for sharing post texts, photos, quotes, links, music, and videos (Tumblr, 2007)
towards fashion and trends, but also a reflection of her knowledge and personal experience in other fields in the life experience. The gained data also shows that the fashion blogger StyleOnTheCouch is highly emotionally involved into fashion blogging. The reason for this statement is a description of the fashion blogger's motivation to share experiences through the blog. She emphasizes that the feeling of excitement of sharing with her audience a newfound brand or product (Appendix 7.), can be a determining factor in her emotional motivation to keep the fashion blog.

To explore the significance of doing communication actions through the blog, the fashion blogger has been asked about the importance of attraction of a certain number of subscribers and readers of the blog. The finding of the fashion blog observation shows that in November 2013 the amount of subscribers was 3750 people. It has to be noticed that gaining more followers was a purpose for the blogger during the first years of the blog's existence, but now the fashion blogger is mostly interested attracting followers and readers who have similar and shared interests with herself. It is possible to argue that now StyleOnTheCouch fashion blogger is more focused on the “quality” of the blog's followers than on the larger amount of them. The interest of the fashion blogger is to establish relationships and find new connections with fashion designers, gaining praise from brands, and connect with other fashion bloggers or people with similar passions and experiences. The interview data shows that interaction between the fashion blogger and the audiences may move to other popular forms of social media, such as Instagram and Twitter.

Using other social media plays an important role in establishing connections, keeping up with innovation, and reinforces communication with audiences in general. As a result, communication through the fashion blog itself declined because of the emerging innovative forms of social media, and moving of comments. Therefore, the link exchange between the readers and the blogger, the fashion blog and the blog-related social media pages, is essential to communicate comprehensively and provide an easy access to all of the particular blog-related accounts.

However, the high number of subscribers of StyleOnTheCouch shows that the particular blog is still successful among the audience. Appendix 2 illustrates the comment field of StyleOnTheCouch posts, which indicates a high level of involvement of the audience into communication process through the fashion blog.

The level of involvement of the StyleOnTheCouch fashion blogger can be assessed by her active participation through updating the blog or answering the followers’ questions or
comments. It has been found that the ability to answer to every comment depends on willingness of the blogger or her available free time. The lack of the free time and professional life beyond the blogging indicate that blogging is still a hobby, and participation in this field is motivated by personal interest and passion. The level of participation and involvement of StyleOnTheCouch fashion blogger into the blogging can be evaluated as high. The interview data displays that the fashion blogger updates her blog with new posts approximately three times per week. Additionally, StyleOnTheCouch fashion blog has a schedule for a weekly rubric *Friday's Lingerie Lust* (Appendix 3.), which obligates the blogger to update the posts as a routine action. The active participation on other social media can also be an evidence of the high level of participation within fashion blogging, because these pages contribute to mutual exchange of links with the readers and other bloggers. The interview data also points out that statistics of visits of the blog fall when the blogger does not update the blog with new posts or does not actively interact through other social media.

Facebook⁴ and Instagram⁵ activities by StyleOnTheCouch fashion blogger are presented in Appendix 8.

The interview data and fashion blog observation give a possibility to describe the main methods of communication used by StyleOnTheCouch fashion blogger. The data also clarifies the level of usability of these methods and personal reasons for choice and implementation of particular methods. The first method to communicate consumption experience is posting pictures. According to the research data gained during StyleOnTheCouch fashion blog observation, it is possible to argue that every textual post is supported by several photos, which use most of the space on the webpage. It is also important to mention that these photos carry content-related visual information of a particular post (Appendix 2.). The reason to post photos by the fashion blogger can be related to the specific personality of the fashion blogger. This statement is based on the data gained through the interview, which describes the fashion blogger as a visual person, who feels a need to visualize the personal image and style. According to Tara Chittenden notes mentioned in the Chapter 2.2.2, a visual representation in the form of pictures or

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⁴ Facebook is an online social networking service founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg. The amount of users is approximately 1.15 billion of people (Facebook, Facebook. About, 2004).

⁵ Instagram is an online photo-sharing, video-sharing and social networking service that enables its users to take pictures and videos, apply digital filters to them, and share them on a variety of social networking services, such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr (Instagram, Instagram. About, 2010).
published video recordings is a core content of posts framed by clear fashion content (Chittenden, 2009, p. 507). The pictures should not necessarily illustrate the fashion blogger wearing different outfits herself. They may show items, groups of items, or models wearing trends. It can be related to the understanding of fashion itself, because fashion can be viewed as a communicative function as described by another author, Malcolm Barnard (Chapter 2.2.1). This means that posting pictures is the most suitable and reliable form to communicate the fashion-related experience. The visual demonstration of particular items and outfits on the blog communicates the style, image, as well as the self-perception constructed by the fashion blogger within a society.

Another reason to use pictures highlighted by StyleOnTheCouch fashion blogger is expanding of relationships with interesting photographers. The professional photos with high-level quality can be interesting for the fashion blogger to improve visualization through the blog.

According to Tara Chittenden (2009), fashion blog may also include video posts as a tool to share experiences regarding fashion. According to the research data, question of using videos opens an understanding that selection of methods of communication has its origin in the professional and personal experiences of the fashion blogger. This assertion is based on three personal factors mentioned by StyleOnTheCouch fashion blogger during the interview. The first is that the blog reflects a certain image of the fashion blogger and possesses a successful readership level already. According to the blogger, posting video may have an impact on that image, which may be positive or negative. The uncertainty of the future development of the blog concerns the fashion blogger too much to apply this method. The second factor is the blogger's level of satisfaction with the particular communication methods that exist on the blog at this point of time. The fashion blogger is satisfied by the results of using pictures and texts, and not motivated to find new tools of communication through the blog. The third factor is related to the professional specific background, in particular the blogger's education as a psychologist. StyleOnTheCouch is moderating the amount of personal information being given away through the blog towards readers. StyleOnTheCouch asserts that posting pictures and posts are appropriate methods of experience communication at this point of time, because they give an opportunity to give away an optimal amount of personal information.

Writing small text below each picture is also a method of communication used by the StyleOnTheCouch fashion blogger. By these textual notes the fashion blogger
communicates her consumption experience, namely justification of choice of an item, sharing inspirations by new interesting brands and communicating the feelings and intentions behind the choices.

A functional link called blogroll has been found on StyleOnTheCouch fashion blog during the observation. The functional value of the blogroll has been studied during the interview. The blogroll is a section within the fashion blog linking the particular blog with other interesting blogs. It is an exchangeable function, where the fashion blogger adds the most interesting and friendly blogs according to her preferences (Appendix 7.). This function gives opportunities to add other people's blogs related to the fashion content, increase the blog’s readers by this link exchange, as well as find inspiration for future posts.

The relationships between fashion bloggers can be described as complicated. The reason for this is that sharing experience is essential for online communities, as it was mentioned in Chapter 2.3.1. Other fashion blogger’s are the first who can be interested in this fashion style related content, because they are already involved in fashion blogging. The interaction between fashion bloggers emerges when they visit other fashion blogs and leave comments. It is a kind of interactive process of visiting and commenting each other's fashion blogs. The interview data shows that foundation for the fashion bloggers relationships is not only pure interest to be inspired by other fashion bloggers, but also a mutual exchange aimed at increasing the number of comments and attracting readers from other blogs.

Design of the fashion blog is also a method to communicate the fashion blogger’s style (Chapter 2.2.2). The design is an expression of the fashion blogger's perception of beauty and style. According to the interview data, the fashion blog's design can be associated with the fashion blogger herself. It can be confirmed by minimalistic design that StyleOnTheCouch fashion blog has. This design sends a message towards the blog's audience about the fashion blogger's personal preference for minimalism. StyleOnTheCouch fashion blogger shows a willingness to develop the blog design, make it more clean and minimal by reducing advertising banners on the blog-page.

Some of the operational questions have been constructed to develop a meaning to answer the third research question, which calls “Can experiential marketing approach be used by fashion bloggers to reinforce experience communication process?” These operational questions were developed according to experiential marketing approach model of engaging emotional attributes into process of communication. The purpose of these operational
questions was identifying usable elements of experiential marketing approach, evaluating emotional and cognitive based interactions with the fashion blog audiences (Appendix 5.).

According to the gained qualitative data it has been highlighted that StyleOnTheCouch had organized giveaway contests on her fashion blog. However, the initiative for arranging this kind of activity came from the brands that afforded the gifts for the contest. The purpose of these giveaways was to promote the brand in collaboration with the fashion blogger. The benefit of this online-organized event for the fashion blogger is potential followers and compensation. It has to be mentioned, however, that the interview data indicated that business-related activities through the blog are not in a focus of StyleOnTheCouch fashion blogger as a way to develop. The first reason can be that she is not interested in attracting more followers any longer; she is focused on building relationships with people possessing similar passions, for example designers or photographers. The second reason for rejection of other giveaway contests is personal interpretation of these activities as too formulaic, not suitable to the blog's image, and mostly commercially driven.

The operational questions have been constructed to explore reflection of the StyleOnTheCouch fashion blog practice on SEMs model:

SENSE – the fashion blogger equipping with sounds and colors to attack audiences;
FEEL – ability of the fashion blog to produce positive emotions;
THINK – ability of the fashion blog to make people to think;
ACT – ability of the fashion blog to motivate and inspire;
RELATE – ability of the fashion blog to connect people.

Adding music or more colors to develop emotional ties with followers was rejected by StyleOnTheCouch fashion blogger. Rejection of the idea to add sounds has a reason of personal dislike web resources equipped with music. The idea to make the blog more colorful contradicted with the blogger’s opinion that personal preferences of minimalism and simplicity. That means that the fashion blogger is not interested in adding sensations the blog to attract more followers, and that the fashion blogger is satisfied with the sensory visual appearance of her blog already.

According to the data collection through the interview, it is possible to generalize that StyleOnTheCouch fashion blog is focused on communicating the personal consumption experience according to the three main personal values that fashion blogger strives to gain
by employing the fashion blog (Appendix 7.). The first is cognitive value, which is indicated by in the purpose to empower women to think about their choices related to fashion or style (Appendix 7.). StyleOnTheCouch fashion blogger communicates her understanding of how to go beyond the standards from her personal perspective. Her actions of the blog updating with new posts and pictures have a purpose to get people to think about their possibilities of the choice within style, new trends or new brands. This value can be viewed as an educational ability of the fashion blog that may educate the audiences to make a good choice during the consumption activities. However, StyleOnTheCouch is not oriented to promote any brands, her goal is to give away information about her personal choices and reasons for these choices; StyleOnTheCouch communicates her personal learning and experience related to the products and brands. Therefore, the fashion blogger employs the blog to inspire and motivate audiences interested in fashion to open new possibilities in fashion and style.

The second value is emotional condition of feeling good about the purchased product or chosen style (Appendix 7.). One of the purposes of StyleOnTheCouch fashion blogger is to communicate her positive consumption experience about high quality items to provide the blog’s readers with feeling of excitement about new, interesting, unique and niche pieces of fashion. Therefore the blog can possess the ability to produce positive emotional conditions.

The third value that StyleOnTheCouch fashion blog encourages is connection with followers with similar interests, unique designers, and professional photographers. The value of connection through the blog allows producing new relationships and friendships. These connections may be born during the reaction by followers to the communicated experience by the fashion blogger. The followers reflect on the StyleOnTheCouch consumption experience by leaving comments expressing their own experience. This process of mutual experience exchange makes the fashion blog real and alive according to David Gurzick and Wayne Lutters (Chapter 2.3.1). Therefore, StyleOnTheCouch can possess an ability to connect people together.

5.3. Assessing of the general emotional condition of the interviewee during the process of the interview

The data gained in the interview can be verified as trustful and reliable. The reason for this is that the interview has been conducted taking into account the ethical norms
described in Chapter 4.3.1 and interview quality criteria, Chapter 4.3.2, which contributes to verification of the collected data.

According to the audio and video observation of the interviewee, it is possible to conclude that the interviewee had a positive emotional condition, showed interest to answer the operational questions, talked freely and consistently. This general attitude can be interpreted that the topics of the interview were interesting and pleasant for StyleOnTheCouch fashion blogger. She showed motivation regarding fashion blogging topic, willingness to talk openly about her personal experience, and that she can be critical to her personal point of view.

5.4. Meaning interpretation reflecting on the research questions

5.4.1. Methods of communication through the fashion blog

As a result of the research data analysis, a theoretical knowledge should be built (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, s. 806). The theory building has to be defined by developing systematic and conceptually cohering explanations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 806).

According to the above meaning analysis based on the coding, implemented elements, netnographical observation of the StyleOnTheCouch fashion blog, and theoretical knowledge regarding the study objectives and contextual concepts, it is possible to formulate the answers to the research questions of the study.

The first part of the first research question is *which methods of communication are used by the fashion blogger to share the consumption experience?* StyleOnTheCouch communicates through the published posts on the fashion blog page. The posts possess textual posts with dates of uploading, photos of outfits and items, and fields under each post to leave comments (Chapter 4.2.2). The obtained interview data shows that the fashion blogger uses several methods to communicate her personal consumption experience.

First method is **posting pictures and photos** illustrating the visual objects of the fashion and style that are own outfits and particular branded items as central topics of the certain post. This method can be considered as the most central and fundamental to this blog, because it takes the most space on the blog-page (Appendix 2.), and because the fashion blogger is identifying herself as visual person, which recognizes the personal value of self-demonstration. According to the considered theoretical view, fashion and style are the communication tools of individual expression by themselves within a society (Chapter
2.2.1). Furthermore, personal fashion blog as a computer-mediated option of communication trends and personal style should consist of representable aspects of new fast stream trends or the individual style (Chapter 2.2.2). Therefore the fashion blog cannot be valuable and significant without illustrating visual objects of fashion, because its mission is to represent visual aspects of fashion and individual style.

Posting videos can also be a part of visual-related representations within a fashion blog (Chapter 2.1.3), but according to the research data, the video publications need more specific emotional input from the fashion blogger. It has been indicated that uncertainty of consequences of adding videos can be a motive to reject this method of communication. Videos within fashion blogging may open too much of the personal life of the fashion blogger and influence the image of the fashion blog and blogger.

Another method of communication used by StyleOnTheCouch fashion blogger is textual posts and comments. The collected data shows that textual posts on the fashion blog have a purpose to express the fashion blogger’s emotional and cognitive reasons of her purchasing choice. By writing texts she describes her personal consumption experience. This method is also important for the fashion blogger’s self-expression, because writing helps to share the experience and describe the emotional condition behind the made choice (Appendix 7.). The theory of blogging also reinforces this statement by the general understanding of the blog as an online diary and journal with regular reports and opinion expressions (Chapter 2.1.2.).

The function of leaving comments after posts as a part of communication process through the fashion blog is also interesting for consideration. The possibility of commenting posts involving audiences interested in fashion into dialogue is essential not only for a fashion blog, but also for any social media activities (Chapter 2.1.1). The interaction and participation of both parties (fashion blogger and followers) make the blog relevant and real. The method of leaving comments is also a tool to establish connection with other fashion bloggers, and therefore to participate within fashion related communities, which can be significant for inspiration and personal growth of the fashion blogger. The comments are important as a method of communication because they give possibility for the fashion blogger to share consumption experience within a dialogue, and receive feedback on experience sharing.

According to meaning analysis based on the implemented coding technique (Chapter 5.2), one more communicative tool has been highlighted during the research as
usable and reliable – design of the fashion blog page. Blog design in general may communicate what the blog content is about (Chapter 2.1.3). Additionally, the collected data shows that blog design may present the blogger's perception and understanding of this fashion content by representation of blogger's personal preferences through the design. For example, the observed minimalistic design of StyleOnTheCouch fashion blog represents her preferences to style minimalistic fashion pieces and use limited range of colors (black, white and denim). Therefore, the fashion blog design is an important method of communication within fashion blogging. However, it presents mostly the content and aspects of the fashion blogger's identity, rather than consumption experience.

5.4.2. Role of the fashion blogger’s self-identity

Selection of the method of communication occurs according to the personal fashion blogger’s preferences for how to communicate personal consumption experience. This assumption may take place because of the theoretical knowledge that an individual is the core of the personal fashion blog, and individual unique experience is a starting point for any blog existence regardless the blog content orientation (Chapter 2.1.2). However, the main point to justify this statement is the obtained research data. It shows that StyleOnTheCouch expresses herself in a creative way choosing communication methods through the fashion blog that are most suitable according to her personal experience and perception. Many aspects of self-identity can possess an impact on the selection of the methods: the individual selection of sources of the gained consumption experience (particular items, brands, designers), personal willingness to open or hide some aspects of the gained experience, personal assessment of risks or benefits of using particular methods, impact of professional life, and previously obtained personal experience of using different methods of communication through the fashion blog.

Therefore, it is possible to argue that fashion blogger's self-identity defines all communication methods used by the fashion blogger, in a context of an independent personal fashion blogging. This context is very important within the understanding of the role of self-identity within fashion blogging. A fashion blogger acting in collaboration with fashion brands may be influenced by these brands, and as a consequence, add specific methods of communication into the blog. In this case, the brand companies may impose
methods according their communication and marketing strategies, and the fashion blog may be perceived as a marketing tool to achieve consumers’ loyalty.

The gained knowledge shows that StyleOnTheCouch fashion blog is focused to communicate the personal consumption experience according to the three main personal values. These values (cognitive, emotional and connective value) have been consequently defined during the interview analysis based on coding. It has been found that fashion strives to achieve these values through construction of communication process within the blog (Chapter 5.2). In other words, the fashion blogger develops her communication action through the blog with a purpose to influence audiences in three ways. The first is cognitive value to make people think about their consumption experiences and choices. The second is emotional value to make people feel good about fashion in general by presenting new items/brands or personal style. And the third is connective value to make new connections with followers, designers or creative people to get inspirations and ideas for future fashion blog content. These values are personal motivations, which affect the choice of how to present information through the blog.

The above-presented interpretations according to the second part of the first research question, what role does the fashion blogger’s self-identity play in the choice of the certain methods, give a possibility to argue that self-identity plays a central significant role in the selection of communication methods by an independent, self-motivated fashion blogger. Furthermore, cognitive, emotional and connective values may be the main personal drivers for this process of selection.

5.4.3. Fashion blog characteristics

The second research question of the study has been formulated as what characteristics does the fashion blog possess as an interpersonal communicative tool to support experience communication? To answer this research question the specific operational questions have been constructed. These questions were developed according to the obtained knowledge by studied theoretical sources and StyleOnTheCouch fashion blog observation.

In order to answer the second research question it was necessary to assess the fashion blogger’s level of participation, to define her motivations to update the blog with new posts, and investigate the blog in connection with the rules of the blog as an interpersonal communication tool (Chapter 1.3).
The procedural rules defining a blog as an interpersonal communicative form have been presented in Chapter 2.1.3. The obtained research data gives a possibility to compare practical actions by StyleOnTheCouch fashion blog and these theoretical rules.

The fashion bloggers’ active searching of inspiration and topics for new experiences within fashion, reading fashion magazines, establishing relationships with designers, tracking publications within modern social media sources, and sharing links to the used sources reflect to the rules of selection aimed at considering the fashion blogger as an active participant within fashion content.

Another rule called publication rule is aimed at consider the blogger as an author of the content. The previously indicated methods of communication used by the blogger (Chapter 5.4.1) confirm that StyleOnTheCouch fashion blog follows this rule.

The active participation within and linking to additional social media pages as well as using the blogroll within StyleOnTheCouch fashion blog, corresponds to the third rule of networking (Chapter 2.1.3). This rule indicates the fact of establishing networks within the blog.

The level of participation has been evaluated as active because of the weekly updating of the fashion blog with new posts, replying to the followers’ comments and linking other social media resources with the blog page (Chapter 5.2.). The fashion blogger is highly motivated to update the fashion blog and participate actively within the fashion blogging field. The evidence for this can be the created weekly rubric by the personal initiative. Maintaining a special category gives an ability to keep attention of audiences. Furthermore, the audience interested in the specific category is accustomed to expect these weekly updates, which adds to the motivation of the fashion blogger to actively update the category.

Realization of the above-described rules is evidence that StyleOnTheCouch fashion blog is an interpersonal communicative tool. StyleOnTheCouch possesses such blog characteristics as weekly active blogger participation, establishing and maintenance of the specific rubrics, and ability to link the blog with social media and other fashion bloggers, sharing sources that highly reinforce the process of communication.

5.4.4. Elements of experiential marketing approach within personal fashion blogging

To answer the third research question, can experiential marketing approach be used by fashion blogger to reinforce experience communication; StyleOnTheCouch fashion blog
has been investigated on the implementation of co-creation and SEMs models. It has been found that the fashion blogger used to organize giveaways through the blog, but only in collaboration with and initiated by a particular fashion brand (Chapter 5.2). It has to be mentioned that the fashion blogger herself does not have a need to organize any contests or add more senses into the fashion blog. The reason for it can be that the fashion blogger is not focused to gain a big amount of followers or doing business through the fashion blog. StyleOnTheCouch fashion blog is oriented at establishing high-quality relationships with the blog followers on the basis of similar interests.

Therefore, by answering the third research question, it is possible to argue that an independent personal fashion blog can possess elements of experiential marketing approach to reinforce the experience creating and sharing process, but the fashion blogger's purpose to add some of these elements is not necessarily to gain a big amount of followers or to promote a certain brand. This may be the case for the fashion blogger creating blog interactions in collaboration with brands, but the motivation for the personal fashion blogger is to gain high quality of content representation, high quality of emotional affiliation with audiences interested in fashion, and high quality of the ongoing interaction through the blog. In this case, the methods of communication will possess such aspects as finding the blog unique or niche, using high-quality photos and videos, carefully selecting sources of inspiration, often updating the blog content with new posts, active participation in dialogues with followers, also through other linked social media. The emotional ties can be obtained by adding sense, feel, relate, act and think, but without marketing-based foundation. That means that the fashion blogger strives to establish emotional ties with the blog audiences by using some of elements guided by personal need of fulfillment of personal values (cognitive, emotional and connective) and desires.

6. Discussion

6.1. Holistic conceptual model of process of communication within personal fashion blogging

The current exploratory study is aimed create a new knowledge through the description of the fashion blogger's experiences and point of views in the lived world of fashion blogging (Chapter 3.3.1).

The above-presented analysis based on StyleOnTheCouch fashion blog practice coupled with the answers to the research questions based on the obtained research data
give a possibility to create a conceptual model or *general-universal statements* (Bendassolli, 2013). This model is aimed at describing the feasible and holistic use of methods of consumption experience communication within fashion blogging context in general.

This conceptual model (*Figure 4*) is created based on the interpretation of the descriptive interview data of the fashion blogger StyleOnTheCouch practice. It is developed as an outcome of the inductive approach of generalizing knowledge presented in Chapter 3.2. The conceptual model has a form of figure, which responses to an easier and coherent understanding of the meaning of data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 806).

During the current research it has been found that the fashion blogger may communicate personal consumption experience communication by combing different methods within a personal fashion blog:

- Visual methods (posting photos and videos);
- Textual methods (written posts and comments);
- Fashion blog design.
A fashion blog possesses a number of characteristics that can be viewed as integrated abilities of the fashion blog, which positively reflect within the process of communication. They give a possibility to attract new followers to the fashion blog, make the interaction more active, and develop multiple connections between the fashion blogger and the audiences interested in fashion inspiration:

- Active participation of the fashion blogger by frequent updating of fashion blog content;
- Establishing permanent categories or rubrics;
- Active participation in other social media linked to the fashion blog page;
- Using a blogroll;
- Links exchange to the sources of inspirations (brands, designers or photographers) or other fashion blogs.

Another set of approaches that are aimed at reinforcing the process of experience sharing and creation are the elements of experiential marketing approach. Usage of these methods are the most critical for a fashion blogger, because a fashion blogger can be influenced by or work in collaboration with fashion brands, and therefore add various marketing-based methods to involve a bigger number of followers into dialogue. The possible brand impact is illustrated in the conceptual model as an object called *Fashion brand collaboration* that lies on the fashion blog self-identity field. It also shows the existing impact of reinforcing of use of elements of experiential marketing approach. This marketing experiential insight can be employed in different actions, but it is not essential that fashion blogger combines all of these methods or adds only some elements of them:

- Organizing of giveaways and contests initiated by fashion brands and conducted through a fashion blog in collaboration with the blogger;
- Adding one or several of elements of experiential marketing approach into the blog to establish emotional ties with followers (SEMs).

The methods of communication, blog characteristics and elements of experiential marketing approach are integrated parts of the communication process within consumption experience sharing. *Figure 4* shows that they may co-exist within the process of communication, but their establishing and interposing is an outcome of an individual fashion blogger’s choice based on his/her personal motivations and values to run the fashion blog. These values are results of the interactions with audiences through the
fashion blog as desired by a particular fashion blogger. A fashion blogger's personality is the core of the independent fashion blog. Therefore the presented conceptual model shows the fashion blogger's self-identity as a foundation, which directly influences the process of communication. The personal cognitive (make followers think about their fashion-related choices and experiences), emotional (make followers feel positive about fashion-related activities and experiences) and connective (make people establish fashion-related connections through the blog) values are the drivers behind selection of the particular methods of communication and construction of the communication process with the audiences in general. It is also the personal fashion blogger's choice how to collaborate with the brands and use the blog's features and abilities.

6.2. Potential practical application from IMC perspective

The current study is considering a blogging as a social phenomenon, and fashion blogging as an independent personal-based concept. However, this chapter is aimed at showing how the above presented findings can be applied by fashion companies towards establishing trustful and long-term relationships with their customers by using the communication-based values of the fashion blog.

By discussing the application of this finding into Integrated Marketing Communications practice, it is essential to emphasize that IMC\textsuperscript{6} considers product/brand advertising and promotion using new technology: web-based communities (Cornellisen, 2003, p. 220), what personal blogging belongs to (Chapter 2.1.1). Its practice is aimed at increasing customers’ loyalty towards the brand by cost-effective communication activities (Schultz, 1991). Therefore, establishing trustful and long-term relationships with customers is a key objective of brand communication strategies. Philip Kotler suggests that creation of horizontal relationships through social media is a way to create relationships and influence the customers. This is because contemporary customers do not trust companies any longer, instead they reply on meanings based on experiences of other customers shared within communities or social media channels (Kotler, 2010, pp. 9-12). The fashion blog can be a tool for creation of such horizontal relationships. Furthermore, Philip Kotler and other researchers point out that customers need to feel a connection with a charismatic person, a leader, who will be a central person sharing opinions and life-style through the community (Fournier & Lee, 2009, p. 109), (Kotler, 2010, pp. 9-12). Thus, companies strive to create

\textsuperscript{6} IMC is the process of managing all sources of information about a product/service to which a customer or prospect is exposed which behaviorally moves the consumer towards a sale and maintains customer loyalty (Schultz, 1991).
their own social media channels and collaborate with bloggers and communities according to their particular target groups.

The third research question (Chapter 5.4.4) of this study challenged the fashion bloggers’ actions according to experiential marketing approach, sharing and creation of experiences within the broadly studied concept of IMC. It has been found that elements of this approach may be used by the fashion blogger, but in situation of initiated collaboration with the fashion brand. Therefore, the co-operation with fashion blogger is important and may give different opportunities for a brand to be engaged into dialogue with the blog audiences, and thereby influence them.

During the research study it has been described how an independent fashion blogger builds the process of communication through the personal fashion blog. More deep understanding of the fashion blogger's motivations, values, and meanings, as well as close collaboration with fashion bloggers’ may enhance brands activities towards relationships building with customers. The presented conceptual model (Chapter 6.1) of the research findings can be used by fashion brands as part of their social media communication strategy.

The most appropriate practical application of the research findings in IMC perspective can be divided into two brand initiated activities: cooperation with a fashion blogger using a blog to share consumption experience, or establishing a brand-related blog based on the practice of an independent fashion blog. By involving a fashion blogger into collaborative activities, a particular fashion brand may:

- Initiatively cooperate with fashion bloggers with high amount of followers or niche specific responding to the brand identity;
- Initiatively organize co-creation with fashion bloggers and engaged audiences;
- Initiatively organize giveaways and contests through the fashion blog;
- Engage the fashion blogger into new consumption based experiences by giving or presenting products/items.
- The fashion brands may also use the obtained deep understanding of the fashion bloggers' values and motivations to create their own blogs with similar methods of communication and insights used by an independent fashion blogger:
- Establishing brand related fashion blog by using visual and textual methods of communication;
• Active involvement of customers into dialogue by linking a brand related fashion blog with other social media pages such as Instagram or Facebook;
• Linking of a brand related fashion blog with other fashion blogs pages, designers to increase loyalty through fashion blogging communities;
• Promote important values and motivations related to a particular brand identity through the blog (to empower customers to make a rational choices, provide positive feelings about the fashion items, and give customers a platform for establishing connections by sharing opinions and experiences about the brand)
• Creating experiences through the brand related fashion blog by using SEMs elements.

However, fashion blogging from IMC perspective needs more in-depth investigation to identify the effective methods of communication towards brand loyalty increasing through the fashion blog practice, as suggested in Chapter 6.3.

6.3. Suggestions for future research

The findings of the current research can be used for the future scientific exploration in large-scale studies of communication using social media or online-communities. The presented conceptual model as an outcome of the research shows a holistic and complex-based communicative process with the influential impact of the fashion blogger’s self-identity, which is a wide and general understanding of the process of communication. Therefore, the constructed knowledge in a form of the presented conceptual model or answers to the study’s research questions can be a basis for the more narrow and focused researches, including quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as examining all involved perspectives: fashion bloggers, fashion brands and audiences.

Some suggestions of the potential research directions are generated below:

• Comparing methods of communication of an independent personal fashion blog with brand-related fashion blog;
• Investigation of effectiveness of the methods of communication applied through the fashion blog from the IMC perspective;
• Creation of experiences through fashion blogging.
7. Conclusion

Personal fashion blogging may possess multiple methods of communication conducted by an independent fashion blogger. These methods are mostly visualized and personalized because the fashion blog is representational tool for frequent sharing of individual and unique meanings and experiences within fashion. Fashion and style themselves are communication of self-expression and self-demonstration of an individual world perception within society. The co-existence and integrity of the multiple communication methods applied within fashion blogging is possible, but with a foundation of personal fashion blogger’s values as well as motivations to interact with audiences through the blog. These motivations and values are the main determinants of the selection of particular methods. The role of the personal values and motivations is critical for the fashion blog, because these form the particular communication strategy by the fashion blogger. However, a fashion blogger’s communication-based activities can be influenced by initiative fashion brands, which view a fashion blog as a mediator between brand and consumers interactions. In this case, conducting elements of experiential marketing approach is valuable in terms of creation emotional ties with audiences through offered range of experiences. Thus, the fashion blogger in collaboration with brands may include marketing-based activities onto the fashion blog to engage a large amount of followers into experience-based dialogue as a cost-effective tool of marketing communications. Consequently, the blog may partially lose the independency factor due to commercial relationships.

Nevertheless, this research shows that an independent non-business oriented fashion blogger with a niche fashion topic of the blog is focused on establishing long-term relationships and friendships based on the high-quality interactions. By high-quality interactions it means that fashion blogger is not oriented on attracting large audiences, instead the focus occurs on finding audiences with similar passions and experiences. Therefore, communication of consumption experiences through fashion blog includes other important activities to build a kind of niche fashion community – unique design of the blog representing the fashion blogger preferences and style, links and blogrolls connecting with other friendly and interesting fashion blogs, web-pages within popular social media related to the blog, sharing sources of consumption experience and inspiration on the blog page, and creation of unique permanent categories and rubrics.
The independent fashion blogger focuses on applying specific communication methods through the personal fashion blog for the purpose of self-fulfillment, increasing of value of the niche fashion content, the value of relationships that fashion the blog is able to construct.
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